

BIG-BLOCK BRIT



***Taking an Austin-Healey Rep
Roadster to a Whole New Lev
with a 700hp, 572ci Chevy***

**READER'S
RIDE**



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As told by Robert Weiss

The basic premise was simple, but the execution was not. Bob Andrews of West Allis, Wisconsin, a longtime car collector, wanted to build a ride with the highest power-to-weight ratio of just about any car on the road.

After all, he's no stranger to high performance, owning both a Corvette and a Viper, but this would be on an all new level, truly untested territory. Especially considering the performance parameters of some of the street beasts

out there. Besides the extreme power-to-weight ratio he wanted, it also had to be compliant, easily drivable, and stunning in appearance. Like we said at the outset, easier said than done.

Andrews chose Bennett Coachworks for the project, noting its reputation for handling complex builds, precision craftsmanship and innovative engineering. Andrews also wanted Bennett because of Bob Bennett's personal history (note sidebar), along with his association with Arntz Engineering, creators of the first Cobra

replica, which included both its development and manufacture (along with a number of other Cobra projects). If anybody knows how to seriously compete head-to-head with a Cobra, it'd be Bob.

The platform Andrews gave Bennett to work from was a replica of a '62 BJ8 Austin Healy, a Classic Roadsters Sebring done in red gelcoat. It was already fitted with a 350 Chevy small block, turbo 350 Transmission and 4-lug Ford rearend.

First job was to figure out if and how it could be fitted with a monster

ECLECTIC CAR BUILDER

In a career that spans over 38 years Bob Bennett and Bennett Coachworks LLC have played a major role in some really rare and revered rides.

For instance, he did the complete restoration of the Ferrari 410 Super Fast

on his own, including the manufacture of rare and unobtainable parts. This is the one-off darling of the 1956 Paris Auto Show is now worth millions of dollars. It recently made another appearance at Pebble Beach, still carrying his original



engine, yet still be something close to drivable. The second job was to take the cute little car all apart and rebuild it into a ferocious roadster.

The mill chosen was a 572ci, big-block Chevy crate motor rated at whopping 701 horses, fitted with a Holley 850 CFM 4 barrel and backed by an Art Carr, 200-4R Transmission. Obviously the size of this lump and new trans configuration required a lot of reengineering to the frame and suspension components, as well as some creative mods for the engine bay and



undercarriage. These included adding extra cross members and outer frame rails tied to existing members for reinforcement,

and reinforcing the rear axle's front spring perches.

Bennett also adapted new motor and trans mounts and made some

restoration work some 30 years after the fact.

There are many other early, rare Ferraris to his credit: A 250LM, 250GT Berlinetta Lusso, 250 PF Cabriolet, 275 GTB4, 365 GTB4, and so on. There have been a string of Iso Grifos, too, including another Paris Auto Show car, the 1962 Iso prototype A3L, as well as a one of seven Series 2 coupe, that he performed automotive archeology on to reconstruct the chassis. (His plans from this project are now used by other restorers as well).

Adding to his list of projects are



Lamborghinis, Maseratis, and a myriad number of Cobras and Cobra replicars. And also Corvettes, hot rods, customs, Pro-Street, Pro Touring and race cars. Not to mention antiques and classics

accommodations to the engine bay to accept the 572. In addition, he fabricated new mounting brackets for additional accessories such as the new alternator, radiator and fan and the transmission cooler.

New headers were also fabricated, creating 2 1/8-inch tubes flowing through 3 1/2-inch tubes to stainless steel, Borla muffler and collector. The tailpipes were made from 3-inch oval tubing for added ground clearance and slashed tips for appearance.

Obviously the brakes had to be upgraded, so Bennett

used Wilwood four-piston calipers on 12-inch rotors. For the ideal stance, a solid hookup and ground hugging nose, three-inch inch springs were added, along with Caltrac split mono-leaf springs and traction bars.

As for rolling stock, it features Weld forged aluminum wheels painted from polished to black, and Mickey Thompson tires (Sportsman SR 26 X 8.00 - R15 LTs front and P25560R15 ET Street Radials, "Sticky Micekeys" rear) finish off the corners.

Instrumentation was upgraded beyond the

standard package, to include an oil temp, trans oil temp and vacuum gauge. An extra sump was added to the gas tank with new braided teflon fuel lines feeding an Aeromotive pump, filters and regulator.

