

**“Once you go hot rod, you never go back to custom.”**  
—Bobby Green



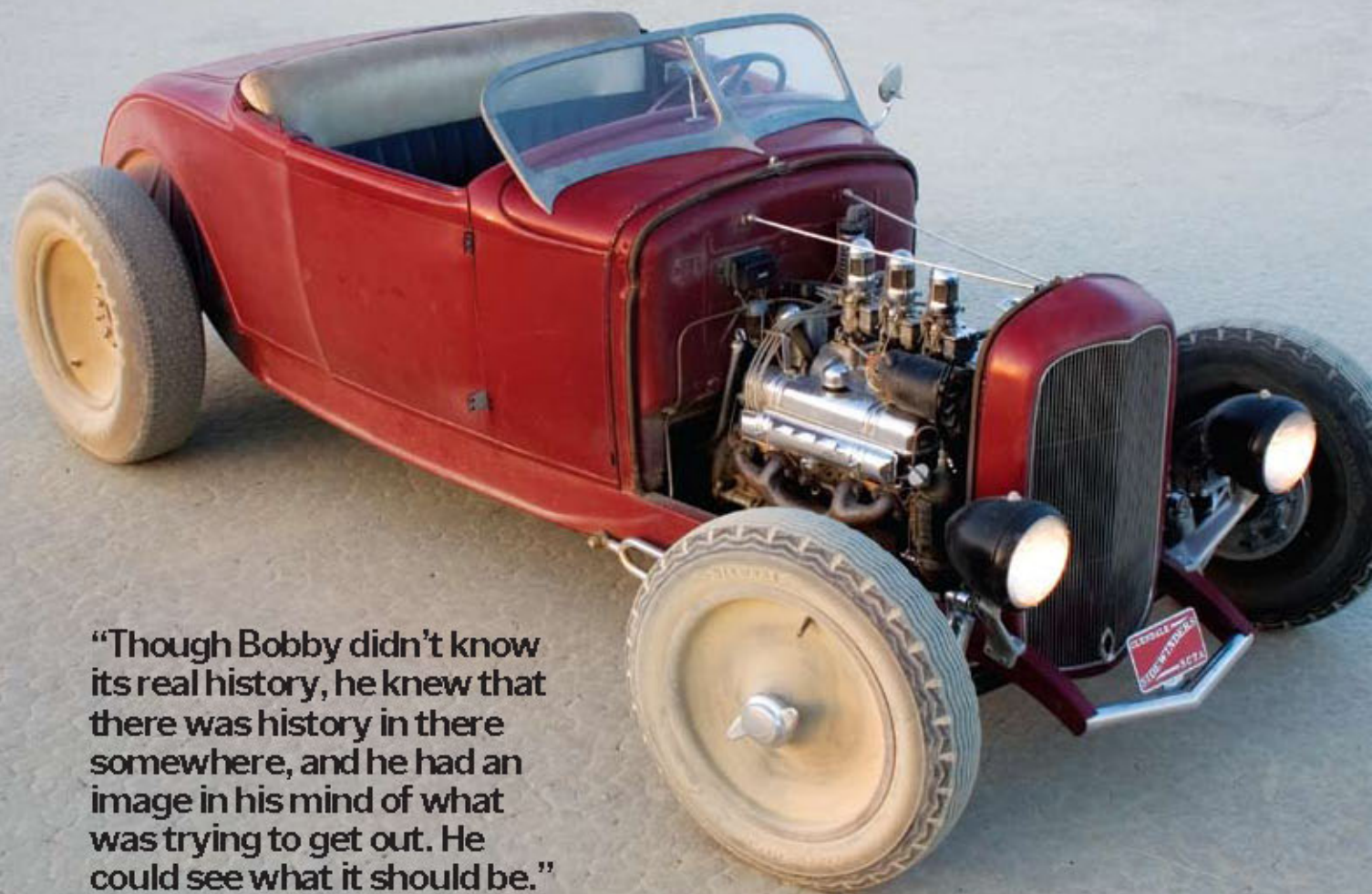
**TIME**

> Is it 1958 or 2008? Doesn't matter, it's a photo of a guy running across the dry lakes of El Mirage in a nailhead-powered '31 roadster pieced together at home with the best '50s-era parts and early IndyCar wheels. It's timeless.

CAR: BOBBY GREEN • PICS: RICK AMADO • WORDS: CHRISTOPHER CAMPBELL

A man wearing a cap and sunglasses is driving a red vintage roadster across a dry lake bed. The background shows a vast, arid desert landscape with mountains under a clear sky.

# TRAVEL



“Though Bobby didn’t know its real history, he knew that there was history in there somewhere, and he had an image in his mind of what was trying to get out. He could see what it should be.”

## VINTAGE

You know those cars when you see ‘em: the real ones, the ones that carry with them leftover memories of that golden time in hot rodding that we wish wasn’t so long ago. Maybe it’s the slightly flat, aged paint, that perfect 322ci nailhead with three Stromberg 97s, or those early ‘50s Halibrand IndyCar wheels, but when we first took a look at Bobby Green’s roadster, that’s the vibe that radiated, and it filled us with the musing that we could be looking at a historic rod. It was so easy to picture it tooling around Southern California’s San Fernando Valley in the mid-’50s, occasionally in attendance at those still-formative years of racing on the dry lakes of El Mirage. But of course, that’s pure flight of the imagination. Or is it?

