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# BUILD AND DRIVE C-10

## A Formula For Success

BY JOHN GILBERT

It could have been the premier of an exciting new television show geared toward classic truck freaks with a bent for wild and crazy road trips. Imagine the opening sequence with a burning map just like the beginning of *Bonanza*, when all of a sudden an old truck crashes through the flames and hauls burns to a signpost up ahead that reads, "Next stop the AutoZone."

Our saga begins only four weeks prior to *Custom Classic Trucks'* scheduled departure with the guys at Painless Performance in Fort Worth, Texas, on *Rod & Custom* magazine's annual Americruise. As loyal *CCT* readers can attest, we have been working feverishly to prepare our '72 Ford F-100 entered in the Build-Off against *Classic Trucks* to be done in time to show up for Americruise—well, long story short, things didn't quite turn out that way. No problem—as fate would have it, we had just picked up a '79 Chevy C-10 Big 10 with only 75,000 original miles for only \$1,600. So maybe this is a tech story after all—anyone knows a person can't just go out and pay \$1,600 for a truck and then drive it all over the country without checking it over first. And since our name is

*Custom Classic Trucks*, there was no way we were going to leave the C-10 stock—some cool things had to be done before we could roll out in style and comfort.

The first step and perhaps one of the most fun things about buying a new/old truck is to begin with a good detail job. The original owner had special-ordered the Chevy Big 10 from De Anza Chevrolet in Riverside, California, to use as a farm truck on his plum ranch. Inside the cab, the interior was covered from top to bottom with 28 years' worth of rotting plums that had turned into a gooey prune paste that had solidified to a dark brown resin. On the outside, thanks to being kept in a barn at night, the '79's original paint was still in pretty good shape, with the only real body damage being typical for a truck that spent almost 30 years driving in between rows of trees each day.

We started the C-10's exterior cleanup with a bucket full of hot water mixed with a heavy concentration of Mothers' California Gold car wash soap. While washing the door jambs, we noticed the Mothers mixture made short work out of



dissolving the prune residue from all the interior areas. Before we knew it, we had the bench seat out of the truck, its Mexican blanket-style seat cover cut off, and the seat scrubbed down to look as good as new. From here the next chore was to tear out the original GM rubber floor covering and hit the mud-caked cab floor with the Mothers concentrate, followed with a heavy blast from a garden hose. The last step was to dry it off with a towel in one hand, followed with an air nozzle hooked up to a 60-psi line.

The benefits of detailing a truck one has just bought are bi-fold, the obvious being the aging process has been slowed and the initial stages of a restoration have begun, but as the truck is cleaned, it is also the time to take a close look and evaluate its mechanical condition. At this point, with only three weeks left before it was time to leave with the '79 for Americruise, we made a list of priorities. In





Left to right: Jeff Wise and Danny Nix of Classic Performance Products with the Big 10 after inspecting the CPP rear trailing arm suspension upon returning from Americruise. It passed with flying colors and should be available soon.



At a later date we will carpet the Big 10, but for Americruise, Quiet-Ride Solutions' foil-backed insulation held down the interior heat and noise quite well.



For front suspension, we used CPP tubular upper and lower control arms equipped with CPP F-44-type heavy-duty disc brakes. To upgrade standard C-10 disc brakes, this kit will bolt right on.



Thanks to Don at Orange County Sandblasting, our Rally America Retro Rally wheels were prepped and powdercoated blue in record time. Ron's Wholesale Tires mounted and balanced the American Classic wide whitewalls from Coker Tire, and the Big 10's new "old-style" look was complete.



While installing the Quiet-Ride kit, we were amazed to discover the cab got quieter as the number of sound-canceling strips were applied.

In addition to handling anything associated with a full service, we decided the C-10 should be set up to be the ultimate high-speed cruiser with the latest technology available for a '73-87 C-10. It is one thing for a drivetrain to be able to sustain high speeds for days on end, but equally important are the conditions that can lead to driver fatigue. For the guy who only uses his classic truck to cruise to the local convenience store, noise levels, ride quality, and fuel economy probably do not matter. However, if a person wants to spend up to 12 hours in the cab pulling down the long-hard miles without dying from discomfort-induced exhaustion,

there are measures that can be taken, and interestingly enough, the benefits overlap.

