

# THE DECEPTI

You See a  
Beautifully  
Restored **Stock**  
**Model A** Coming  
Your Way—  
but What's  
That Noise?

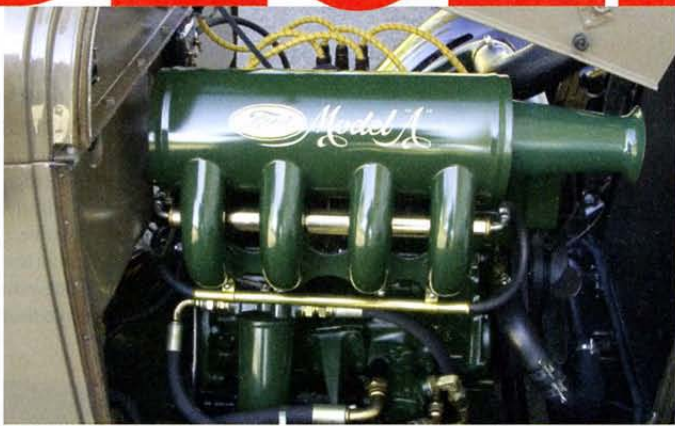
By Christopher  
Campbell

Photography: Stefan Bau  
and Mäkelä Auto Tuning

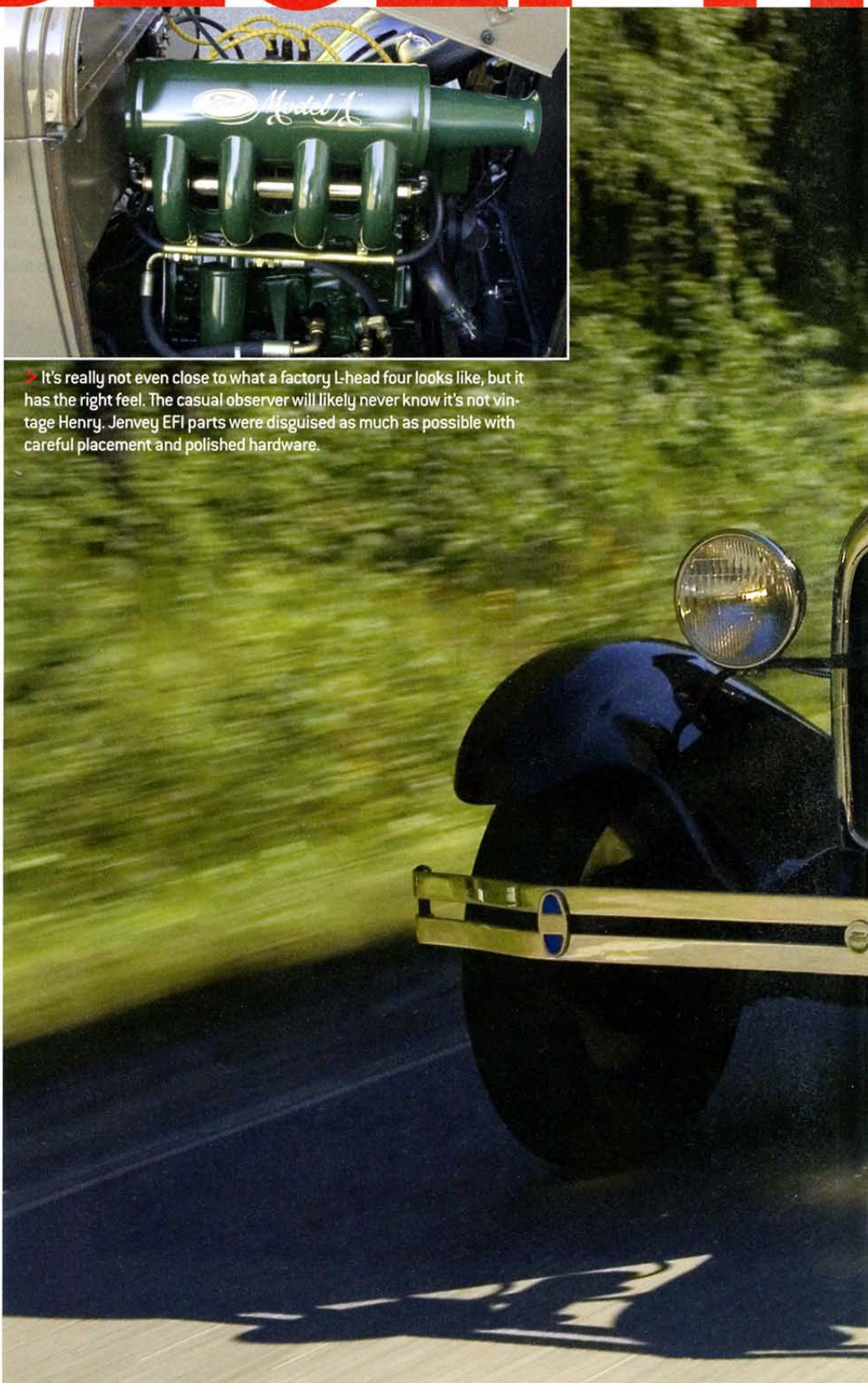
It sounds angry. Really angry. And man, it's hauling ass on those wooden-spoke wheels on a winding road through the beautiful Finnish countryside. By the time you catch up to it at a diner down the road, it's chugging, sputtering, and sounding like a standard 200.5ci L-head four-cylinder engine. What's going on here?

