



# ONE-WEEKEND

# Wonder

**Building a '48 Bomber Truck in 48 Hours**

*Story by Gerry Burger  
Photography by Josh Mishler*



A team of real hot rodders, a pile of finished and nearly finished parts and 48 hours was all it took to turn this pile of parts into a truck. It was pure fun and a fine example of a weekend spent Over-Thrashin'.

**Instant gratification. It's an addicting thing whereby somewhat suddenly, you find compete satisfaction. It's the opposite of long, laborious projects that linger on for years, doling out their pain and pleasure in measured portions along the way. Sure, it can be fulfilling, but few things are more fun than putting things in fast-forward and doing what should take a long time in a short time. TV shows are based on just such rewards in this ever-accelerating time we live in, and in a reversal, we now find life imitating art as hot rodders do their own versions of Overhaulin'; we like to call it Over-Thrashin'. Generally, there are no cameras whirling, no lights and no scripts. It's just a bunch of hot rodders, a good garage and maybe stacks of empty pizza and parts boxes in the corner.**

We've got a story of a group of hot rodders who decided to do the final assembly and building of a hot rod truck in one weekend. Now, not only does that seem preposterous—it is—but they could certainly assemble, wire and upholster a truck and then drive it after a long weekend, couldn't they? It may seem like a tall order to most folks, but if you own a rod shop and have plenty of hot rod buddies, the chore becomes a lot easier.

When the team at II Sly Hot Rods in Brandon, South Dakota (605/582-3082), started bench racing, they realized that it was time for a shop truck. Now, the II Sly Hot Rods shop is not like your average shop; this is a shop that brings friends, families, customers and hot rods together. It's a shop where local hot rodders can come down, tinker on their own cars, lend a hand on another car or just hang out and talk about hot rods. The Bowman family, Kevin, Edane, Tonner and Gaven, decided that they wanted a fun hot rod for traveling, and it seems that each bench racing session came to the same conclusion: They needed a shop truck.

And so the search began in earnest. Well, actually, it began in central South Dakota, where Warren Wilson located a pair of donor trucks on a ranch. One truck was a '54 Chevrolet with a good frame, and the other was a '48 wrecker with a great cab and front clip. A deal was struck, and two early Chevy trucks were subsequently hauled to the II Sly shop.



Between making a living and helping friends, team Sly worked on installing a Progressive Automotive front crossmember, associated C4 Corvette suspension, Aldan coilovers, a T-bird rack-and-pinion unit, a triangulated rear four-bar and another set of Aldan coilovers. Custom motor mounts and transmission crossmembers were fabricated, and a healthy 468ci big-block Chevy engine and Turbo 400 transmission were built to power the truck. The engine and trans were built by Tim Mathern while Mitch Meyers and Jerry Schelske came up with some very cool, one-off polished pieces for the pair. The wheels and tires were mounted, and the chassis was a roller. Greg Burrell and Dave Richardson plumbed the chassis and fabricated an aluminum fuel cell for the truck.

While all of this chassis work was being performed, bodywork was underway, and the team included no less than five guys working 57-year-old sheetmetal to perfection. The bodywork team consisted of Mike Linton, Jerry Schelske, Kevin Adney, and Kevin and Tonner Bowman, and while the fit and panel finish would be done to a very high level, the final finish was still up in the air. The ability of the team made everything from Candy Apple to Blitz Black an option, and when the bench racing ended, several layers of red primer were covered with Blitz Black. Later, the black would be "worn through" for the ever-pop-

ular patina look. The trend toward alternative finishes is really big in street rodding today, and many of them don't include full gloss. Rather, mixtures of textures and finishes in varying grades of luster are used to provide plenty of old-timey flavor to a hot rod. Some call them rat rods, others call them beaters, and still others, including our friends at II Sly, prefer to call them bombers, which seems to suit this style of car as we can remember saying "bombing around" as an alternative to "cruising." And so the theme was established, the mission was on the board, and after briefing the crew, a date for the mission was set. The bomber truck would be assembled in one weekend, and our own Josh Mishler would be invited to attend as both a photographer and a worker, for Josh is first a hot rodder and then a photographer.