On one hand, it’s none of those things. The roadster, as you see it, is circa 1998, built by a young and determined enthusiast with a well-cultivated eye for traditional cars—though it has made several trips out to those dry and dusty flats to watch the speed trials. On the other hand, it might have been all of those things, because this was a real ‘50s-era hot rod. Don’t be confused... here’s the story.

Bobby Green, proprietor of the private traditional hot rodder’s dream shop known as The Old Crow Speed Shop, used to be a custom guy. His fairly mild ‘57 Chevy was his first car and from it he learned a great deal about what it takes to put together a rod. He then moved on to a ‘54 Ford. Both were good-looking cars that garnered plenty of attention, but there was something inside Bobby that yearned for more simplicity. After all, a custom’s a bout style, the kind of style that takes substance, so there’s really no way to strip one down and keep the look. Deep down, what he really wanted was a bare-bones hot rod.

Nowadays the Old Crow Shop has a stunning array of vintage parts stockpiled from years of Bobby’s scouring swap meets, junkyards, and classified ads, looking for period-specific parts he might need one day

on a future build. Ya never know—besides, that stuff isn’t getting any easier to find. Having his eyes constantly peeled is what led him to cross paths with what would be his first hot rod.

While flipping through the local *PennySaver* classifieds one day, Bobby’s finger landed on an ad for a ‘31 roadster body located fairly close by in Pomona, California. The deal seemed good, so he set up a time to drive out and see if he might have found the basis for the build he had in mind.

When Bobby first laid eyes on the roadster, it wasn’t much to look at. It was definitely in need of some metalwork and had been doused in a faded light metallic green with a tanish pinstripe that seemed to implore “Strip this paint off, please.” But it was a real ‘31 roadster and had a definite, though ambiguous, pedigree of being an early hot rod. The body had been channeled over boxed ‘32 rails, which were still with it, and an Auburn dash had been molded in. Though he didn’t know its real history, Bobby knew there was history in there somewhere, and he had an image in mind of what was trying to get out. He could see what it should be, so a deal was made.

At the time, Bobby didn’t yet have a shop. Matter of fact, he didn’t even have a garage. He and Piero DeLuca of the Mad Fabricator DVD-series fame shared an apartment in Santa Monica, which wasn’t exactly suited to the hot rodding hobby to say the least. The only place available to work on the car was the back patio, but if you want something badly enough, you figure out how to make do with what you have. Bobby ordered up some panels from Brookville Roadster and set about the unenviable task of patching, repairing and dechanneling the body. From there he began setting up the chassis: Model A cross member, ‘32 Ford dropped axle, Pete and Jake’s spring, and ‘57 Ford rear. Money was tight for Bobby, so the roadster initially had an early 283ci small-block Chevy with a TH350 and rode on black steelies with wide whites. Basic, but nice.



• VAVOOM: GENEVIEVE CHAPPELL  
(WWW.GENEVIEVECHAPPELL.COM)  
• STYLIST: NANCY NESTER  
(WWW.MOVIEGIRLMAKEUP.COM)



Fortunately, partially through the build, Piero decided to move in with his girlfriend. That was great news for him, and also for Bobby, since her house had a garage that she was willing to let him take over for a while. By this time the roadster was almost fully mocked-up, which presented an interesting problem—the 100-foot or so alley, the only entrance to the patio, was only about 4 feet wide. To get it out, Bobby had to disassemble the roadster and take it piece by piece out of the yard. Think about that next before you complain about not having enough space to build something.

Once he had a real garage over his head, progress was much quicker, and it wasn't long before the roadster was ready for paint. A single-stage PPG, more or less the color of dried blood, was chosen and mixed with a small amount of flattening agent to stifle the gloss just enough.

Bobby happily drove the car in that configuration for quite a while and told us he finally felt what he'd been missing all along: that smile

> The big deco steering wheel is from a '40 Lincoln. Bobby cut the aluminum panel for the vintage Stewart-Warner gauges at his shop.

> The '55 Buick 322ci nailhead is bored .030 over and makes 9.5:1 compression with custom pistons. A Positon cam makes the most of the ported and polished stock heads fitted with aluminum Buick 4.01ci 1.6:1-ratio rockers.

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that comes from driving a hot rod. Does he miss his customs? Not so much. Once you've had simplicity, it's hard to want complexity back. Or as Bobby told us, "Once you go hot rod, you never go back to custom."

Sure, it was good looking in that form, but it just wasn't quite right yet. It needed those wheels. Bobby wasn't actually looking for them when he found them though; he simply happened upon them on eBay. Apparently the wheels had traded hands several times before, with no one actually taking the time to have the machine work done to make them fit. We just like to think they were waiting for the right car.

As for that bitchin' Nailhead, well, that was in the cards the entire time. Bobby just had to take a little time to save the money to build it right. When that last piece fell into place, that's when the roadster came to be what it was supposed to be—and maybe what it had once been before. An exceptional, traditional hot rod. Squint your eyes; you can almost see it in black-and-white photos on the little pages.

By the way, if anyone has an old shot of a misty green '31 roadster in the Southwest (circa '50s or '60s) it might be his car in its former life. Bobby would be glad to hear from you. ★



> Fitting those vintage IndyCar wheels onto the 12-inch '41 Lincoln brakes required a custom-machined hub with a splined shaft.



> The DuVall style windshield is a one-off piece cast by a friend of Bobby's in San Diego. Unfortunately it was too costly a business venture to make more.

> Three Stromberg 97s fitted with Eelco linkage and Boettger air cleaners originally made for first-gen Corvettes top a Weiland intake.