Bennett kept the red color and the cool looking black vintage "hot rod" top that came with the car, and fits neatly over the six-point roll bar that was added. The exhaust tips were painted black to match the wheels and to continue the clean and subdued, tough look. The car has just the right amount of bright work,

like the Talbot Lago, Hudson and Pierce Arrow. Even a rat rod made from a '49 International Harvester Fire Truck, historically significant cars like the Shelby Cobra, chassis number CSX3003, one of five 427 Cobras chosen for homologation by the FIA.

Bob was in-house research and development tech for the first Cobra replica company, Arntz Engineering,

of San Francisco, CA. Bob was the first person to ever show a Cobra replica at the prestigious SAAC (Shelby American Automobile Club) Convention, with its introduction coming at the 1982 SAAC Convention in Dearborn, MI.

He went on to prototype the Excalibur Cobra replica, including building the prototype, producing the tooling and fixtures and first 10 sets of steel, all



very little chrome and tan leather seating.

To top it off a functional hole was added to the hood for air flow and cooling. Originally, the design called for a scoop, but Andrews liked the way the specialized air cleaner shows just above the hood line. "It looks like a piece of art in the center of the



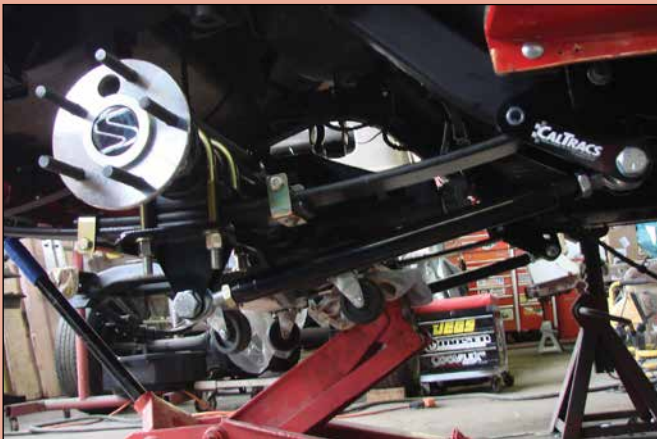
singlehandedly.

Bennett was also tapped by Concept Coach Builders, Milwaukee, WI, to be Director of Operations for the company's Rolls Royce limousine series, stretching Rolls Royce Silver Shadows and Silver Spurs.

As a driver, and a veteran of a variety of series and classifications, garnering track records and class championships,

Bob Bennett has developed a unique understanding of power, performance and handling. This particular skill has given his firm a well-deserved reputation for building winning race cars, with a particular strength in the Datsun and Nissan, "Z" car arena.

In the natural progression of an industry artist of Bob's stature, he has released a car of his own design: The



hood,” he says, so it was kept that way. All told, with the exception of the factory top, there wasn’t any part of this car that was left untouched.

With its tremendous power and light weight you’d think you could never drive it, but actually, because of the relatively long wheelbase for this small car, some ingenious engineering on Bennett’s part, and enough tread width, it’s really pretty stable. And nothing short of an incredible stoplight to stoplight car.

While Bob Andrews wanted a very fast car, since he’s used to speed, he did not want a race car. And it had, “to look like something you would actually drive,” he insisted.

As noted at the outset, the goal was to create the highest power-to-weight ratio of any road-going ride. Do the math: The total weight of the car with five gallons of gas in the tank is 2,691 pounds, resulting in 1 hp for every 3.838 pounds. Compare that with a 2015 Corvette Z06’s 5.42 pounds per hp. So even if he didn’t hit the ultimate goal, it’s pretty darn close.

What kind of guy goes for that sort of thing? Andrews is a 74 year-old retiree who still feels the need for speed, loves his new car and enjoys it whenever he can, weather permitting. Regarding the build, he says, “These guys really know their stuff, they have their own projects, they’re real enthusiasts.”

The car has been pretty much driven daily around town and the suburbs since completed and has responded beautifully, not only on the streets, but on track testing as well, at both half and full throttle for regulated bursts during the engine break-in regimen. That experience gave Bob quite a kick, literally. Of course, he loves to bait other unsuspecting drivers who don’t realize what’s lurking under the hood. Any takers? – **CB**

SOURCE:

Bennett Coachworks
www.hotrodbuilders.com
414/ 298-2068

Bennett ZX-1, a radically transformed Corvette that was prototyped, developed, production tooled and sold exclusively by Bennett Coachworks LLC. Beyond the basic body conversion, Bennett’s ZX-1 offers an array of performance and appearance enhancements. Designed for both high performance and stunning visual excitement, the ZX-1’s main component is a totally redesigned body built to fit any C6 Corvette chassis. Altogether, Bennett can cite an impressive automotive resume. – **CB**

