

BACK TO THE FUTURE: PART II

By Ian Bowman

Much like the movie of the same title, we're going forward in time, from 1955 (oddly enough, the respective time period Marty McFly traveled to in said movie series) to 2023 this time around. Though there's no fancy stainless steel DeLorean adorning these pages, or timeline altering sports almanac to bring forward, just one of the most iconic cars of all time, some good looks from the past, and the technology the automotive industry has amassed up to this point.

The last time we saw "Project Sleeper '55", the backstory had been played out, the plan was on paper, and the teardown had begun. The project was in full swing at time of print!

As the initial article laid out, there was nothing required for the Hensley's more-door in the way of the body. The paint had held up amazingly over 65+ years, all the original red oxide was still visible

underneath, there was no pesky rust repair to deal with.... simply put, this was as good a car as you were going to get to start with. This revamp was going to be purely mechanical. Matter of fact, there was focus on changing as LITTLE as possible when it came to the outside of the Bel Air. The teardown simply involved removing the old mechanicals front to rear and making the more-door "modern day usable" while still keeping the outside of appearance of a mostly stock '55 sedan.

The antiquated suspension has since been completely removed in favor of a Woody's Hot Rodz (WHR) 4-Corner Coilover setup. Not one single part of the original 1955 suspension remains, only the best modernized driving components have been installed to make this '55 a 21st century driver, with no aftermarket frame required.

Out back, the leafs have been ditched, the 10-bolt shelved, and a WHR 4-link featuring Viking Coilovers *The setup starts as a LS3/4L70 Connect and cruise, sans management. Trans and engine are mated together, then slid into place. Driveline is mounted using Woody's Deluxe Engine mount kit. P/N WHR-30350*

and a John's 9" installed out back. What this yields, is full adjustability to nail not only the stance that owners Jim and Gina Hensley were after, but to tailor fit the ride and handling capabilities to their specifications all the same. Install here is straightforward, requiring some precision measurements and a welder, but a cost-effective means for modernizing this 4-door. CPP's 9" big brake kit provides stopping power that many modern performance cars would be jealous of, making the '55 even safer for the trips around treacherous Detroit roads and distracted drivers.

And just as any reasonable person would want, with the leaf springs out of the way, there's more room for activities when it comes to back tires. But if more is good, even more is good-er, right? Master Fabricator Brian Graber took to the wheelwells to install a set of Golden Star Classic Auto Parts factory appearing wheeltubs to make room for some 315/40zr18 Nittos around Billet Specialties Suave wheels sporting factory dog dish caps to keep the classic vibe. Along with this, Graber deleted the spare tire well from the trunk floor to make for a smooth appearance inside and underneath, as well as make the necessary room for the giant CPP 29 Gallon EFI tank. That color? A Woody's signature base/flat clear mix, WHR's "calling card" if you will.

Up front, the suspension is straight-forward and all bolt on! Woody's ECAU tubular control arms paired up with Viking Coilovers again make for bolt-on ride and handling that's unsurpassed. Add the 1" front

swaybar into the mix, and the whole package is linked together....both figuratively and literally! Stance and braking are handled by a CPP C7 Hub drop spindle kit, featuring a monster 13" brake rotor and a sealed bearing hub for the ultimate in durability, serviceability, and braking ability! Steering has been freshened up with CPP's steering linkage kit and a Woody's 500 Series power steering box. Combine this with those new control arms and sway bar, and it's likely Jim won't recognize this car at all, when compared to how it lumbered down the road originally!

