

For Enthusiasts, by Enthusiasts

BRONCO

DRIVER

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Arizona Classic Bronco's 2005 Stampede



Taking on Baja



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Rob Smithson's
Obsession

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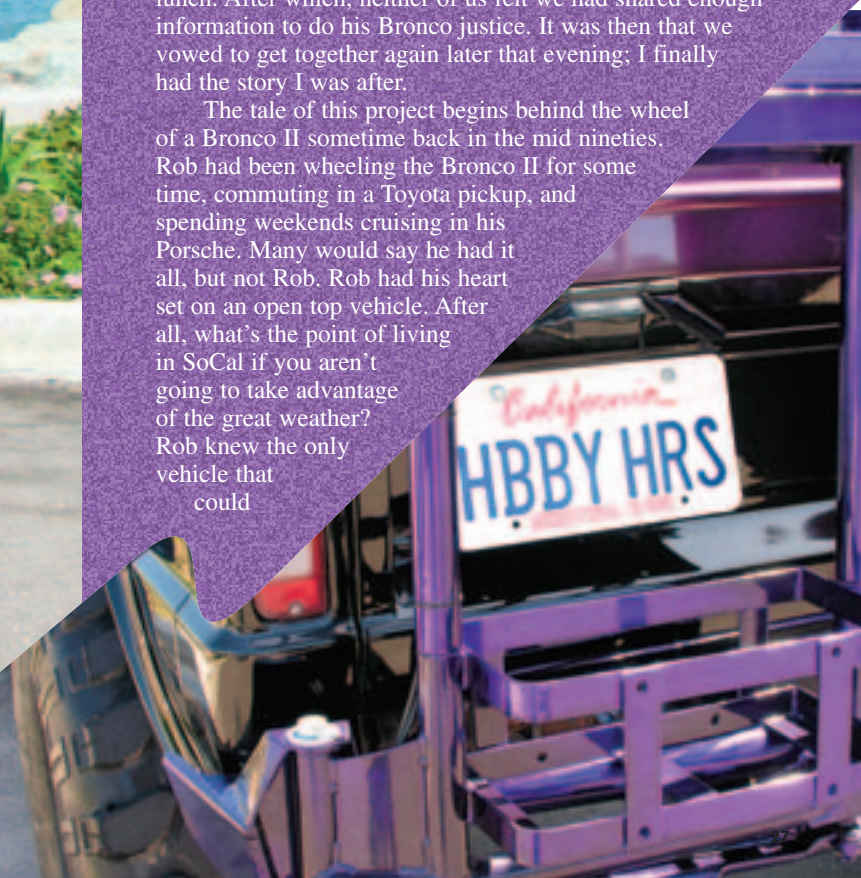


I first met Rob Smithson at SOB this past summer. After traveling down the Oregon coast behind Jim and Suzy Duff, I was told that the next morning I'd be in for a treat. Indeed I was. Rob had made the trek from San Diego all the way up the California coast to spend a relaxing weekend with his good friends, the Duffs. Behind his Super Duty Ford was what I found to be one of the most attention getting Early Bronco's I've ever come across. Little did I know that I would spend the next two days bouncing around the dunes of Sand Lake in this trusty steed. It was only then, with the wind in our faces and sand in our teeth, that I realized just how splendid this little Bronco was.

Rob's easy going attitude and passion for the Early Bronco led me to push him for a future story. We didn't make any timelines or promises other than to get together when we could and to try and make a story that we could all be proud of. With that, we went our separate ways, our heads full of memories of a grand weekend and tentative plans for another.

Fast forward three months. My "other" job sent me on short notice travel to Southern California. Immediately upon learning of this impending trip I reached for my wallet and searched anxiously for the business card Rob had given me just a few months earlier. Indeed, it was there. Minutes later I had Rob on the phone laying out the specifics of my jaunt to the west coast. There is no way I could have known just how many times we would talk before we actually got together. First, let me tell you, the few days I spent in Southern California were very atypical. My hopes of putting together a photo shoot were dissolved in what seemed like an endless rain storm and temperatures in the forties. When it wasn't raining it seemed as if it would again at any moment. Add to that my unfamiliarity with Southern California and what you have is a logistical nightmare. After a dozen or so phone calls, Rob and I were finally reunited over an all too short lunch. After which, neither of us felt we had shared enough information to do his Bronco justice. It was then that we vowed to get together again later that evening; I finally had the story I was after.

