

## 23 FORD ROADSTER

**January 1968** - For the great sum of \$175 I bought a truckload of parts from a guy in Worcester, MA who decided on giving up on building his own 23 T Roadster Hot Rod. The load of parts included a new partially completed chassis, a 1937 Ford tubular front axle with spindles and an original spring with the eyes on the main leaf reversed, a pair of cast aluminum headlight brackets, a pair of friction shocks for the front, a Caltech 23 T body shell with a Turtle Deck (no floors or interior), a windshield w/o glass, an Austin Healy gas tank (5-gallon capacity), a Columbia 2 speed rear end and spring, a 55 Buick 322 cid Nailhead V-8 engine with a 6 deuce carb manifold and carbs., a Buick to Chevy bell housing adaptor. He also included a homemade 23 T body. **How tough can it be to build a car?** It was a pleasant surprise for my Father David, who was born a Ford mechanic and helped me tremendously.



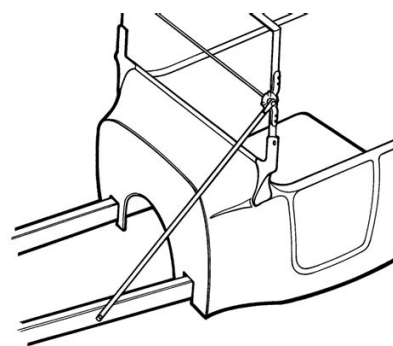
Cal Automotive Fiberglass Body



Buick 321 Nailhead Engine



Columbia Two Speed Rearend



Split Windshield



Unfinished Steel Chassis

**January 1968 to June of 1969** - We started by building all the cross-members for the chassis, the transmission cross member was for a very used 59 Chevy 3-speed that I acquired for \$10. I had to rebuild it for another \$20 in parts and bought a used Hurst shifter for \$10. Went to St. Germain's Junk Yard in Oxford, MA, and purchased a 57 Chevy station wagon rear end with 3.56 gearing, a drive shaft, and a Buick manifold with a 4-Barrel Rochester carb that I learned how to rebuild. To attach the Model A spring to the 57 Chevy Rear end, we welded on a pair of modified Model A spring arms. We then mounted the engine and transmission. I went back to the junk yard and had them shorten my drive shaft to fit the new layout. The drive shaft was now only 18" long! Went to Can Am Marine in Webster and purchased a pair of boat trailer shocks for the rear.

During the course of the project, I also learned how to arc weld from my Father, my Uncle Ray, and one of my Father's friends, Chuck Waddington, who was a certified professional welder. Building this project was an education in itself. It was a great Father-Son project.

**In June of 1968**, I graduated from Lowell Tech as an engineer and went to work for the Brand-Rex Company in Willimantic, CT. Finally money! One of the first projects I worked on was finishing up the manufacture of the new wiring system for the Apollo Project. You guessed it; my 23 wiring harness was part Apollo spacecraft. Now we're flying.

With the drive train ready to go, we jury-rigged an old radiator in front, along with the ignition system, and used a gravity feed system for the fuel. We fired the engine and it sounded great. A friend of mine gave me parts off a junk 1949 Ford F-1 pickup which included a steering box and the front spindles and drums. He also gave me a 59 Chevy master cylinder for the brake system. I mounted the spindles and the steering box in the chassis. I purchased a set of Chrome Moly front and rear radius rods, along with a pair of steering rod linkages, from Racecar Hardware for about \$300. Biggest expense to date. Back to the junk yard for a set of used wheels and tires for \$10.

