

**BY DAMON LEE**  
**PHOTOS BY DAMON LEE AND**  
**NICK LICATA**

In Greek mythology, Pandora's Box represents a fundamental human temptation. Opening it was prohibited by the gods, but the desire to reveal its contents proved too enticing for Pandora, who released misery and chaos into the world by lifting the lid.

Some enthusiasts argue the same thing happens when

you try to blend traditional and modern custom car styles. They contend it only creates visual chaos. Yet it's the nature of custom curiosity to test such forbidden notions.

Temptation got the best of Steve Frediani when he began his '51 Ford convertible project. "I wanted to build a car that was at the heart of the traditional custom scene, but with today's technology and design philosophy," Steve says. "I didn't want a billet rod, but I also didn't want a '50s custom with the standard shoebox formula."

Fortunately, Steve was well armed with a keen sense of style and assistance from artist Steve Stanford. "[Stanford] and I discussed the key elements of the project," Steve says, "and he produced artwork capturing our ideas into a phenomenal design.

"I wanted to slim down the original design without sectioning the car," Steve continues. Stanford's trim design—pairing long '58 Ford spears over shortened '51 pieces—helped, but more metalwork was inevitable. "The

front fenders were wedge sectioned as the project developed to enhance the sweeping curve of the beltline," Steve says. Tastefully frenched headlights gave this curve a clean point of origin.

Additional curves came by adapting a '70 Torino windshield and frame, which led to more changes, like chopping the convertible top 2 inches, eliminating the vent windows, and shaving the door top moldings. "Lengthening the doors 3 inches was not originally dis-



# OUTSIDE THE BOX

STEVE FREDIANI'S CLASSICALLY MODERN '51 FORD

cussed," Steve says, "but became obvious for balance once the windshield was replaced and the new angle set. It is interesting to note that a careful review of the drawing shows this same balance without a conscious plan to lengthen the doors."

The windshield's lower edge was hidden by the upswept trailing edge of a pie-cut and peaked hood. To maintain the '51 identity, Steve kept a twin-bullet grille design but machined smaller pods to house the relocated parking lights. The grille bar and upper molding were

both sectioned and reshaped, with new grille extensions fabricated to wrap around the fenders. Below, the gravel pan was modified to better follow the contour of the shaved bumper.

Around back, a new tulip panel with less crown was

built, which led to the fabrication of a new aluminum decklid with a recessed license housing. The quarter-panel tops were reshaped to match, the wheel openings were shortened, and the windsplits sharpened. A.W. Model Craft cast new taillight lenses, which were frenched into reshaped openings.

Many craftsmen contributed to the car's metalwork. Bill Cooke did the windshield frame swap and corresponding dash and firewall work. Alex Prosser chopped the top, built the decklid and tulip panel, sectioned the fenders, and reshaped the wheel openings. Finally, Scott Bonowski and his crew at Hot Rods & Hobbies (Torrance, California) handled the remaining bodywork, along with prep, paint, and assembly.