The tale of this project begins behind the wheel of a Bronco II sometime back in the mid nineties. Rob had been wheeling the Bronco II for some time, commuting in a Toyota pickup, and spending weekends cruising in his Porsche. Many would say he had it all, but not Rob. Rob had his heart set on an open top vehicle. After all, what's the point of living in SoCal if you aren't going to take advantage of the great weather? Rob knew the only vehicle that could



satisfy his desires was an Early Bronco. More importantly, he wanted an Early Bronco of specific vintage. As it turns out, there's something special about 1974 and older vehicles in California. I'm not going to claim any real expertise on the subject, so I'll leave it at they're special. What Rob found in the hills of Northern California was a rod knocking, broken axle, 351 totting, smog certified Early Bronco for the paltry sum of \$400. The body was straight and the price was right, so Rob drug her home. The obsession had begun.

Rob began this project with the end in mind, but if you think he built it over night or built it right the first time you'd be wrong. Rob performed some minor repairs and drove the little Bronco just like it was for a while, but after it overheated one too many times he resolved to finally build the Bronco of his dreams. Fortunately over the years he'd learned a few things about what worked and what didn't. This time it was going to finally be right. His determination

was to build a Bronco that would perform in any situation; whether it be the dunes of Sand Lake, the sandstone fissures at Moab or running the length of the California coast on Interstate 5. To power this dream machine Rob selected a crate 392 stroker form Ford SVO. Atop this beast resides an Edelbrock Pro-Flo multi port speed density fuel injection system. AT first Rob was a little skeptical of this combination. He wasn't sure the 430 horsepower mill would be well suited to the various conditions he would subject it to. Ultimately the combination surpassed his every desire.

Getting the power from the mill to the rest of the driveline is a well appointed AOD Dana 20 combination. The AOD bolts right up to the 392 and the Advance Adapters conversion smooths the transition to the Terra Low equipped Dana 20. Out back resides a Ford 9 inch sheltering a 4.56 ring gear which surrounds a tried and true Detroit Locker. A set of Warn 35 spline full floater axles route the reduced ratio power to a set of 36 inch Interco Super Swamper SSRs. Up front is another 4.56 ring gear, but this one surrounds an ARB air locker. Dana 60 outers spin the matching 36 inch Interco Super Swamper's.

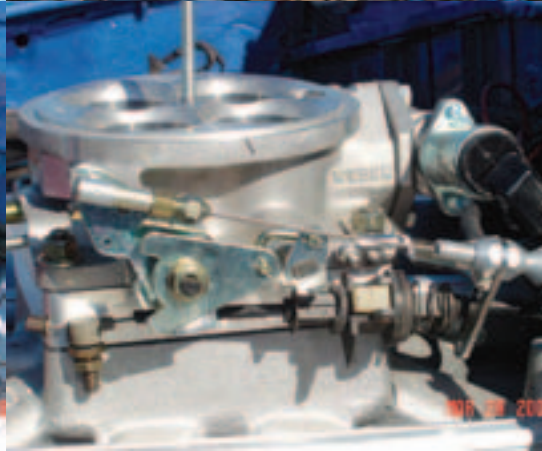
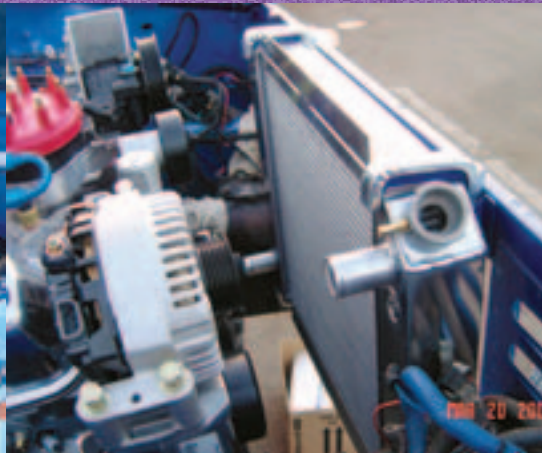
Fed up with V-belts and all the pleasantries they come with, Rob, truly an inno-