For example, one of the methods we employed to substantially lower the noise level in the C-10 was to install a Quiet-Ride kit with a damper-absorber reflective barrier, which in turn lowered the cab's ambient temperature. We can attribute these results directly to the Quiet-Ride kit because it was the only floor covering installed during the C-10's Americruise configuration.

Another key player in our battle against air- and structure-borne noise was a Magnaflow high-flow catalytic converter and muffler. The constant drone of a poorly designed exhaust system while driving cross-country can leave a person with an unbelievable headache. Our Magnaflow system's throaty exhaust note garnered several unsolicited compliments from fellow Americruisers while providing us a pleasant drone-free environment within the truck. Beyond noise cancellation, a catalytic converter and muffler provide emissions control along with increased performance. Our next stop after the Muffler Man installed our Magnaflow system was straight to a California Test-Only smog center, where the '79 Chevy C-10 breezed through California's stringent emissions requirements without missing a beat.

Installing a Gear Star 4L60E automatic overdrive transmission controlled by a Compushift computer wasn't inspired by our quest to quiet down the '79. However, used in combination with the Chevy's original equipment 3.07:1 rearend gears, the stock 350-inch LS9 truck motor was turning only 2,050 rpm at 80 mph. Needless to say, not only was the LS9 running a lot quieter at the lower revs, but the 2,000-rpm range turned out to be the engine's sweet spot for obtaining the best fuel mileage.

Besides utilizing what little time we had to maximize the C-10's high-speed cruising ability, next on our list of two major items to upgrade was the C-10's Big 10 F-44 suspension package. For

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The Muffler Man Josh Gledhill did a super-clean custom installation at his Placentia, CA, shop using a stainless steel Magnaflow muffler and catalytic converter.



Marysville, KS, was our last stop before heading to Lincoln, NE.



Shortly afterward, we all stopped in Clinton, OK, to check out the Route 66 Museum—it was pretty darn good.



those of you unfamiliar with a Big 10, the F-44 chassis is basically a 3/4-ton frame (short or longbed) with super-stiff heavy-duty leaf and coil springs attached. In keeping with our desire to seek out the latest technology available for a late-series C-10, or better yet stumble onto some neat things that weren't on the market yet, we turned to the suspension gurus at Classic Performance Products in Anaheim, California. Sure enough, when we inquired about what was coming down the pike, we struck gold. The CPP guys were gearing up to introduce a rear trailing arm setup for '73-87 C-10s based on their line for '63-72 trucks. When we offered to hand over 5,000 hard test miles in less than two weeks, CPP's R&D manager Jeff Wise and Development Engineer Danny Nix accelerated the program to provide us with a prototype. There is a good chance that by the time this issue hits the newsstand, CPP's '73-87 trailing arm suspension kit will be available to the public. To inquire, call CPP's Trailing-Arm Hotline at 800-830-0952. Up front, we used CPP 2 1/2-inch drop spindles and replaced the heavy-duty F-44 coil springs with stock-length CPP standard coil springs. To complement the CPP tubular control arm setup and help reduce body roll, we installed a CPP front sway bar.

With the suspension completed, we

moved on to the brakes. The deeper we got into preparing the Big 10 for Americruise, the more we learned about the F-44 package. We discovered it contains numerous factory upgrades that make it a very desirable option. On any truck, when it comes to front brakes, bigger is definitely better. During our research, we discovered F-44 front brake rotors are 1 1/4 inch wide in comparison to the standard C-10's 1-inch rotors. Because we were on such a tight schedule, the fast way to guarantee our front brakes were in perfect operating condition was to swap out our original 75,000-milers for a pair of CPP complete assemblies that automatically come with the F-44 brake upgrade. The CPP brake assemblies are also the hot ticket for those who want to step up to bigger brakes for their standard C-10; they bolt right in. On the rear, we retained the F-44's larger wheel cylinders, which after exhaustive testing have proven to be overkill for a truck that rarely carries a load in the bed. During Americruise, the '79 hauled a roll-away top full of tools, two spare tires, a floorjack, plus a bunch of other things so the brakes worked perfectly, but once the truck was unloaded, the rear wheels locked up. It's a common problem for any pickup whose hauling days are over; in an upcoming issue we'll shed a little more light on the subject.



