

Bev's '55 Chevy Bel Air



Text and Photos by Bob Ryder

For most of us one of the highlights of our high school days is getting our first car. Bev Simpson remembers her high school days at Wilson High School in Long Beach, CA with some fondness.

Her older sister, Gloria, chauffeured her to and from school in a '55 Chevy Bel Air. Many times, after football and basketball games, the two cruised in the Bel Air to Downey's Twitty Blvd., Whitter Blvd. and to Bob's Big Boy Broiler Drive In. Those youthful experiences have been etched in Bev's memory and she has always wanted to relive that part of her high school years, and drive her own Chevy Bel Air.

Over the years, Bev has been a real car girl. During her 50 years of driving, she has owned over 15 bitchin' rides. Her cars have included a '71 Olds Cutlass, '70 Road Runner, '70 Chevelle, '69 Camaro, '65 Corvette, '66 Chevelle 396, and a MGB GT, TR6. Finally, after all this time, her dream came true.

Bev's husband, Tom, worked hard to make it happen. Three years ago, the search was on to find Bev's '55. For professional advice, Tom contacted Rick Abate, who owns Classic Car Marketing in Orange, CA. For over 40 years, Rick has been an icon in the business of purchasing and selling high quality vintage, classic and muscle cars. After searching and sourcing in SoCal for sometime, they located a '55 Chevy Bel Air Sport Coupe with the factory 265ci V8 162hp bolted up to a Powerglide two-speed automatic transmission in Carson, CA.

After throwing down a fist full of Benjamins to obtain the pink slip and keys to the '55, it was loaded up and trailered to Autobahn Auto Body in Costa Mesa, CA. There, Phil Sanchez and his crew began disassembling the Bel Air's bumpers, grille, headlights, tail-

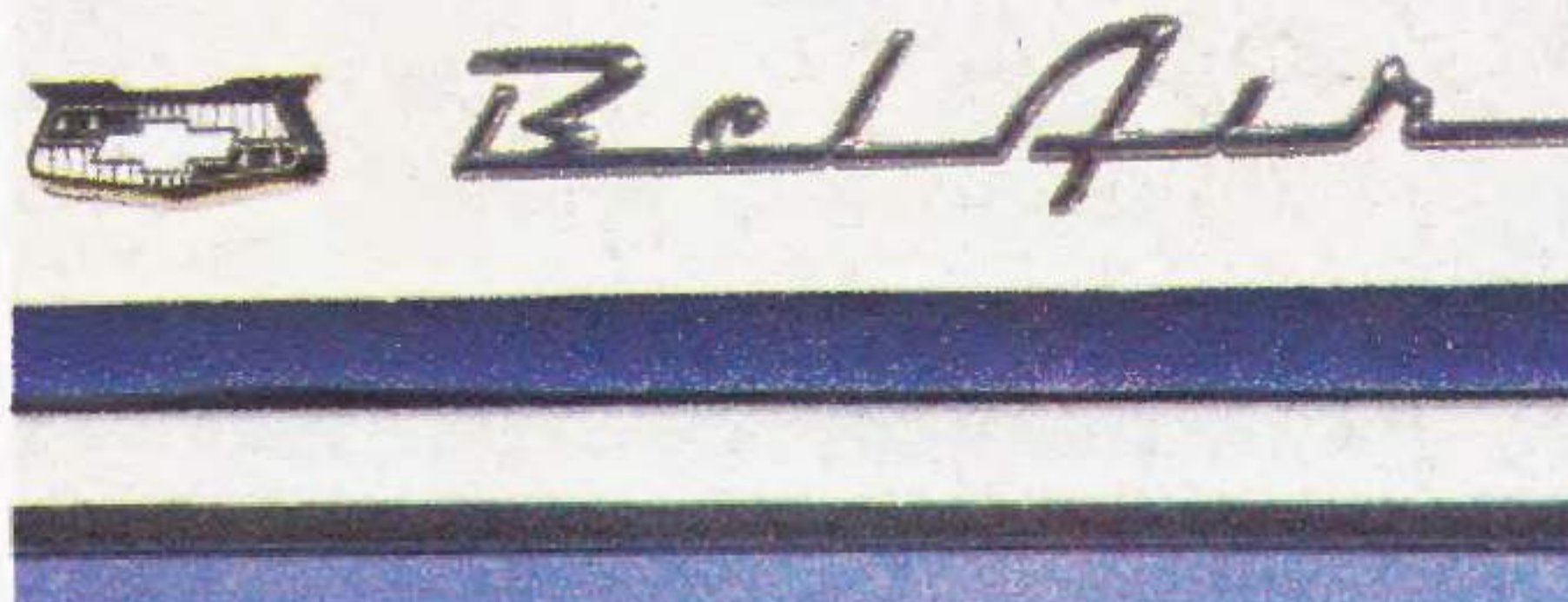
lights, badging, glass molding trim pieces and glass. The interior dash, gauges, door panels, radio, steering column, front and rear seats were all removed. The pieces were then analyzed and determined if they would be refurbished or trashed. The new moldings, trim, badging and bumpers for Bev's Bel Air were purchased from Danchuk Manufacturing.