You've just encountered the most clandestine prewar sleeper we've ever come across. What appears to be a nuts-and-bolts restoration of a Model A sedan is actually a very precisely tuned and stealthily constructed hot rod.

Kari Mäkelä and his team of metal craftsmen at Mäkelä Auto Tuning (MAT, [www.mat.fi](http://www.mat.fi)), which specializes in building and restoring vintage sports cars and race cars, is the mastermind behind this surreptitious build. The owner of the A, a widely renowned rally driver who wishes to remain anonymous, found it and a '24 Model T while racing in the World Rally Championship in Argentina in 1993. The cars were mostly complete, and the word is that he didn't pay much

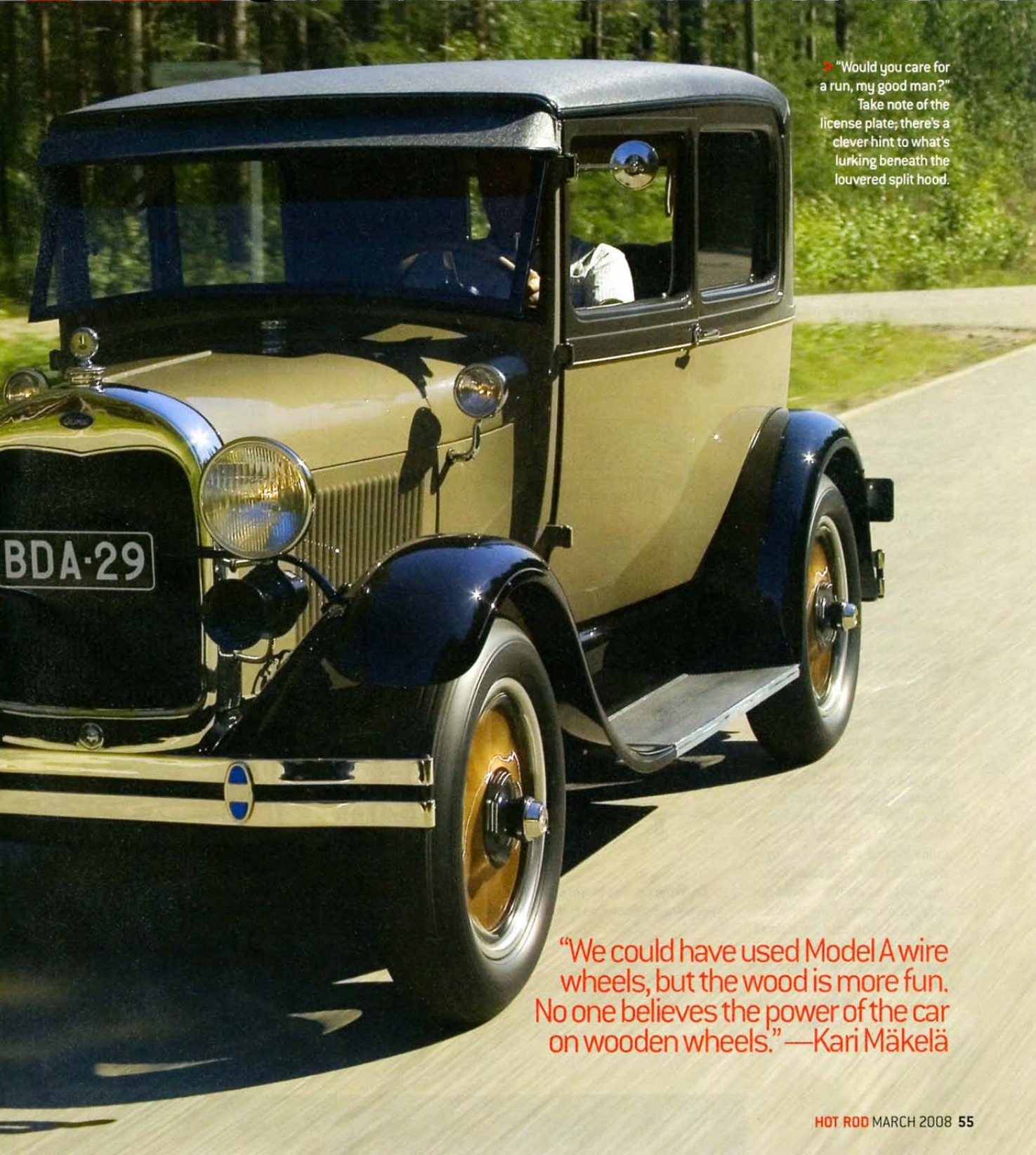


➤ It's really not even close to what a factory L-head four looks like, but it has the right feel. The casual observer will likely never know it's not vintage Henry. Jenvey EFI parts were disguised as much as possible with careful placement and polished hardware.





# WE GENTLEMAN



➤ "Would you care for a run, my good man?" Take note of the license plate; there's a clever hint to what's lurking beneath the louvered split hood.

"We could have used Model A wire wheels, but the wood is more fun. No one believes the power of the car on wooden wheels." —Kari Mäkelä



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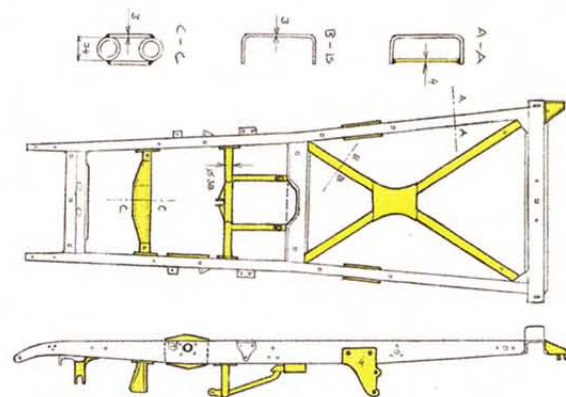