vator, assisted in the development of the Extreme Automotive Explorer Serpentine conversion. With that Rob called upon his old friends in Sequim, Jim and Suzy Duff. Together they developed an aluminum radiator to complement the reverse rotation of a serpentine system. Their relationship now galvanized, Rob and the Duff's began testing in earnest many prototype components. Currently Rob's Bronco sports a set of Duff's Long Travel radius arms and a brand new set of 5.5 inch coils. Additionally, you'll notice Duff's diff guards and prototype Duff's bumpers. With all this go under the hood Rob decided it was time to look into the brakes. Stock four wheel drum brakes are woefully inadequate at best, down right dangerous at worst, especially when stopping on larger tires. To remedy this Rob again turned to Hydrotech for a Hydro Boost setup. Gone are the days of white knuckle stops and the omnipresent fear of not anticipating enough. The Hydrotech Hydro Boost completely changed the personality of the Bronco and completed the rolling chassis.

With the driveline meeting his standards Rob turned his attention to the interior. Most prominent is his custom console which houses a large screen Garmin GPS. Amongst the switches centrally located here



the re-buildup



the goods

1974 BRONCO

Engine:

Crate 392 Ford SVO stroke est. 430 HP
Edlebrock Pro-Flo MPFI
Extreme Automotive Explorer Serpentine Setup
MSD Pro Billet Distributor
James Duff Aluminum Serpentine Radiator

Drivetrain:

AOD Transmission
Advance Adapters AOD-Dana 20 Adapter
Terra Low Dana 20 gear set
Ford 9 inch with 4.56:1 gear set
James Duff Skid Plate
Detroit Locker
Warn 35 Spline Full Floater conversion
High Pinion Dana 44 w/ 4.56:1 gear set
James Duff Diff Protector
ARB Air Locker
Dana 60 Outers
Hydro Tech Hydro Boost Braking System

Suspension:

James Duff Prototype 5.5 suspension lift
James Duff Long Travel Radius Arms
36 x 14.50 x 15 Super Swamper TSL's

Body/interior:

Sony G-Shock AM/FM/CD player
Sony Explode speakers
Garmin GPS
Ham Radio
Prototype James Duff Bumpers
Heritage Auto Body
Custom body work & paint

are controls for his Ham radio, controls for his Vintage Air system, and finally, the ARB Air locker. The door panels have been sculpted with a subtle flame motif to accent the Sony Explode speakers. Driving the tunes is a Sony G-Shock in-dash AM/FM/CD player. Delivering power to all the accessories is a bumper to bumper E & J Wireworks harness. Finally Rob turned his attention to the body. Within his custom design you'll find integrated 4x4 steel rock-er protection and a pair of sculpted Yamaha FZR 1000 billet fuel doors. With all the time Rob has spent designing and working on his Bronco, it's no wonder that his wife, Mary, considers herself a Bronco widow. When asked who he wanted to thank for supporting his obsession, Mary was at the top of the list. Rob also wanted to thank James Duff Enterprises for their unending support in all of his Bronco endeavors.

Additionally, without the help and professionalism of Eric at E & J Wireworks and all the Staff at Heritage Auto Body, Rob's Hobby Horse would have never come to be. Truly a marriage of function and form, Rob's obsession is fully realized. Finally we asked Rob when he's not running his business, R & M Electric, and not wrenching on his obsession, what does he do for fun? That's when he told us about his other Bronco. "Other Bronco," we asked? Let's just say that it spends a good deal of time in the air and leave it for a future story. Indeed we will. 