Driveline wise, the anemic 235 gave way for a Rinke Chevrolet Performance LS3, dressed up with all the goodies from LS Classic. The Hensley's wanted reliability above all, 430+HP just happened to be the byproduct! And with all the trimmings from LS Classic, the period-theme carries throughout the engine bay, at first glance looking the part of a '63 327 plucked right from a split window 'Vette! Woody's Signature gray carries to the engine bay all the same, really pronouncing the crown jewel that is the LS3. Feeding the LS3 is the aforementioned CPP 29-gallon tank, which will make for fewer stops along the way between Warren, Michigan and the Tri-Five Nationals in Bowling Green, Kentucky, as well as wherever Jim and Gina want to head in the '55. "200 miles to next gas station???" No problem now! And whether it's cold weather cruising north,

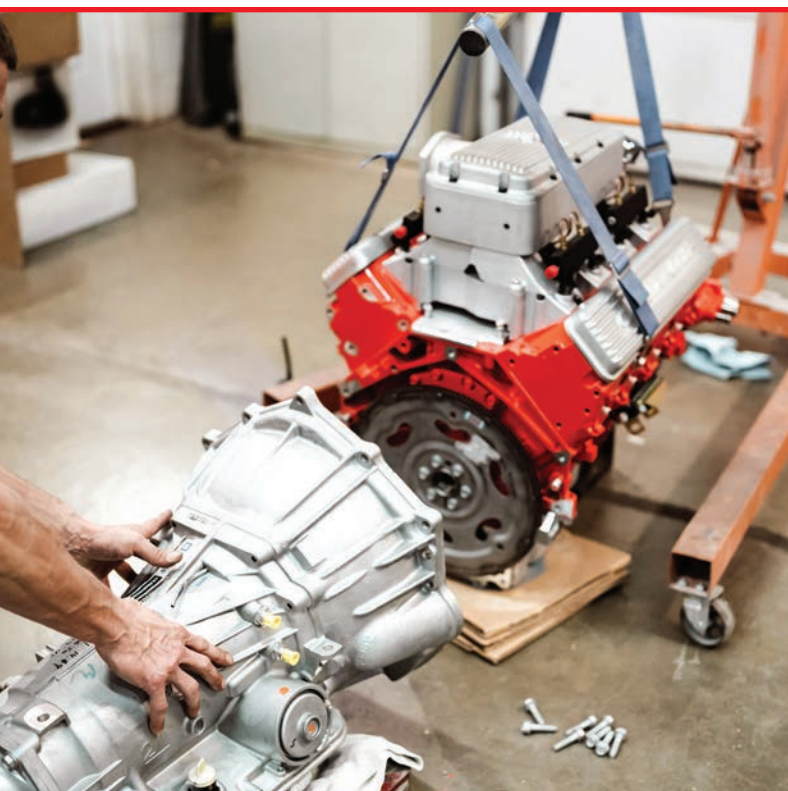


Top: With the rear section no longer utilizing leaf springs, Brian opted to remove the shackles and front hanger from the frame for a clean look.

Bottom: Woody's tubular control arms and Viking coilovers are bolt-on options that will see wildly improved ride and handling.

or blazing temperature road trips down south, that customized Mattson Custom Radiator cooling module is sure to keep things in line.

Inside, the refresh again stays purely functional, with the factory look in mind. A VHX or HDX simply would've looked "out of place modern" inside. Dakota's ever popular





Rather than use a hidden SureFit unit, we opted for a classic styled Vintage Air under-dash universal A/C kit, keeping the "dealer-installed" look of the fifties alive and well with modern technology!



Above Left: Master builder Brian Graber cuts away the factory wheeltubs to make room for the big Billet Specialties hoops and Nitto 315/40 rubber. Above Right: The finished product: A factory appearing wheeltub, and the trunk sprayed in Woody's signature grey to match the engine bay.

RTX gauges keep the factory look, while being able to monitor vitals going down the road. And installation is easy as ever, interfacing with the Holley Terminator X-Max management system to pull its information from. Rounding out the steering on the inside, a

Woody's tilt column was opted for ultimate comfort, while an American Retro 15" '55-'56 steering wheel keeps the factory look. And speaking of comfort, Vintage Air came to the party with an under-dash unit. With the pizzazz of a classic styled "add-on" air conditioning unit, it was hard to beat. And with the factory heat working perfectly, there was no need to bother it.



Small and weak out, big and strong in! The John's 9" replacing the factory rear will not only be light-years stronger, but leak free and 100% reliable just the same.

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