The toughest part was designing the brake, clutch and gas pedal. The brake & clutch pedal assembly was from a junked 1962 Rambler Classic that I had. I modified the bracket to fit under the dash and shortened the pedals slightly. For the clutch linkage I used the same bushing pedal setup I got from the Junk Yard and welded on the linkage to operate a new heavy duty

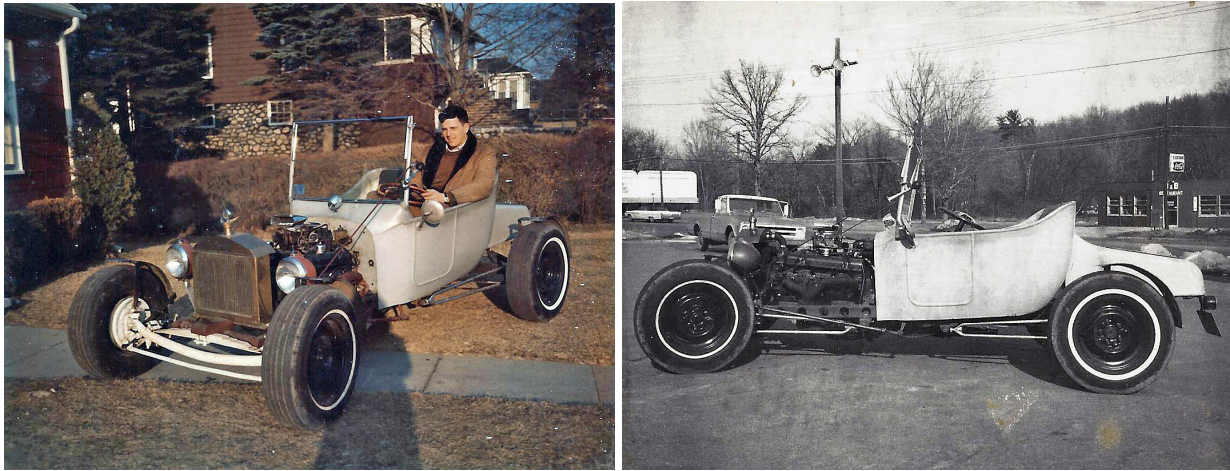
Chevy 11" clutch and pressure plate with a Junk Yard throw out bushing arm. Made the gas pedal linkage from the F-1 Ford pickup and a modern Ford car pedal. I ran some temporary brake lines and made a emergency brake from a floor mounted school bus emergency brake. I took a stainless steel shaft from a washing machine that ran across the chassis into homemade bushings, and welded on the arms to the shaft to make the system work.

Next, we jury rigged the body on in a very temporary manner and put an old school bus seat across the chassis and wired on an old radiator that was hanging around to the chassis. My Uncle Leo, who was a frontend alignment specialist, showed me how to set up the caster and toe-in, and we were ready to go. The first run was with my Father holding the gas tank in his lap and me driving. Remember, no floor, exhaust, windshield or lights. Everything worked great and the car had loads of power. By this time we were warmed up and my Uncle Ray became the gas tank man. On the second run we did a great hole shot to see if we could lift the front wheels, but the wiring on the radiator broke sending the radiator into the fan. We ended up getting a very hot shower. Luckily we weren't using any anti-freeze. End of the first day testing.

Next I self-learned how to fiberglass the floor and interior into the body and Turtle Deck. I used an old school bus seat for the interior and hung sundry gauges on the dash. Not pretty, but functional. I mounted a battery under the driver's side seat. The gas tank, mounted in the turtledeck was connected to the engine via a pair of old Ford bus electric fuel pumps mounted under the passenger's seat. I then mounted the wind shield to the body and braced it with a pair of rods going down to the headlights. I also mounted a hand operated windshield wiper on top of the windshield. I borrowed the plow headlights from my Father's 1946 Wrecker/Plow and used some universal trailer lights for the rear. Every thing was wired using pieces of the Apollo program. I even intertwined the generator cable with the exhaust manifold to show how heat resistant the wire was. In the meantime, I ordered (\$300) and mounted a brass radiator from Ted Brown Chassis in California. It was custom made for my setup. I modified the exhaust manifolds and custom made a dual exhaust system using Thrush glass pack mufflers. Last but not least I robbed my sister's squeeze bulb horn off her old bicycle and mounted it on the side of the body. We were finally street legal, or so I thought. My Father insisted I put on fenders. He had a 55 gallon steel drum that I cut up and adapted for fenders. Not pretty, but functional. Rather than register the car I used one of my Father's repair plates. I was on the road. During the spring and summer of 1969 I tested the car on the road and made adjustments and modifications to get it to run as smoothly as possible.