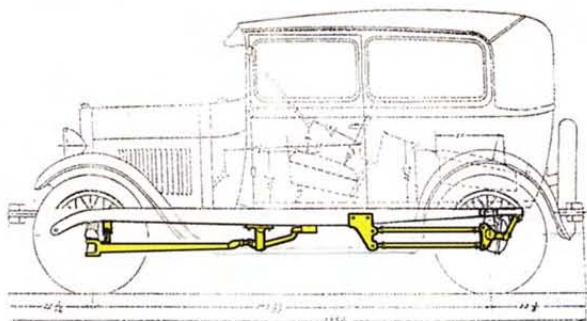
more than the price of shipping to get them back to his native Finland. The T received a full resto back to stock standards, and the A was slated for the same until the intrepid rally racer happened to mention to Kari that he'd like a bit more power underhood, but without going the typical hot rod or street rod route—he wanted to maintain a vintage look to the car. After a few moments of bench racing with Kari about what could be done, he mentioned that his favorite engine from his decades of racing was the high-strung Group 4 Ford Escort BDA built by Cosworth. That sparked an idea, and Kari immediately started envisioning what the car should be. After airing a few ideas, he persuaded the owner to give him full license to build the A as he saw fit.

The goal was to keep the body, interior, and feel of the A stock while making it perform like a sports car, all the while using as many factory parts—or at least factory-appearing parts—as possible. That's a tall order considering the canvas. While he may have relished the idea of revolutionizing the art of automobile production, ol' Henry wasn't big on technology for the car itself. Simplicity and low cost were the keys to the success of both the T's and A's. That meant using the stock A frame and buggy spring suspension for this build created a multitude of challenges.

