

The power and glory that are hot rods

By Craig Piechura
staff writer

A car is simply something to drive from Point A to Point B for most people. It's a means of transportation.

For Bob Houchins, 51, and Joe Struhar, 27, both of Farmington Hills, a car is a sacred object. It's something to be polished, worshiped and rarely driven. In fact, they never really drive their cars, they cruise.

Neither man knows the other, but both are exhibiting their cars in this weekend's Fifth Annual Detroit Street Machine and Street Rod National car show at the Michigan State Fairgrounds.

Houchins is showing his 1936 candy purple Ford pickup truck understandably dubbed "Deep Purple." He's got fuzzy dice under the truck's rear-view mirror and a 327-cubic inch engine under the hood.

Struhar is exhibiting his "triple black" (translation: black-on-black exterior, black interior) 1970 Chevelle Super Stock with a 454-cubic-inch Chevrolet engine.

Just having a car like this, most people who know anything about hot rods 'ooh' and 'aah' when they see it. "I have a 454 Chevelle," Struhar said. "It's kind of a macho thing. Besides, they're not making anything like this any more."

The year 1970 was the last gasp for the American muscle car, Struhar said, an era he's sad to see has passed.

NOBODY NEEDS a car that produces 460 horsepower straight from the factory, Struhar admitted, but he said "if people could still buy that kind of car they'd probably sell a lot of them."

You can hear the reverence in his voice when he talks of the power his car is capable of producing. He uses the word "awesome" and said the only other street rod capable of competing with his car's engine is a 426 Hemi manufactured by Chrysler.

"If you're entering an expressway, if you're in second gear, and you hit the gas at 40 or 50 (mph) the tires will break loose from that power," Struhar said.

When Struhar says "break loose," he means the tires spin wildly, and the car will go out of control. That's why, he said, it's important to take it easy.

The power and the glory cars once had are still treasured by both men in the current age of sensible econo-box cars long on mileage but short on style.

"The car doesn't have to be a race car to interest me," said Houchins. "Take anybody who's into this stuff,

they'll tell you that when a sharp-looking car would go down the street, guys like me could tell on the make, the year and the manufacturer. I had all that down. Today I'm at a loss when somebody asks me what kind of car it is. They all kind of look the same."

WHILE HIS car is a hot rod, Houchins said that doesn't make him a hot-rodder in the usual sense of the word.

"We're not hot dogs squealing tires, laying rubber like some people might think," Houchins said. "You put that much time, money and effort into something you don't want to burn it up by fooling around."

The father of four, Houchins said he and his wife often go on organized cruises with other street rodders, including a recent event sponsored by the Dearborn Police called "Cops and Rodders."

The expense of the sport is defrayed, Houchins said, by meeting other enthusiasts who help him out and he, in turn, helps them. Struhar works at Lucky Auto Shop, Inc. mainly as a painter which cuts down on the cost of restoring his car to mint condition.

Like Houchins, Struhar said the real enjoyment for him is "turning heads" of drivers on the road who admire his ride.

"When you come out of the grocery store there's always a crowd of people around admiring it," Struhar said of the few times he drives the car on the street. "That kind of gives you a neat feeling."



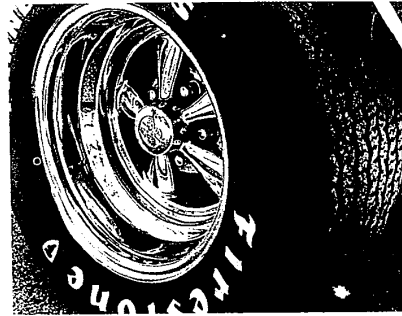
RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Polishing his 1970 Chevelle in anticipation of this weekend's United Street Machine Association show, Joe Struhar hopes to im-

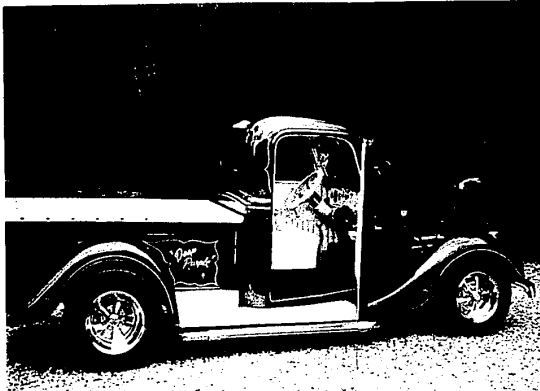
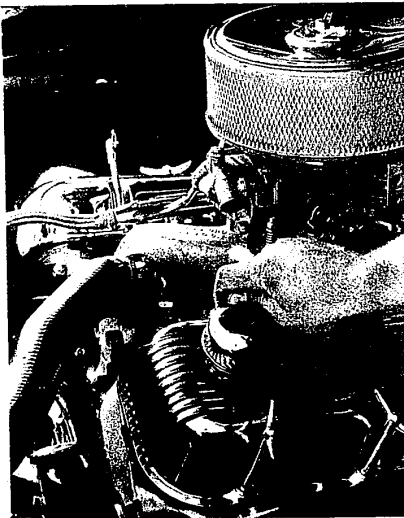
press judges with his black-on-black muscle car with black interior.



The logo (left) for the Chevelle Super Sport 45 tells fans of high-performance cars that his car is hot, says Struhar. The tires are built for speed.

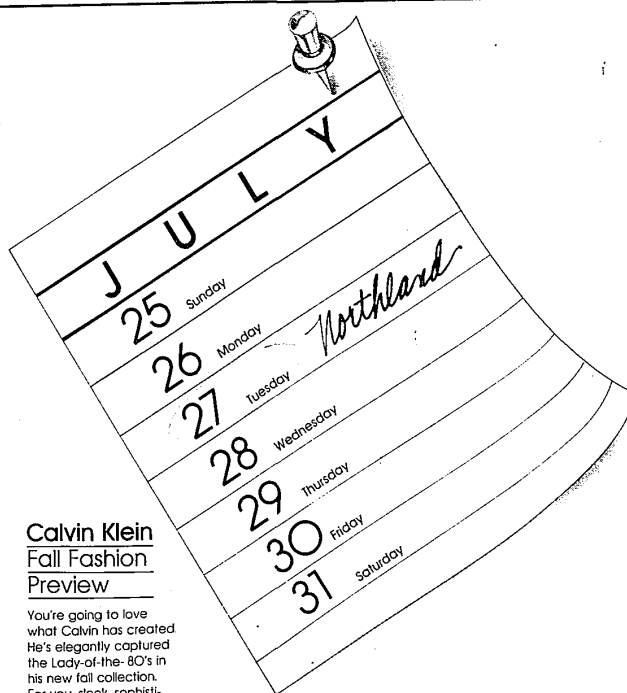


The engine under the Chevelle's hood is stock except for the air cleaner and the chrome valve covers which were added later for flash and dash. The engine generates 460 horsepower.



'Deep Purple' is the name of Bob Houchins' 1936 Ford pickup truck. The running board and the cover for the truck

bed is made of naugahyde. Note the fuzzy dice hanging from the rear-view mirror.



Calvin Klein Fall Fashion Preview

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Maura De Visscher, Calvin Klein representative, will be on hand to answer questions.

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