Here's Dennis Overholser from Painless Performance in his '36 Ford panel heading up the pack on the outskirts of Lincoln, NE.



It's great making new friends out on the road. We needed to dump the oil and install a new K&N Wrench-Off oil filter on the Big 10. Pete Klucas of Top End Engineering helped us out at his immaculate facility in Lincoln, NE.

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Kent Oakeson at Oak's Automotive, also in Lincoln, NE, was another great guy we met when we thought the 100-degree-plus heat wave had fried our factory air conditioning. Kent traced the problem to a cooked fuse and we were gone.

Before it was time to hit the highway, we made some finishing touches to the Big 10, including new wheels and tires. Again, our main goal was to improve on the stock Big 10 without making any changes that could actually decrease the truck's performance. Frankly, it's not something you will find commonly mentioned in a tech story, but there are some modifications that will make a truck perform worse than stock. In past testing on another C-10, we learned that a closed-design wheel that won't allow enough cool air to pass over the brakes can cause brake overheating and consequently will result in brake fade. A trick hot rodder learned a long time ago was to check out what the manufacturers had done to solve a particular problem and then apply it to their situation. We went right to the source and selected a ventilated '71-81 Chevrolet truck Rally Wheel as our starting point. Naturally, being *Custom Classic Trucks*, we couldn't settle for stock. We contacted Gary McLean at Rally America in Fresno, California, to come up with a one-off custom design. We like to call them "Retro Rallys" because Gary grafted on a '33 Ford center with a Bow Tie stamped into a '33 Ford smoothie hubcap. We ended up with a custom wheel design that stumped everyone who speculated on its origin. Of course, Gary is in business to make a living, so if you want a set of Retro Rallys for your truck, he'll build more—just give him a call.

One of the last things we did on the



This is the future of high-performance handling, with Cadillac comfort for the late C-10 Chevrolet.

eave of leaving for Americruise was to have Ron's Wholesale Tires mount up a set of 235/75/15 American Classic nostalgia wide whitewalls from the king of wide whites, Coker Tire. The very last thing was to repair the Big 10's factory air conditioning; special thanks go to Craig Ferguson and his crew at Ferguson's Auto Center in Garden Grove, California, for working way beyond their normal closing time to get our A/C fully charged and ready to go.

In retrospect, attempting to build the Americruise project in such a short time around a \$1,600 truck might have been a little extreme, but thanks to an amazing amount of help from our industry friends, we were ready to roll only one day behind a ridiculously tight schedule. Since we were already a day behind the southern tour leaving out of Fort Worth, Texas, the plan was to either make it or break it the first day out by pushing the Big 10 as hard as we could.

Everything we did to the Big 10 transformed it into an incredibly pleasurable truck to drive at high speeds for mile after mile through the desert's summer heat. The Coker tires and CPP trailing arm suspension were definitely superior to the original equipment it replaced. Our first night out we pulled into Grants, New Mexico, the halfway point where we'd meet up with the Painless guys in Elk City, Oklahoma, the next night. Even though time was tight, we dropped off of US 40 and cruised old Route 66 every time we spotted a business loop. It was kind of cool how the tourists would flock to the Coker whitewalls whenever we stopped for gas. As soon as we had

answered the usual questions about the Big 10 and its 16-gallon gas tank was full, it was back out on the interstate to run with the big dogs.

Like any TV show worth watching again, we think we have some pretty neat segments coming up on the Big 10. In case you missed it, we debuted the Big 10 in last month's September issue with the installation of a Gear Star 4L60E automatic overdrive transmission, and elsewhere in this issue we've picked up over 42 extra horsepower with just a new DUI distributor, spark plugs, wires, and a carburetor rebuild. We'll resist the corny "tune in next month" cliché and just say we look forward to you joining us next time. **CCT**

## SOURCES

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