The key to any good performing car is the platform, so the first order of business was to strip the A down to its basic elements and develop a plan for the chassis. Of course boxing the rails was on the list, but to make the frame exceptionally rigid, Kari designed crossbracing and brackets that would not only stiffen everything up but also blend right into the chassis and give a factory-built impression. The stock front suspension was strengthened and given a Panhard rod, but the rear had to be completely rethought. No banjo rearend could survive the



> The '29 was a solid base for a project, but 64 years in South America necessitated copious amounts of bodywork for rust and dent repair.



> Once the car was blown apart, Kari sketched out the plans for the redesigned suspension and crossmembers.



> The body and chassis were completely disassembled for metal and paint prep. It looks like a giant ERTL kit, doesn't it?



> Once the frame was squared and boxed, the custom X-brace and crossmembers went in. Here, the location of the four-link and Panhard bar can be clearly seen. The four-link was designed similarly to those MAT has used on other vintage rally cars, and the rearend is from an '85 Toyota rally car.

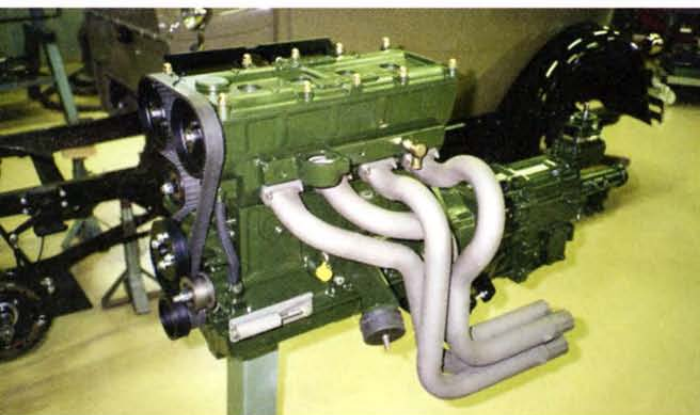




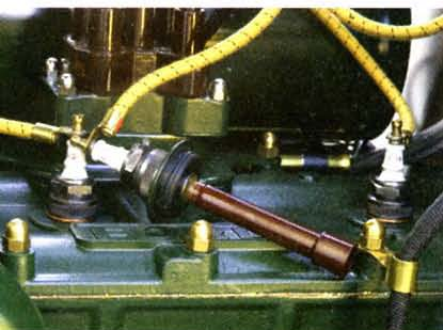
> Not a single part in this shot of the rear suspension is original Model A, but MAT blended everything together to create the figment of a race-prepped A chassis.



> The metal patchwork is seamless, and very little filler was needed to make it like glass. Model A's weren't this straight when they rolled off the Dearborn assembly line.



> Even though it's a 30-plus-year-old design, a great deal of work went into retro-izing the ex-rally engine and distilling it down to its basics.



> The coup de grâce on the engine's masquerade is the original banger spark plugs mounted on the Cosworth valve cover with old-style cloth-covered wires. The ignition current passes right through and down to the Cossie's real plugs, which are deep in the cylinder head.



> Above and below: Wire or steel wheels would have been easier, but Kari wanted the absolute stealthiness of a wooden wheel. Of course wooden wheels will not hold up to this combination, so MAT built its own mold to cast the wheels in aluminum, then painted them to look like wood.



> No room for a picnic basket in here. The original trunk now hides the dry sump reservoir and battery.



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wrath of a race-bred Cosworth, so a Toyota 4x4 van rearend (which was actually used in Toyota rally cars) was selected for its width and durability, and a parallel four-link with a Panhard rod was designed to locate it. Coilovers would have been the easy choice but not the right one for this car. Kari's team fabricated mounts to use a stock-style buggy spring modified for a progressive rate and swapped in friction shocks from an Aston Martin DP4. Who would have thought? The list of illusory mods is lengthy, but to really appreciate the level of detail and time spent on every aspect to keep the identity of the A correct requires hours crawling all over it.

Now the answer to the question on everyone's mind: What does a near-stock-height Model A with a race-prepped original chassis and a drivetrain that'll propel it 0-60 in a tick over five seconds feel like on the open road? Stupid fun—and we don't use that term lightly. A good sleeper puts a wicked grin on your face, and there's no bigger sleeper than this. The absolute contradiction of sitting in the gentlemanly interior grasping the four-spoke steering wheel and stock-length shifter and hearing the high-strung wail from the Cosworth is delicious.

