

Too Perfect to Part

Though Picked for its Pieces, Lyle and Christina Vass' '68 Mercury Muscle Truck Upstaged its Recipient

Feature Story // + By Chris Shelton

Philosophers and scientists will tell you there's no such thing as perfection. But as far as donor trucks go, the '68 Mercury ¾-ton pickup that Lyle Vass found in a farmer's field four hours east of Calgary was the perfect candidate to complete another project, one of nine '68 Mercury crew-cab pickups.

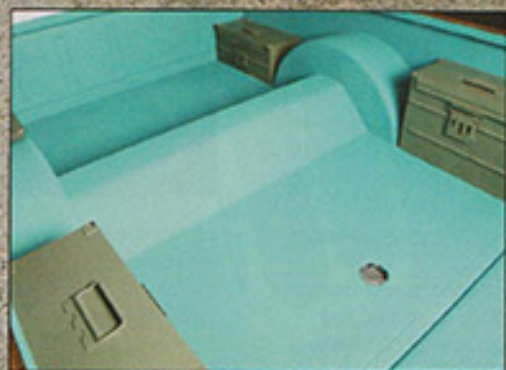
But something curious happened when he got it back to his Strathmore, Alberta, shop, Rods n Restos. "When I started stripping the truck I realized it was too good to part out," he admits. Seeing an opportunity, he says he decided to just make it run, swap the suspension, and throw it on the road as is. "My goal was to have it on the road in three to four weeks," he noted. It made sense to touch up and fix a few things on the way, but it looked like a slam-dunk deal.

Along with friend Kevin Williams and employees Robert Lee and Sam Hutchinson, Lyle tore into the truck. Starting with the chassis, he swapped the twin I-beam for an

'09 Crown Victoria subframe. Being from a Police Interceptor, it boasts the bigger 12½-inch brakes and heavier anti-roll bar. Lyle had Eaton Detroit wind a new set of coils for it. Things like drop spindles don't exist for Crown Vics so to get the ride height where he wanted, the crew Z-cut the frame 3½ inches where the crossmember mounts.

Who needs overdrive when running a steep 3.08:1 gear and enough torque to pull it? A narrower '91 Crown Vic 8.8 axle also boasts a limited-slip carrier, making it a real performer. Lyle pulled a few plates from the pickup's rear springs and mounted the axle above the leafs, a modification that required a frame notch.







Under the heading of, "since we're already here," Lyle and the crew cut 16 whopping inches from the frame's length in anticipation for a shortbed conversion. There's more to the bed than just the shorter profile; Lyle made the inner bed walls from scratch, shaved the tailgate handle, and re-skinned the inner tailgate wall.

The project acquired an objective along the way. "The idea was to build a '60s muscle truck," he says. "This is what Mercury should have built to compete with the muscle car market, similar to the Lightning and 454SS that Ford and Chevrolet built in the 1990s."

Lyle employed as many period-correct parts and techniques as possible to achieve the effect. He shortened a Cougar Eliminator hood scoop to match the pickup hood's proportions. He also machined dies to form the dimples that accommodate the '68 Shelby twist-lock hood pins. And yes, they're functional too. To further drive home the muscle car twist, he inverted the paint detailing on the side trim so it appears mostly black with a silver highlight. To give the front wheels the room they needed at the new stance, Lyle fabricated new inner-fender panels. And to fix what tin that Mother Nature rusted away, Lyle replaced the fender bottoms and cab corners.

The interior underwent a similar transformation. Lyle shaved the dash, painted the gauge cluster Ford Parchment, and had Acorn Graphics in Calgary re-face the gauge faces with black lettering printed on clear vinyl. Rather than let the contemporary Old Air Products Hurricane climate-control system spoil the vintage look, Lyle formed a box around it and adorned it with a pressed panel from a 1948 to 1950 Mercury pickup radio-delete plate. Old Air also supplied the chrome vents in the gauge cluster.

Steve Ottens at Old Iron Kustoms and Upholstery in Strathmore, Alberta, trimmed a 1993 Ford XLT seat and a booster seat for Lyle's son, Lane, in the factory Parchment vinyl. Lyle eliminated the door vent windows; Dominion Auto Glass in Calgary cut the glass for the conversion. Lyle also modified the stock column to work with the Crown Vic rack. To prove the point that stock parts are just as worthy as aftermarket, Lyle kept the pickup's original steering wheel.