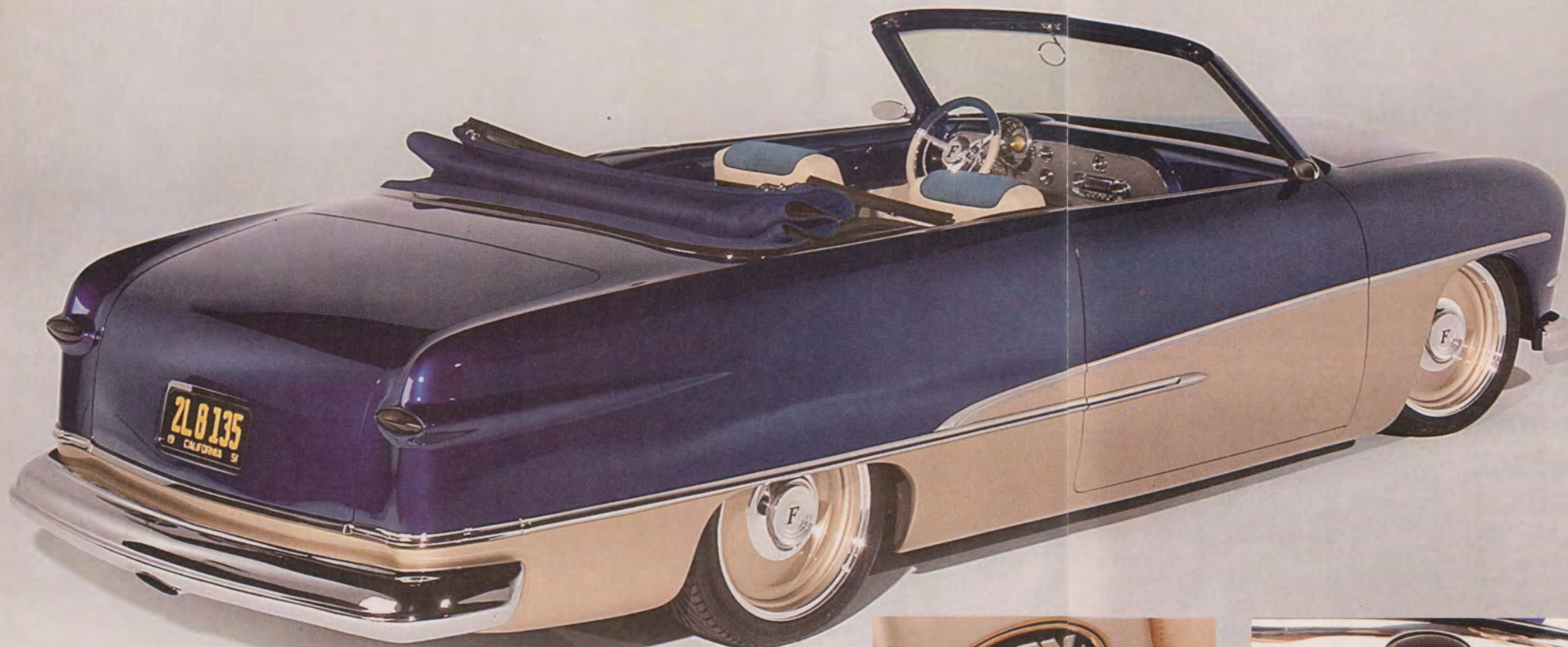
"I wanted a dark pearl blue," Steve says of the color, "but [Stanford] enhanced this idea by balancing the cool tone of the blue with the warmth of a metallic champagne." Scott mixed and shot both using RM Diamont materials.

Though Steve farmed out the bodywork, he built much of the chassis himself. He boxed and filled the frame, added a Mustang II-style front crossmember, and installed Air Ride Technologies' tubular control arms and ShockWaves in front, along with Air Ride's four-bar setup to locate the 9-inch rearend. Polished stainless lines were added to feed four-wheel disc brakes and drain the twin fuel tanks flanking the centered exhaust. The smooth 18x7-inch Budnik wheels were painted and finished with custom two-piece center caps for a steel appearance.

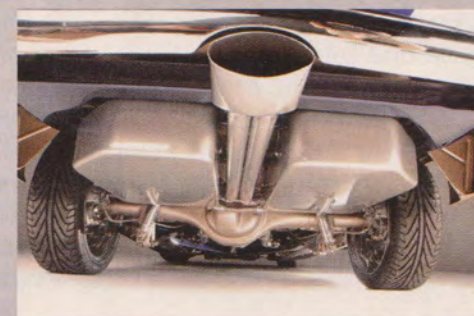
Dan Brewer assembled the 351 Cleveland V-8 using KB pistons, a Crane cam, Yates aluminum heads, and an external oil pump. To this, Steve added an MSD ignition and custom aluminum accessory brackets. But the crowning touch came when Bob Ream at Imagine Injection built an electronic fuel-injection setup with throttle bodies resembling the Weber carburetors often worn by Ford V-8s in Pantera sports cars. Dubbed Pantera Injection, it spawned the car's moniker: *Pantera's Box*.

Inside, Steve maintained the integrity of the '51 dash by retaining the original gauges, using the stock radio face to cover the Kenwood stereo, and employing plated steel mesh as insert material. Stitchcraft and Richard Ward teamed up to cover the custom-built seats and side panels in fawn leather and blue suede, upholstering the trunk to match. Amenities and accessories included Vintage Air climate controls, an ididit tilt column, Colorado Custom wheel, and Lokar shifter directing the AOD transmission.

Four years in the making, Steve says the *Pantera's Box* name was often substantiated. "Just like opening Pandora's Box, each step of this project provided new creative and technical challenges," Steve says. A little-known belief about Pandora's Box is that it also contained Hope, a key attribute for humanity to confront the evil and misery it released. We think *Pantera's Box* does likewise, offering faith that old and new styles can coexist in visual harmony.



# OUTSIDE THE BOX



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