Kevin Adney batched the Blitz Black in a bucket, poured it in the gun and laid down a stunning finish without a finish; it was the ultimate stealth bomber look. Proving that some shine is fine, the firewall, inner fender panels and rims were all coated in a custom-mixed, high-gloss color called Combat White. And so, a chassis, suspension, engine and body panels were finished and awaiting assembly, and seats and door panels awaited upholstery. Myriad minor tasks in assembly would be discovered along the way, and everything from complete wiring to bleeding the brakes would have to be done. The mission



The nicely detailed big-block Chevy engine displaces 468 ci and pumps out 375 hp. A Demon carburetor tops the polished intake.



The interior is clean and simple, and the buckskin leather is the perfect complement to the flat black paint. Classic instruments now fill the dashboard while a Moon steering wheel tops the column. A Lokar shifter grabs the gears.



The basic look of a bomber truck is hard to resist. What makes this truck work so well is the perfect stance and selection of finishes. A modern chassis ensures that this shop truck will be reliable for the long haul.



It's a shop truck. It's a beater. It's a bomber.



The seat was custom-built at II Sly Hot Rods, and the upholstery was done in house, too. This interior should provide many miles of comfortable cruising.


had a total of three days at their disposal, the goal being to do it in two.

And so, one Friday morning, a group of dedicated hot rodders gathered in the II Sly shop. Building a bomber requires proper uniforms, so black bomber T-shirts were handed out for a stealth look. They came from as far away as Cleveland, Ohio, and some were hometown hot rodders. It was a formidable collection of talent.

The build went off without a hitch—no clash of egos, no tools thrown about, no storming out of the room or slamming of doors. No, this was a group of professionals, semi-professionals and pure hobbyists that came together to assemble a great truck and have a good time while doing it.

Team II Sly gathered Friday morning. The chassis was assembled, and the cab was mounted. Warren Wilson and Tim Mathern completely wired the truck, and virtually everyone on the team had something to do with body and chassis assembly. The Bowman family stretched cowhide and stitched seats on the inside, and they even had time to install loop carpet on the floor of the cab. The clock

kept ticking, and so did this bomber-assault team. Day turned to night, and by sunrise on Saturday, major progress had been made. And then at 4:30 on Saturday afternoon, the team came together around what appeared to be a finished truck.

Danny Tesar slipped behind the wheel and belted in, and the big block fired to life. Vital signs were checked on the engine, and several team members dropped to their knees to check for leaks; it was just your typical pre-flight inspection. The pilot was given the thumbs up, the shifter slipped into drive, and the black bomber rolled out of the door under its own power. After a short taxi to the straight part of the runway, Captain Tesar lined up and was cleared for takeoff. Now, he could simply take off, or he could go for a full launch. Being a true test pilot, the left foot went to the brake pedal, and the right foot brought the engine up to power. Then, the right foot went down, the left foot lifted, and the bomber launched hard with smoke billowing out of both rear fenders. Mission accomplished. 



The headliner insert is held in place with the stock moldings, and a polished bow adds a touch of class.



The stock door handles and locks were left in tact, and the chrome helps to break up the expanse of Blitz Black.



The II Sly Hot Rods logo provides the finishing touch on the truck.



ABOVE - Things were kept simple out back, too, with stock chains on the tailgate and a nice rolled pan for the license plate and taillights.

LEFT - Basically, stock sheetmetal was all that was needed to make a good-looking hauler. The custom rear pan holds '47 Chevy taillights.



## '48 Bomber



Organization is key. Note that everything is neat and clean, and the parts are arranged for assembly.



Danny Tesar of Il Sty Hot Rods wonders if this pile of parts will be a flying bomber in less than 48 hours. He was the designated test pilot.



The completed chassis is a study in basic hot rodding. Put 468 ci of big block up front that provides 375 hp, hook it to a Turbo 400, and pass it back to a 9-inch rear. An independent front suspension from a C4 Corvette provides handling and braking equal to the engine.



Looking from the rear, we get a good view of the Progressive Automotive front suspension that incorporates an all-aluminum C4 Corvette front suspension. Big Corvette brakes are more than ample to stop the truck, and Aldan shocks provide suspension.



The rear suspension is like the rest of the truck, simple and sturdy with excellent craftsmanship. A stainless steel four-link locates a 9-inch Ford rear while another set of Aldan coilover shocks provides suspension.