The cab's factory wiring harness remains, but Lyle made the rest from restoration-grade wire and plugs to run through the frame channels and wheelwells. A set of '80s Mustang door switches actuate matching Mustang



power door locks and Electric Life power windows. Dakota Digital made the cruise control. The cab boasts an array of Kenwood audio components, from a KDC X496 receiver, XR-4s

Too Perfect to Part >

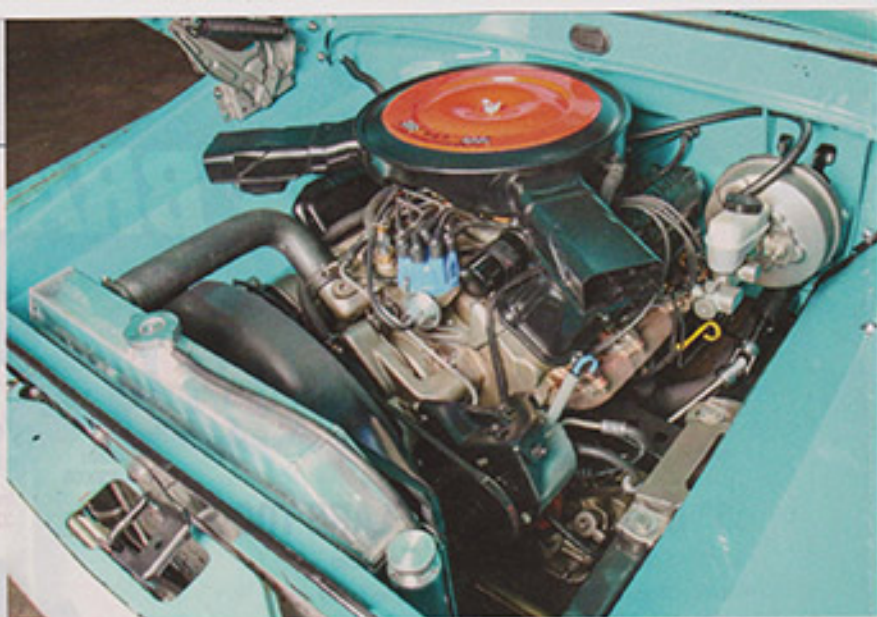
amplifier, KFC-1393PS coaxial drivers in the kick panels, and a Rockford Fosgate P3SD4-8 8-inch subwoofer in an enclosure under the seat.

Given the missing hood and the modifications and repairs to the body, it's safe to assume that the patina finish on it is false. And you'd be correct, but only about 25 percent correct; most of the paint on the truck is what was on there the day Lyle dragged it out of the farmer's field. The rest was spotted in with PPG Omni in the stock Ford Swiss Aqua color. "If I had to do it again I wouldn't shorten the bedsides by cutting and welding," he admits. "You can actually do it by cutting a few inches short of how much you need to remove then by folding the edge over a buck or with a dolly and hammer. If I did that then I wouldn't have had to paint the places where I welded."

Finding appropriate looking wheels proved more difficult than anticipated. As strange as it seems, the Vic track is too wide for dent-side trucks. It's not so much a deal killer, but it requires wheels just the right width and with a bunch of positive offset (pronounced backspace). Lyle found OEM-style wheels in the diameters he wanted, but the vendor refused to build them to his truck's specific dimensions.

Undaunted, Lyle ordered a production set anyway and sent them to a machinist who cut them apart. He narrowed the 18-inch rims to 7.5 inches and reassembled them with a whopping 6 1/4-inch backspace. He narrowed the 20s to 8 1/2 and rebuilt them with a more conventional 4.5 inches backspace. The front wheels mount 215/45R18 Pirelli P-Zero Rossos; the rears, 275/35R20 Goodyear Excellence Run Flats.

Lyle Vass is the first to admit that his truck is far from perfect. After all, to most eyes it needs a coat of paint. But those who get it understand the calculated perfection in his '68. Proof is in the way people react to it; it consistently steals the show from the seemingly perfect-looking ones around it at any given show.