Apollo 11 landed on the Moon in July. I lost my deferment a couple of weeks later and was in the army in time for my birthday in September. After my infantry training, I came home at the beginning of March and took the 23 for what could be my last ride in it. By mid-March, I was on my way to Vietnam. My brother Paul and my father took over the roadster until I returned in 1971.

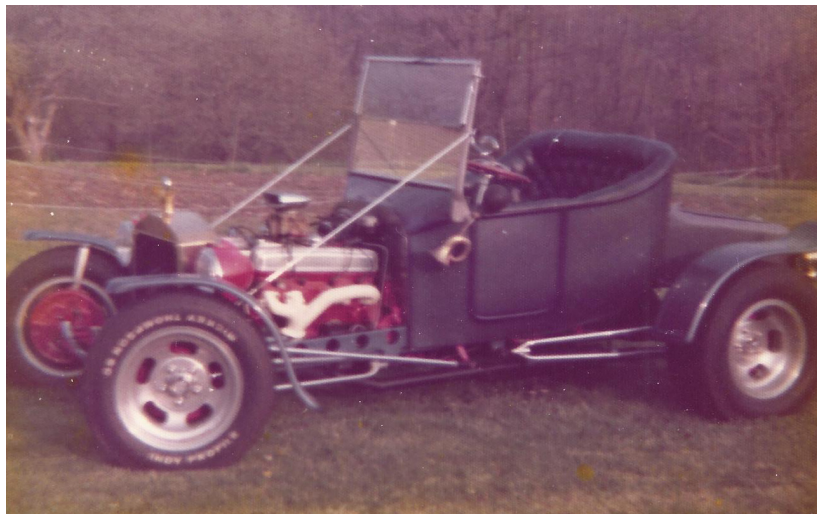
### The 1969-71 Look



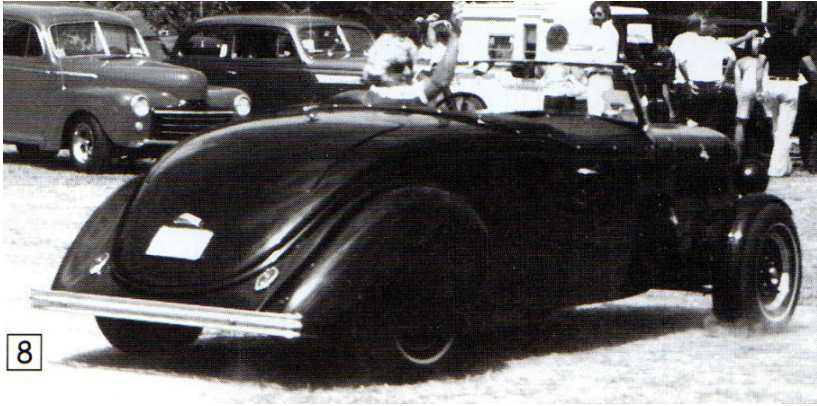
Last Ride in February 1970 before my World Tour

### The 1974-75 Look

I arrived back home from Vietnam at the end of April in 1971 and drove the car all summer. I did get into some trouble with the local police over lack of bumpers and the Thrush mufflers. During the winter I completely stripped the car down to the frame and began the tedious job of finishing it with the help of my buddy Larry Cortis, who did the painting. Finally the car was ready to roll for the spring of 1974. I added Ansen Wheels with Mickey Thompson Tires and a new brass horn and brass taillights.. I built a custom wood dashboard with Stewart Warner Gauges. The speedometer was from a 1960 Lincoln Continental. The interior was done by Daves Auto Top of Acton, MA. The fiberglass fenders came from Total Performance in Wallingford, CT.