The fuel cell was built in house by Greg Burrell, Dave Richardson and Jerry Schelske. Filling the cell will be done through the bed floor.



The 400 Turbo transmission couples to the big-block engine, and a Lokar shifter selects the gears. A dual master cylinder was located under the floor, and stainless brake lines are neatly plumbed.



Keeping the firewall and engine bay sanitary was one goal in building this truck, and to that end, the battery was located under the passenger-side running board in a custom battery box.



The cab was finished in a contrasting color combination of Blitz Black and gloss Bomber White.



A polished intake and Moon finned aluminum valve covers top the Tim Mathem-built big-block Chevy engine. A simple alternator is all that's needed as this truck will not run A/C.



The stainless steel exhaust system was fabricated in house, and like everything else on this truck, it was done with an eye toward maximum performance with minimal maintenance.



A neatly beaded and recessed firewall was built and installed during cab restoration by the team at It Sly Hot Rods.

# THE BUILD



# '48 Bomber



A little grunt work is done in order to get the cab up on the cherry picker-turned-body boom.



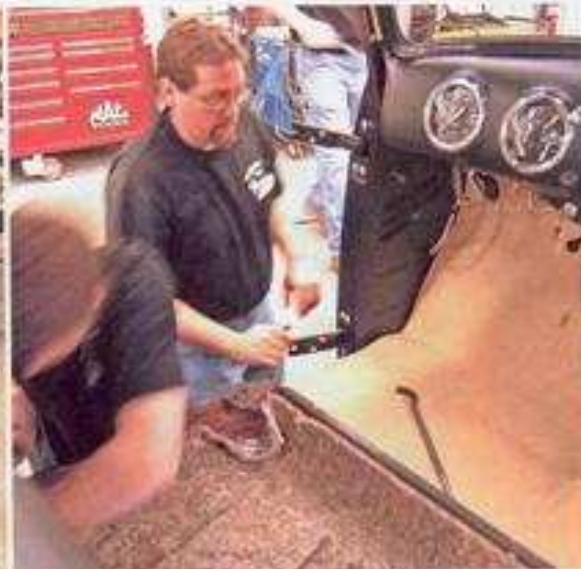
The cab is slowly rolled into place as the bomber crew steadies the cab.



Suddenly, we've gone from working on a bunch of parts to working on a truck.



Body bolts come next. One guy in the cab and one guy under the cab makes it quick and easy.



Swarming like fire ants on a bare foot, team #1 Sly moves in on the cab instantly to make patterns for the carpet. There's no time to waste!



Once again, organization is paramount when you're Over-Thrashin'.



Coolant, wiring, windshield and carpets—it's all going in at once.



Wires to the starter and alternator are neatly routed forward. A Centech system was used in the truck.



A Blitz and billet steering column seemed natural for the truck.



A vintage Chevrolet heater is waiting to be installed inside the cab. Note the high level of detail on this truck. It may be flat black, but the build quality is top-notch.



A vintage-style Moon steering wheel will be used inside.



Measure twice, cut once.



Meanwhile, back in the cab, the sound deadener is in, the gauges are installed, and the wiring is hooked up to the gauges.



Fuzzy dice have no place in a bomber. Instead, a model of a B-17 is suspended in flight.



Sometimes, you get to do the pretty work, like putting the finned aluminum Moon air breather on top of the 725cfm Demon carburetor.



Big and small jobs must be done. Putting parking lights in the grille is all part of the build.



The thrashing continues as the clock ticks.



Before the stainless steel bed strips were installed, they were brush-finished with a piece of Scotch-Brite.





The carpet is coming together nicely.



The door panels are stitched and ready for installation.



Large shrink wrap covers the hose clamps, and a heat gun does the shrinking... details, details, details.



The steering column goes in, enabling the interior wiring to be completed.



A tinted rear window and new rubber are pressed into the cab.