And the crew cab that Lyle intended to reanimate with parts from this truck? Well let's just say it's going

to have to wait for another farm truck to show up. And for its sake, we hope it's not quite so perfect. ☺

1968 MERCURY PICKUP

Lyle and Christina Vass

CHASSIS

- WHEELBASE: 115 INCHES
- MODIFICATIONS: SHORTENED 16 INCHES, FRONT STEPPED 3 INCHES; C-NOTCHED REAR BY RODS N RESTOS, STRATHMORE, ALBERTA, CANADA
- REAR END / RATIO: CROWN VICTORIA 8.8 WITH TRAC-LOC / 3.08:1
- REAR SUSPENSION: PARALLEL LEAF, PLATES PULLED FOR STANCE AND WEIGHT CAPACITY, LOWERING BLOCKS AND LMC DROPPED DAMPERS
- REAR BRAKES: POLICE INTERCEPTOR
- FRONT SUSPENSION: 2009 CROWN VICTORIA POLICE INTERCEPTOR SUBFRAME WITH EATON DETROIT SPRINGS
- FRONT BRAKES: POLICE INTERCEPTOR 12-INCH ROTORS AND DUAL-PISTON CALIPERS
- FRONT WHEELS: MODIFIED FORD DISC STYLE, 18X7.5; 6.25 INCHES BACKSPACE; 20X8.5, 4.5 INCHES BACKSPACE
- TIRES: PIRELLI P-ZERO ROSSO, 215/45R18 PIRELLI FRONT; GOODYEAR EXCELLENCE RUN FLAT, 275/35R20, REAR
- GAS TANK: STOCK IN-CAB

ENGINE

- MAKE: 1968 FORD
- DISPLACEMENT: 390CI
- INDUCTION: 750-CFM HOLLEY 4150
- IGNITION: STOCK WITH MODIFIED ADVANCE CURVE AND PERTRONIX IGNITION MODULE
- COOLING FAN: 19-INCH BELT-DRIVEN
- RADIATOR: CHAMPION THREE-ROW ALUMINUM
- EXHAUST / MUFFLERS: 2 1/2-INCH STEEL MANIFOLD BENDS WITH FLOWMASTER MUFFLERS, RODS N RESTOS
- OTHER ENGINE FACTS: ALL EXTERNAL ENGINE SURFACES WERE GROUND AND PAINTED SATIN NICKEL
- OTHER ENGINE NOTES: RARE MERCURY 427 ACCESSORY-DRIVE SYSTEM WITH CUSTOM-BUILT STEEL BRACKETS (RODS N RESTOS)

TRANSMISSION: FORD C6 BY NATIONAL TRANSMISSION, CALGARY, ALBERTA

DRIVESHAFT: PAT'S DRIVELINE, CALGARY

BODY

- BODY MODS: RODS N RESTOS
- HOOD: CUT FOR COUGAR ELIMINATOR HOOD SCOOP; COLOR MATCHED TO EXISTING PAINT
- PAINT TYPE / COLOR: PPG OMNI ACRYLIC ENAMEL / SWISS AQUA
- HEADLIGHTS / TAILLIGHTS: UNITED PACIFIC LED CRYSTAL / STOCK LENSES WITH REVERSE LIGHTS TINTED RED
- BUMPERS: SHAVED AND TUCKED
- OTHER BODY ITEMS: ALUMINUM TONNEAU COVER FRAME WITH CANVAS COVER

INTERIOR

- INSERT / GAUGES: PARCHMENT PAINT DETAIL; ACORN GRAPHICS, CALGARY FACE GRAPHICS
- STEREO / SPEAKERS: KENWOOD KDC X496 RECEIVER, XR-4S AMPLIFIER, KFC-1393PS COAXIAL DRIVERS IN THE KICK PANELS, AND ROCKFORD FOSGATE P3SD4-8 8-INCH SUBWOOFER
- AIR CONDITIONING: OLD AIR PRODUCTS HURRICANE WITH OLD AIR VENTS
- WIRING: STOCK IN-CAB WITH AFTERMARKET EXTERIOR BUILT WITH RESTORATION-GRADE PLUGS
- STEERING WHEEL: STOCK, PARCHMENT FINISH
- STEERING COLUMN: STOCK, MODIFIED FOR STEERING RACK
- INTERIOR MIRROR: SPEEDWAY MOTORS
- SEAT: 1968 FORD XLT SEAT
- UPHOLSTERER: STEVE OTTENS, OLD IRON KUSTOMS AND UPHOLSTERY IN STRATHMORE, ALBERTA
- MATERIAL / COLOR: OEM FORD PARCHMENT
- CARPET: AQUA NYLON LOOP
- SEATBELTS: JULIANO'S THREE-POINT RETRACTABLE

Stroker Rotating Assembly

Classic TRUCKS

STACKED



◆ JEFF GREENING'S INJECTED APACHE ◆

TEN

THE ENTHUSIAST NETWORK

\$6.99 | DECEMBER 2015



Shaved Door Handles



One-Off Exhaust Outlets



Trailing Arm Upgrades

PLUS More Tech, More Trucks At classictrucks.com