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James Duff's
**Pony Express
Rides Again!**

November/December 2009 • Issue 42



6 02648 56768 12
\$4.95/Canada US • \$6.95 Mexico/AU
www.BroncoDriver.com

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PONY EXPRESS Rides Again



BY JUDY DUFF, WASHINGTON
PHOTOS BY ANDY GOUGE, SLIM CARTER, SUZY DUFF,
STEVE SAMPSON, SHARON SULLIVAN, ROB SMITHSON



I

n 1971 James (aka Jim/Duffy) Duff was employed full time as a body and fender man at Walker Buerge Ford in Santa Monica, California. He drove brand new Broncos home at night and outfitted them with front double shock mounts, fender flares and roll bars. They were then sold new from the dealership already “Duffy-equipped!”

His off road racing was ongoing as well. Jim had converted his first Bronco into his race car and thought it would be fun for him and his wife Judy to have a cute little street half-cab. Ah, the enthusiasm and energy of youth!

Jim paid Griffith Construction Company in Los Angeles \$500 for a six cylinder 1966 half cab. It was red, but the only color visible was on the dash as it had been used to refuel rigs on asphalt road construction sites. In his back yard in



Venice, Calif, he proceeded to scrub off the asphalt using 55 gallons of diesel. (Wow, we hope the back yard has recovered from the toxic spill by now.)

The half cab project soon took a slightly different direction. Jim decided to make it a real sand machine. At that time, Southern Calif was full of places to run in sand; Glamis Dunes, Pismo Beach, Borrego Springs and the High Desert. (Rock Crawling as we know it today, was decades away.) He channeled 4" out of the body at the front, tapering to 3" at the back

bumper - among a host of other modifications. This complicated job necessitated “zeeing” the frame at the rear.

Being in the racing scene in LA meant Jim had access to lots of cool parts and pieces that would have been impossible to find elsewhere. About that time, Jim & his partner Roger Gesner rented a shop in Gardena and started Duffy’s Bronco Service. They had a little competition going with their project Broncos. Roger went with a 351 Cleveland while Jim wanted the torque of the Windsor. The 351W



was built and balanced by Edelbrock with a flex fan on the crankshaft. Roger's was lifted while Jim's was low & sleek. Since Ford hadn't come up the power steering as an option yet, he put together his own version. Using a 1961 Buick power steering box and modifying the frame, then installing a u-joint in the steering shaft. Jim scored a 4-speed top-loader transmission with hardened gears from Parnelli Jones' Pikes Peak stock car, and a floor-mounted shifter was installed. Clutch & brake pedals were shortened, shift levers were custom-fabbed, and the stock steering column/wheel was raised 3" and foam-dipped (Baja Bronco style). Since the radiator sat below the engine, it had to be filled from a firewall mounted reservoir tank (custom-fabbed, of course).

The Dana 44 front axle with 4.89:1 ratio gears was pulled out of a Baja Racer and trussed with stainless cable to 10,000 lb. preload. The rear axle was 4.86:1 locked with a Detroit. Front and rear were double shocked and carried custom built springs. Urethane bushings were installed on the front axle.

When the Shelby foundry was shutting down, Jim purchased a truckload of their unmachined aluminum wheel castings for

ON DEC 26, 1978, WHILE THE DUFFS WERE WITH FAMILY IN SACRAMENTO, THE DUFFY'S ENTERPRISES SHOP WAS ENGULFED IN FIRE AND WAS A TOTAL LOSS. THE PONY JUST MISSED BECOMING A CAR-B-QUE!

\$.25 per lb. (eat your hearts out!) Several sets were raced in Baja and Las Vegas and a few lucky customers scored a set as well. The street tires it usually ran were 33 x 12.50 BFG All Terrains. But all terrains just didn't cut it for shooting the bowls though. The sand wheels were all custom-widened: the fronts to 14" with 2-ply grooved drag slicks, the rears to 18" with Boynton paddle tires with 1 7/8" paddles vulcanized to drag slicks.

Inside, Toyota Corolla seats

were installed after modifying the floorboards. Front fenders were customized by rolling and flaring, an old-world metal technique. (Notice the cut out starts at the belt-line of the front fender and extends into the grill corners.) At the rear, Jim spliced additional sections of fiberglass into the flares to create taller, wider rear wheel openings.

Custom walnut dash and door panels were cut out by his good friend, Eddie Edwards. Eddie was a fellow founding member of Bronco's West, California's 1st Bronco-only club. It was formed in 1972 and held meetings at Duffy's Shop. Jim layered clear resin over the dash which today, 38 years later, still looks pretty good, covered with dozens of event dash plaques.

Mounted on the frame, the roll cage was built so that the cab could be removed. A removable smoked sunroof was installed as well as a smoked plexi-glass rear bubble window.