The Bel Air body was fairly straight with limited surface rust. The last paint job looked like it had been applied by a paint roller. Needless to say, the multi-layers of paint were removed by applying industrial strength chemical stripper. The metal surface was then scuffed down using a DA. Minor bodywork was then worked with hammer and dolly followed by a skim coat of body filler. The body was then block-sanded to make the surfaces straight and smooth. Before more block sanding, two coats of PPG sanding primer were applied. The body was given three coats of PPG Off White. Then masked off, it was sprayed with PPG 2014 Toyota Clearwater Blue. After a thorough inspection of the paint, multiple coats of PPG

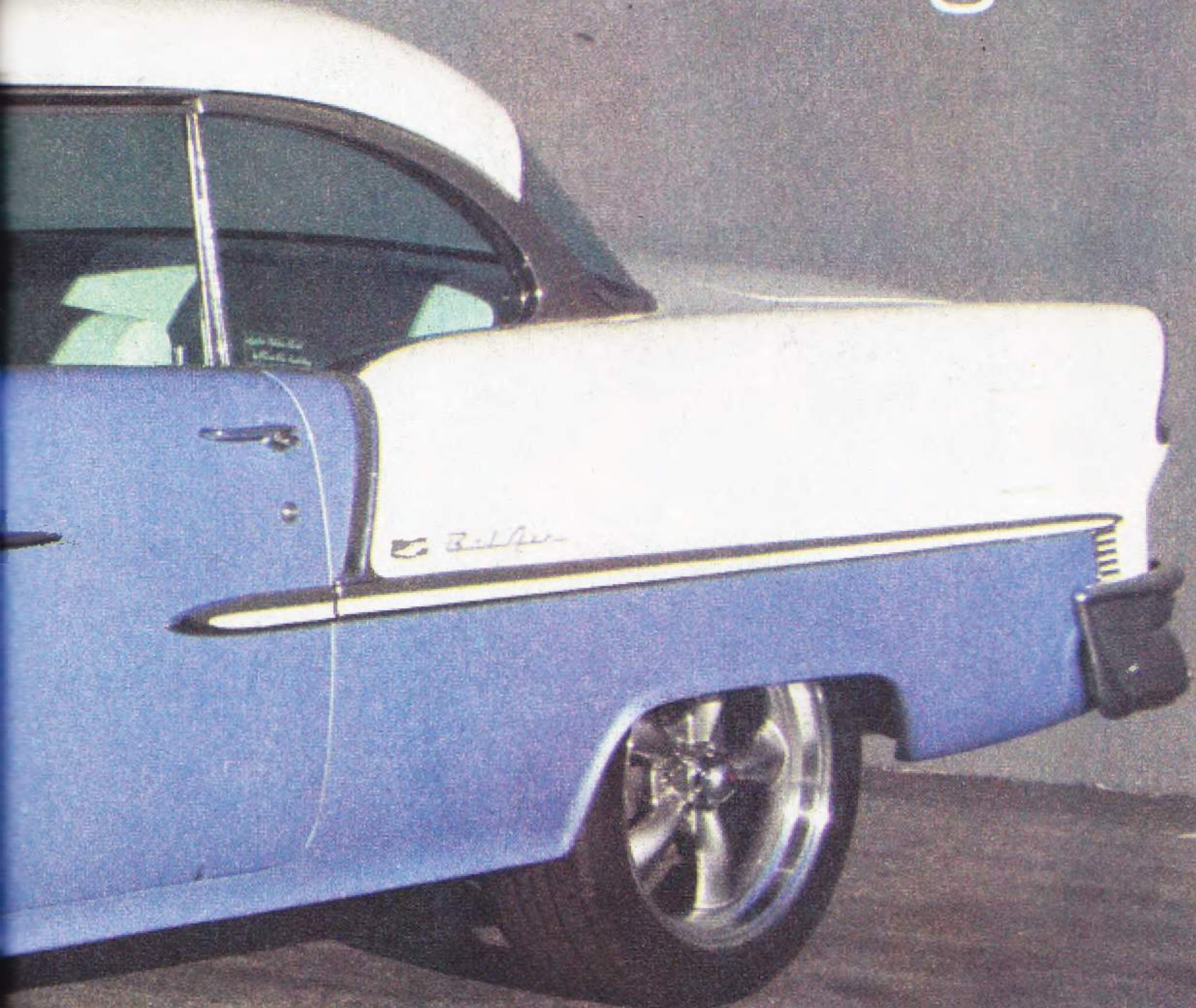
Clearcoat were applied. The freshly painted Bel Air was given a few days to let the paint cure, then it was cut, buffed and polished to a glistening shine. All of the new Danchuk body trim moldings, grille, headlight bezels, bumpers and badging were carefully installed. The new Crystal Glass received new rubber and molding pieces. The side windows also received new felt.