If given the chance to enjoy the A for a weekend or so, we'd go for the ultimate covert action and dress in our Sunday best as if the only intention was a leisurely drive to an antique car show—with the MAT-designed ignition misfire circuit activated so it chugged laboriously along like a stock Model A. Of course we'd only pull the Simpson race harness over our shoulders at the stoplight once the guy in the BMW in the next lane had thoroughly dismissed us as nothing more than an antiquated and sluggish museum piece. Then, with a flip of the misfire switch and a tip of the hat, it'd be time to lower his smugness a few points. You with us? Bonus points for doing it with vintage driving gloves and a newsboy hat.



> Other than the steering wheel, shifter, and pedals, everything in the interior is OEM Model A.

> Below: The dash features restored original gauges, but a data logger was mounted overhead next to the rearview mirror to keep tabs on everything—in Finnish, of course.



> The Tilton Engineering pedal assembly simplified the packaging for the new hydraulic brakes and clutch. The misfire circuitry that causes the engine to drop every third spark and sound remarkably like an original flat-head-four is also hidden behind the dash with a removable panel for access.



> Factory Model A seats may not provide a great deal of confidence during aggressive driving, but that's what the Simpson race harness is for. The belts are mounted discreetly and can be tucked out of sight. The misfire switch is located on the front of the shifter for easy access.



## HEAR IT WAIL ON HOTROD.COM!

Check out the link to the full-build album of this awesome A and the absolutely must-see-and-hear in-car video and dyno run. Turn up the volume!

> Below: Trial-and-error testing has dialed the suspension in, and Kari plans to use it occasionally for demonstrations and shows on racetracks and at rally stages. How well does it stick? It's the only A we've ever seen corner fast and hard enough to lift the front inside tire without a catastrophic result.





## Quick Inspection: '29 Ford Model A sedan Mäkelä Auto Tuning (MAT) • Kannus, Finland

### POWERTRAIN

**Engine:** The little beastie in banger guise is an '81 122ci aluminum Cosworth BDA originally designed for European Group 4 rally and touring car racing. Nearly everything in the engine is original Cosworth-spec including the billet steel crank, forged rods and pistons, and solid-tappet Cosworth L1 cams. The twin-cam 16-valve head received a thorough porting and polishing from MAT and was fitted with stainless steel 1.4- and 1.2-inch intake and exhaust valves respectively.

**Power:** The naturally aspirated Cossie revs to 8,400 rpm to make 250 hp and sees 200 lb-ft of torque at 7,200 rpm.

**Transmission:** At the end of that long shifter is a ZF quick-ratio five-speed transmission sourced from a Group 4 Escort rally car.

**Rearend:** An '85 Toyota Celica rally car gave up its rear end, but a limited-slip diff and stronger axles were swapped in.

### CHASSIS

**Suspension:** It's still original-style buggy springs front and rear, but they've been lowered a little over 2 inches all around and feature adjustable bumpstops between the leaves to create a progressive rate. Shocks are Girling friction shocks from an Aston Martin DP4. MAT designed and built the front and rear Panhard bars as well as the 0.79-inch adjustable sway bar. The front radius rods are the originals but are strengthened considerably by MAT, while the rear end is held in place by a custom parallel four-link by MAT.

**Brakes:** Toyota manual drum brakes take up all four corners with two 21mm Girling master cylinders providing the push. Pedals are from a Tilton box assembly. A hydraulic hand brake was fabbed up to allow some hand-brake-turn fun.

**Wheels:** The 19-inch cast-aluminum wheels were made in-house by MAT.

**Tires:** Dunlop Racing 500-19s take up all four corners and stick better than you'd expect.

### STYLE

**Body:** Though the chassis is full of tricks, the body was restored to stock form with panels from Snyder's Antique Auto Parts ([www.snydersantiqueauto.com](http://www.snydersantiqueauto.com)) and some handformed pieces by MAT.

**Paint:** The paint is a custom-mixed two-tone acrylic from PPG swirled with an eye toward a classy stock look.

**Interior:** The interior is almost 100 percent restored original parts with material supplied by LeBaron Bonney ([www.lebaronbonney.com](http://www.lebaronbonney.com)). The steering wheel is a custom piece by Moto-Lita, and the Simpson four-point belts can be easily hidden under the rear seat pillows. **HRM**



> Looking like a scene from 1929, this thing is the ultimate sleeper.

> If only this page had audio. Go to [HOT.ROD.com](http://HOT.ROD.com) to see the video and hear it scream.