The original bumper had to be ground out to allow the headlight rings to clear. Exotic at the time, European halogen headlights were installed. The push bar was also modified to fit the compact grill height. The Duffy's fiberglass hood was designed with a bubble for the Pony's engine which also had a special recessed air cleaner. The exhaust pipes exited thru the rocker





panels with custom flaring. The tailgate latch was moved inside and the exterior smoothed with metal (making the perfect canvas for a mural!) The original rear bumper was modified by creating an inset for the trailer ball and license plate (using lights from a 1969 Galaxie Country Squire.)

Jim did the paint himself. He had painted his own cars since his youth in Nova Scotia, Canada, where he used a paint brush to paint his 1951 Mercury. Sorry, no how-to's here! Let's just say, the Southbay Paint Store loved it when Duff pulled in for yet another jar of Pearl White, Blue toner and a box of supplies. Clear coat flowed like Niagara Falls. The Pony actually went through several different paint incarnations as Jim has never been one to leave something alone. The tailgate mural started out in boat flake (a skill he learned from the neighbor Low-rider.) It changed a few more times over the years. Who knows how many times the name changed on the upper quarter panels!

When the Pony Express made it's media debut in Four Wheeler Magazine, (thanks Mr. Bill Sanders) Judy was about to give birth to their first child, Suzanne. Richard followed two and a half years later and the Pony was then reserved for off roading. (Have you ever tried fitting a family of four into a Half-cab?) That brought about the Mrs. Duff's Bronco (wagon)...but that's another story.

On Dec 26, 1978, while the Duffs were with family in Sacramento, the Duffy's Enterprises shop was engulfed in fire and was a total loss. The Pony just missed becoming a car-b-que! Luckily, Jim had taken it to his home garage while he and the General Manager were re-arranging the warehouse.

THE RE-CREATION

Jumping ahead a few decades, Jim finally had time enough to restore the sadly neglected Pony Express. It seemed that running the business in California and then starting over in Sequim, WA after the fire, left little time for keeping all his vehicles in top-notch shape.



Oh boy, where to start. Remove the body and start from scratch. Sand blast and powder coat the frame. Re-chrome Bumpers. Linex the interior. Soda blast the body prior to renewing the paint- as close to original- as memory and photos permitted. This time is was Cornell Auto Parts & Paint Store in Port Angeles, Washington who enjoyed frequent trips for paint & supplies.

When Puget Sound Vintage Broncos held their annual event in Sequim they voted on keeping the Pony original. But, Jim installed a Duff lift kit so he could improve handling and run 35" tires. Long travel radius arms up front and disc brakes with hydro boost were installed. Rear disc brakes with full floating

axle with special gusseting and torque tamer traction bar finished off the rear. Duff's ceramic coated headers and exhaust system with single chamber Flow-Masters were installed. Edelbrock fuel injection was added. New Mastercraft seats and fresh snap-in carpet finished the interior.

The new Pony Express debuted in 2006 at Fab Fords at Knotts Berry in Anaheim, Calif. The next month it went on to Victorville for Bronco Daze and the 40th Anniversary Celebration where it stood side by side with the freshly flowered Hi Ho Silver.

In 2007, at Fab Fords, The Pony Express won 1st Place Best of Show in the truck division. Willie Stroppe and Parnelli Jones present-



How many people do you know who have been cited for "Airborne in an intersection"?

Between the freeway and Duff's home, there was a street lined on both sides with back yard fences, no sidewalks and no action. One intersection in particular, complete with deep water draining curbs was the perfect testing ground for Duff suspensions. Hitting that intersection's first dip at about 50 or 60 would launch a Bronco past the center crown and second dip for the ultimate jump. WELL, who knew the officer had been tipped off to the nightly product testing. Ergo, "Airborne in an Intersection."





ed the trophy and reminisced about the Good ol' Days.

Another near miss with fire occurred when the transport that was about to pick up the Pony from storage at Stroppe's shop in Long Beach, for transport to Tennessee caught fire and burned with four other people's treasures inside. After visiting the new headquarters for James Duff Inc. in Knoxville, (where

Suzanne Duff wears most of the hats now), the Pony went onto Pennsylvania and took 2nd place in trail/modified class at the Carlisle All-Ford Nationals show.

On the way to OCBR in Arkansas, Jim, Judy and the Pony made their way through Nashville and visited Stacy David's "GearZ" Studio where he taped an interview with them as well as Suzanne and Hi Ho Silver. Stacy enjoyed firing up the Pony with the paddles and parking his Crazy Horse next to the two Duff Broncos.

The Pony is resting again in

Sequim, Wa. Occasionally, it needs the cobwebs blown out and wakes up the retirement village. 🚗