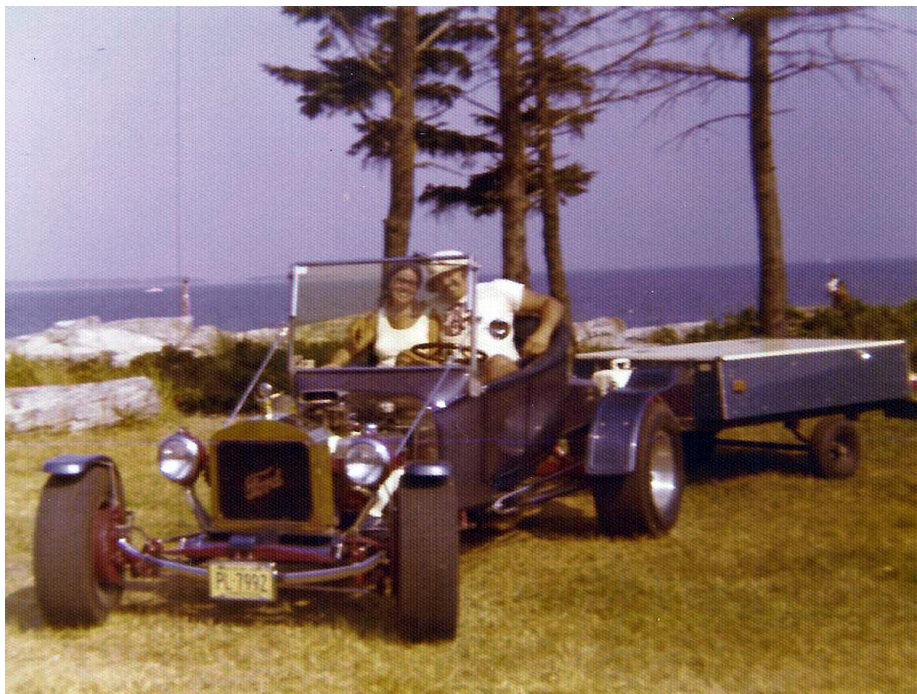


At the beginning of 1975 we got very ambitious and drove to Baltimore, MD for the first Street Rod Nationals East. We left at 2 am in the morning in a pouring rain. It took us 14 hours to get there. It didn't stop raining until we got to the George Washington Bridge in NY. It was during this trip that I got to meet Sebastian Rubbo.

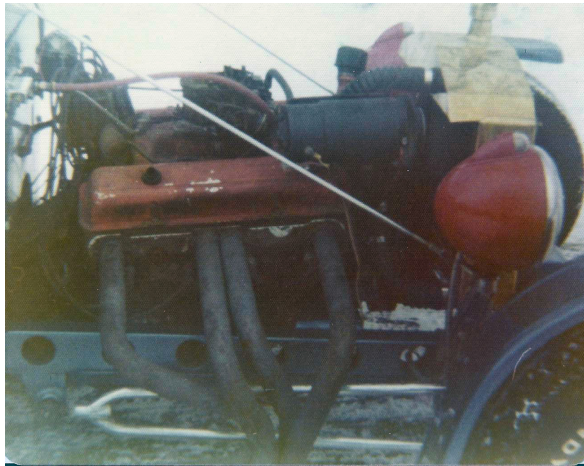


Sebastian

Later, in 1975 I bought a used Appleby Pop-up Tent Camper for \$275. I then proceeded to mount a custom made trailer hitch that went from the rear spring perch to the end of the turtledeck. People thought I was crazy, but it worked like a charm. I added a radio with an 8-track player built in. I took a wire antennae and ran it under the upholstery beading at the top of the body. Again, people thought you couldn't run a radio in a fiberglass body (Corvette?), but it worked like a charm. Now I could travel with music, set up camp along the way, and carry plenty of cold beer in a cooler mounted on the tongue of the trailer. Fastest camping rig in New England. Zero to 60 in less than 5 seconds!