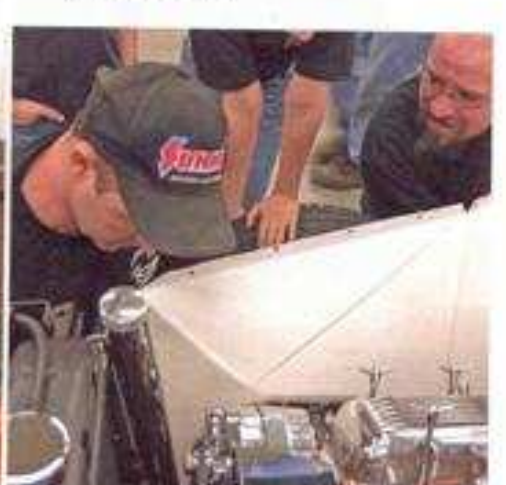
The seat covers are being stitched. The seat is a custom-made piece, and the rolled and pleated leather will go a long way in terms of style and comfort.



When the floor escutcheon for the steering column didn't fit, it was time to mill a little clearance.



The bed is in B&B, the chains are hung on the gate, and this piece is ready to be bolted on.



The custom inner fender panels have been painted Bomber White for a sanitary engine bay.



Finished fenders will find their way on the truck soon, and smoke will be billowing out of them soon thereafter.



Headlights are mounted in the front fenders, and they're ready to be fit to the truck.



The first fender is fitted to the front end, being careful not to scratch either fender or the inner panel.



Slowly, the pile of body parts is getting smaller, and the truck is getting larger.



With two fenders on, this thing is beginning to look like a truck!



It's time for some glory work! The shiny grille is fit between the fenders, and green painter's tape protects the edges.



Six men and a truck—no wonder things are moving along so quickly.



Tanner Bowman attends to details like adhering the '68 NHRA decal to the rear window.



The underside of the hood was also painted gloss white, and that seemed like the perfect place for the crew to leave an autograph.



The new wood in the bed is accented by the brushed-finish stainless steel strips.



The front clip is complete now that the bumper and pan have been installed.



A simple white stripe provides a bit of contrast and blends with the white wheels.



The bed is lifted into place, and things are actually on schedule.



The fender welding is in place on the rear fender prior to installation.



The custom-built rear pan and '47 Chevrolet taillights are bolted in place.



Two other team members are busy installing the running boards.



It's Saturday morning, and at least three of the guys on the team are lying down on the job.



The lower seat is in place, the carpet is done, and the steering column and wheel are mounted.

## THE BUILD



# '48 Bomber



The seatback is installed, and it's time for the very first test of the seating position.



The next piece of sheetmetal to go on the truck was the hood, and since most of the work was done at this point, there was no shortage of helping hands!



The tailgate is installed to finish the sheetmetal on the truck; care was taken to fit the panels perfectly.



Since this is a company truck, the all-important Sly decal is put into place.



The door panels are snapped into place, and the interior is on its way to completion.



The finished interior is simple, well-executed and highly functional, just like the rest of the truck.



It's 3:30 in the afternoon on day two, and sure enough, the job is complete. It's time for a test drive!



The big block fires to life, the brakes are checked, and in true victory celebration fashion, it's time for a burnout!



The victory smoke pours from the wheel wells, and another bomber is road-ready.

## The Crew

Danny Tesar . . . . . Tech Support and Assembly  
 Kevin Adney . . . . . Bodywork, Paint and Assembly  
 Carl Johnson . . . . . Assembly  
 John Leonard . . . . . Custom Sheetmetal and Assembly  
 Mike Linton . . . . . Bodywork and Assembly  
 Greg Burrell . . . . . Wiring and Assembly  
 Warren Wilson . . . . . Wiring and Assembly  
 Tim Mathern . . . . . Engine, Wiring and Assembly  
 Mitch Meyers . . . . . Assembly  
 Jerry Schelske . . . . . Bodywork and Assembly  
 Bruce Knudson . . . . . Glass, Bodyshop Provider  
 John Feltman . . . . . Graphics

Shirley Bowman . . . . . Upholstery, Lunch Crew  
 Cyndy Burrell . . . . . Lunch Crew  
 Josh Mishler . . . . . Photography and Assembly  
 Kevin, Edane, Tonner and Graven Bowman  
 Shop Providers, Tech Support,  
 Upholstery, Assembly and Lunch Crew

*And the Humanitarian Award Goes to Barry and Ginny Lobeck for Putting Danny Tesar on Work Release for the Weekend.*