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### The Tomcat

A New Type of Kit on the Prowl

Photography: Eric Geisert

Whutizzit? That's the question car builder Larry Burchett hears most often, and one that demands a longer-than-usual response. Based in Knoxville, Tennessee, Burchett has been a hot rodder all of his life (he still owns the '30 Model A coupe he built in 1977), though raising his family and building up multiple businesses took up a large portion of his time these last couple of decades.



But the love of cars finally won him over, so he sold one of his companies and decided to open his own shop devoted to building quality hot rods and street rods. A couple of years ago, in walks Tom Badgett with a desire for a '30s-era car. The basic resto-rod concept of a vintage body with all the underpinnings of a contemporary vehicle appealed to the both of them, so Larry set out to build his customer a unique, one-off hot rod.

Once they got into the project, two things became clear. One, the design that combined early MG styling with that of a '34 Ford roadster was very appealing to all who saw it and, two, they needed to look into reproducing the bodies for the kit-car market.

Though you might see a little bit of an early Corvette influence in the Tomcat's interior, it is at least a clean and sano one! Red leather bucket seats (from Steve Holcomb, Pro Auto Upholstery) are a clear contrast to the silver-covered used elsewhere on the car.

Having built many street rods throughout his life, Larry went with what he knew about street-rod chassis to fabricate his own for the Tomcat. Set up on a 104-inch wheelbase, the tube and rectangular frame was secured in the jig before the Heidt's independent front suspension pieces were welded in place. Out back, a Ford 8.8-inch independent rear was installed with control arms and axles made by B-Rod. A four-wheel disc brake system from Stainless Steel Brake Co. was also installed, and a set of 100-spoke wire wheels (with real knock-offs, too) in 16- and 17-inch diameters were bolted up to their respective corners.



A Lecarra steering wheel attaches to a Flaming River column, while a shifter from Lokar is used to select the gears.

Small-block Chevy motors have always been a mainstay of the hot-rodding public, and Larry decided on a Ram Jet crate motor (backed to a TH350 trans) from GM to power his new ride. "Standard" street-rod components, such as an Edelbrock water pump, Sanderson headers, Lokar throttle and kick-down cables, Flowmaster mufflers, a Powermaster alternator and starter, and more, all found their way onto the 350, which fits neatly under the three-piece hood.

The 'glass body is typical of what you'd find in better street-rod bodies: the suicide-style doors shut even and solid, no waves in the quarter panels, and a general impression of overall quality is apparent. Though you may also think about a Jag XK120 or even the profile of a Triumph TR3A when you see the Tomcat, the car is unique enough to stand on its own.

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On the dash, custom, one-off gauges (from Classic Instruments) are lettered with the company logo.

That unique design is carried over to the dash area, which is not too old, and not too new. The top of the dash/cowl rolls over into the door tops, like a newer street rod, but the dash has enough old flavor to make it appealing by itself. Two large-diameter gauges from Classic Instruments (who custom made a one-off set of gauges that included the B-Rod logo on the face of each gauge) are easily readable behind the Lecarra banjo steering wheel, while other controls, such as the Vintage Air A/C and heating knobs, the tunnel-mounted Lokar shifter, and the Pioneer DVD/CD changer are all within easy reach. Finished off in red leather by Steve Holcomb at Pro Auto Upholstery (Knoxville, TN), the Tomcat's interior looks both elegantly contemporary and vintage cool at the same time. Larry's son, P.J., gave the car, with its Matrix silver base/clear-coat paint job, another ingredient formulating the classy look of the car.

The Tomcat made its debut recently at the Kit and Replicar Nationals in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, but the Burchetts have been on the move. They also intend to have the car at the SEMA Show in Las Vegas, Nevada, too. B-Rod or Custom should have bodies for sale (entry-level kits sell for about \$11,500) by the time you read this article, and a much-anticipated coupe version is also being worked on (some say there aren't enough coupes in the kit-car world). And, in his "spare" time, Larry is also working on a 'glass '67/68 Camaro body to be ready by the end of the year! You can see more of their shop at [www.b-rodorcustom.com](http://www.b-rodorcustom.com).

In a time where sameness seems to be taking over with too many clones of clones, it's refreshing to see someone has taken the plunge and brought something new to the table. We applaud Burchett and B-Rod or Custom for having the courage to create a new avenue for the kit and replicar market to drive down!



A Pioneer DVD/stereo sound system comes with a hideaway TV screen.



Burchett made the custom brake lights and installed a third brake light right behind the edge of the cockpit.



The powerplant for the lil' roadster is a 350/350 GM Ram Jet crate motor, backed to a TH350 transmission. Internally left stock, the exterior utilizes extra performance goodies such as an Edelbrock water pump, Powermaster alternator, a K&N air filter, headers from Sanderson, and Flowmaster mufflers.

The 16- and 17-inch BFGoodrich-shod knock-off wire wheels are 100-spoke units and lend an air of elegance to the ride.

LARRY BURCHETT	
Knoxville, Tennessee	
Tomcat	
CHASSIS	
Frame	Custom by B-Rod or Custom, Knoxville, TN
Wheelbase	104"
Rearend	8.8" Ford T-bird independent
Rear Suspension	Independent w/ B-Rod axles and control arms
Rear Brakes	Stainless Steel Brake Co. disc
Front Suspension	Heidt's independent
Front Brakes	Wilwood disc
Steering	Ididit steel column
Front Wheel	100-spoke knock-off, 16 x 7
Rear Wheel	100-spoke knock-off, 17 x 8

Front Tire	BFGoodrich, 225/50-16
Rear Tire	BFGoodrich, 245/50-17
ENGINE & TRANS	
Make	GM Ram Jet crate
Crankshaft	Stock GM
Pistons	Stock GM
Water Pump	Edelbrock
Radiator	Griffin
Alternator	Powermaster
Heads	GM
Induction	GM Ram Jet injection
Air Cleaner	K&N
Ignition	GM
Headers	Sanderson Headers
Mufflers	Flowmaster
Transmission	TH350
Shifter	Lokar
Trans Mods	Shifting kit
BODY	
Manufacturer	B-Rod or Custom
Bodywork	Larry & P.J. Burchett, Wayne Hobby
Paint Type	Matrix base/clear
Painter	P.J. Burchett
INTERIOR	
Gauges	Custom by Classic Instruments
Wiring	Don Davis
Steering	Wheel Lecarra
Seating	Custom buckets by Steve Holcomb
Upholsterer	Steve Holcomb, Pro Auto Upholstery, Knoxville, TN
Material	Red leather

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