

Low riders make Motor City debut

By SANDI HORNE
It has four small tires, a chain steering wheel, travels very close to the ground at low speeds and can be elevated with the switch of a lever.

It's called a low rider.
While these unusual autos have been popular in other parts of the country, they just recently have made an impact in the Motor City area.
Alex Vasquez recently went to Texas and learned to install the hydraulic system necessary to transform a normal street car to a low rider.
He is hoping to take advantage of the trend by specializing as a low-rider car mechanic.

A low rider rests 4 to 5 inches above the ground. Because of the specialized hydraulic system, the back, the front or the entire vehicle can be raised several feet above the ground.

"These kind of cars look very nice," he said. "And they're unique. When people have this kind of car they always try to make it look very nice."

Chain-link steering wheels and velvet-like upholstery are usual extras for the low rider.

The car's hydraulic system proves an advantage for winter driving.

THE CAR'S ABILITY to rise prevents its bottom from becoming crusted with salt and sleet. If the road is bumpy, raising the car makes handling much more comfortable.
"When it's raining very hard, you can raise the car up and see the road better," said Vasquez.

Low riders are very popular throughout the Southwest, where low rider competitions and shows are conducted, Vasquez said.
They buck the trend of Michigan motorists' hurried way of driving.
"Low riders travel very, very slow," said Vasquez. "People just like to cruise along and show off their cars. In Southern areas, particularly California, it isn't unusual to see a whole line of low riders traveling along at 30 miles an hour."

Since returning from Texas, Vasquez has converted three cars to low riders. One of those conversions is his own auto.

"People are very curious," said Vasquez. "They stop and ask me what it is. One day I went into the car wash and the guy told me my car was too low, wouldn't go through. You should have seen his face when I raised up the car."

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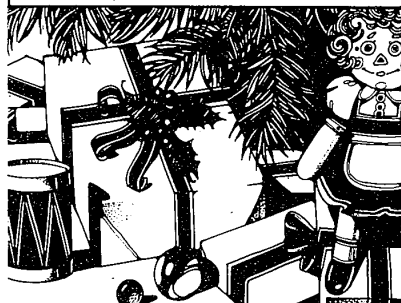
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