At the end of the season the old nailhead was beginning to show its' age. It was beginning to burn oil, smoke, and make some strange noises. We pulled it apart in November, but found the cylinders, head, and bottom end in sad shape. My cousin Dave Farrar had a 68 Chevy that had burned and was a total. It had a 327 engine with a humongous 4 barrel QuadraJet in it and a Powerglide automatic. After checking the engine numbers, I found that the engine was actually a 350, although Chevy did not offer this engine in a full sized car until the 1969 model year. The price was right so we retrofited a set of engine mounts and installed it in the chassis. I had to shorten the driveshaft again. I was running out of driveshaft! I borrowed a pair of headers from a friend and in December we were ready to go. We opened the garage doors only to find a blizzard beginning. I always wanted to see how a T would handle in the snow. Pretty Good.



That winter I bought a header kit from Tubular Automotive in Weymouth, MA and proceeded to weld up a header system. The mufflers were built in the final exhaust tube. Bye Bye glaspacks. Although the headers were louder than the glaspack mufflers, I never was bothered by the police again for having Woody Woodpecker on the mufflers.

### **The 1976-91 Look**

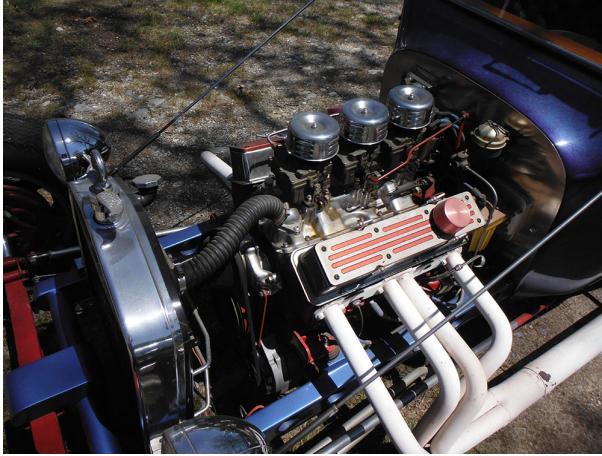
The summer of 1976 was the Bi-Centennial Year and we traveled far and wide with the car. It was reliable and easy to drive with the automatic, but had poor performance compared to the Buick engine. We determined that it was caused by the 2-speed PowerGlide transmission. I got a Turbo 350 three speed from my Cousin and decided to change transmission during the off season. In 1977 the change was a complete success. We had more than enough power.



### The 1995 to Present Look



By 1995 the old Brass Radiator was at the end of its road. To replace it with a Walker Radiator with an electric cooling fan, I had to length the chassis by another 6" It did the trick and also made the car ride better. I also added new front lights.



## 23 "T" Roadster Original Donor Units



*Ford Model A - Rear Spring*



*37 Ford - Tube Front Axle & Spring*



*46 Ford Bus - Fuel Pumps*



*49 Ford F1 Pickup - Front Spindles, Brakes & Steering Box*





*Austin-Healy - Gas Tank*



*55-56 Buick Engine  
(1st and 2nd Engines)*



*Ford School Bus - Emergency Brake  
Rearview Mirror and Bench Seat*



*57 Chevy - Transmission & Rearend*



*59 Chevy - Master Cylinder*



*60 Lincoln Continental - Speedometer*



*62 Rambler - Clutch & Brake Pedal Ass'y*



*68 Chevy Impala - 350 Engine & Trans  
(3rd Engine, 2nd, & 3rd Trans)*



*Sister Debi's Bicycle - Horn*



*WWII Jeep - Hand Windshield Wiper*



*Washing Machine- Stainless Emergency  
Brake Pivot Shaft to withstand the elements*



*55 Gallon Drum - Fenders*



*1969 Applo Moon CCapsule - Wiring  
(I always regretted junking the rest of  
the capsule)*