Re-chromed front and rear bumpers, grille, headlight bezels, turn indicators, taillight assemblies were installed.

Under the body was a bone-stock frame that was fitted with all new CPP Inc. front suspension components and brakes. The CPP



Fast Times at Wilson High...



front suspension "Totally Tubular" upper and lower control arms sandwich a pair of CPP two-inch dropped spindles. A pair of CPP 4-valve adjustable gas filled shocks and CPP 1-inch diameter sway-bar help eliminate any body roll while cornering. A pair of CPP front disc brakes use 13-inch, cross drilled, ball milled, vented rotors, that are squeezed by a pair of CPP dual piston calipers loaded with semi-metallic pads. The front brakes were neatly plumbed to the CPP Master Brake Cylinder and Power Booster. A new CPP 500 Series Power Steering Box with a one-piece housing deliver a 14-1 steering ratio. The factory Chevy 10-inch rear end was removed and the axles were removed and checked for wear, then magnafluxed for cracks. The rear end axle housing was checked for proper alignment using an alignment bar. A new set of inner and outer axle bearings, races and seals were installed. A pair of Danchuk 11-inch rear drum brakes are responsible for decelerating the rear wheel/tire, rotating mass. A pair of CPP gas-filled 4-way adjustable shocks help dampen the rear suspension. The rolling style and traction came from a set of REV Classic Anthracite wheels (17"x7" front, 18"x8" rear) with gray spokes and polished hoops. The REV wheels are wrapped with a set of Ingens A-1 Radial tires (215/65ZR-17 front, 235/50ZR-19 rear).

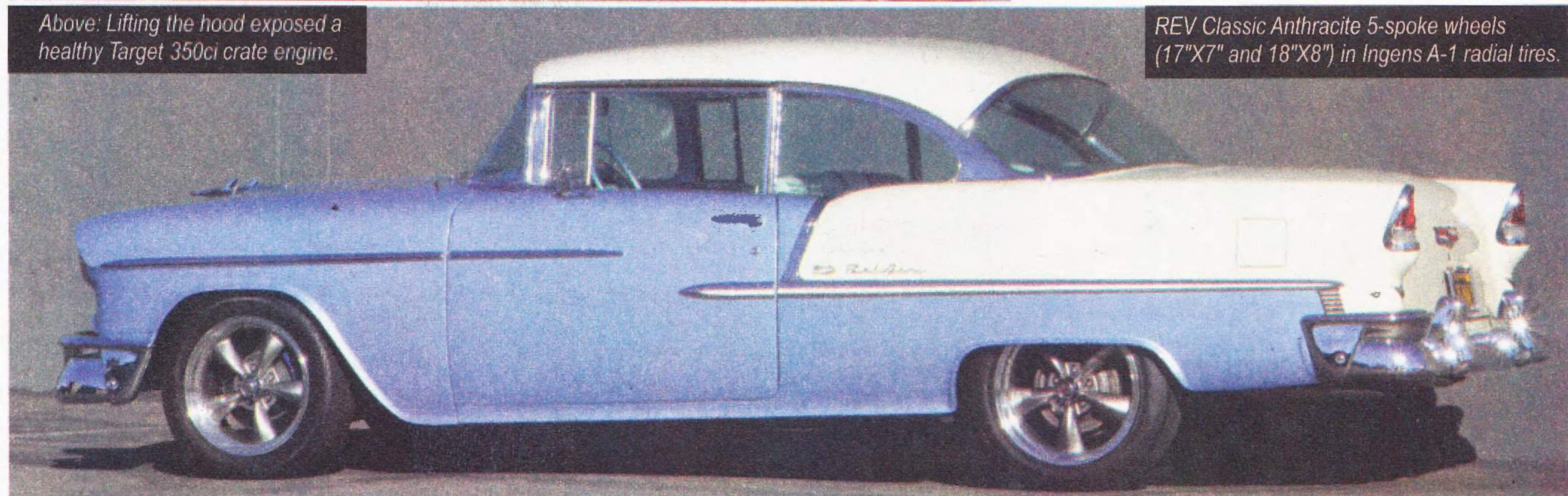
Under the hood is a GM 1988 350 V8ci Target crate engine that was dressed out with an Edelbrock Performer polished aluminum intake manifold, Edelbrock 500cfm carburetor and K&N air filter. An Eddie Motorsports polished billet aluminum serpentine pulley kit was installed.

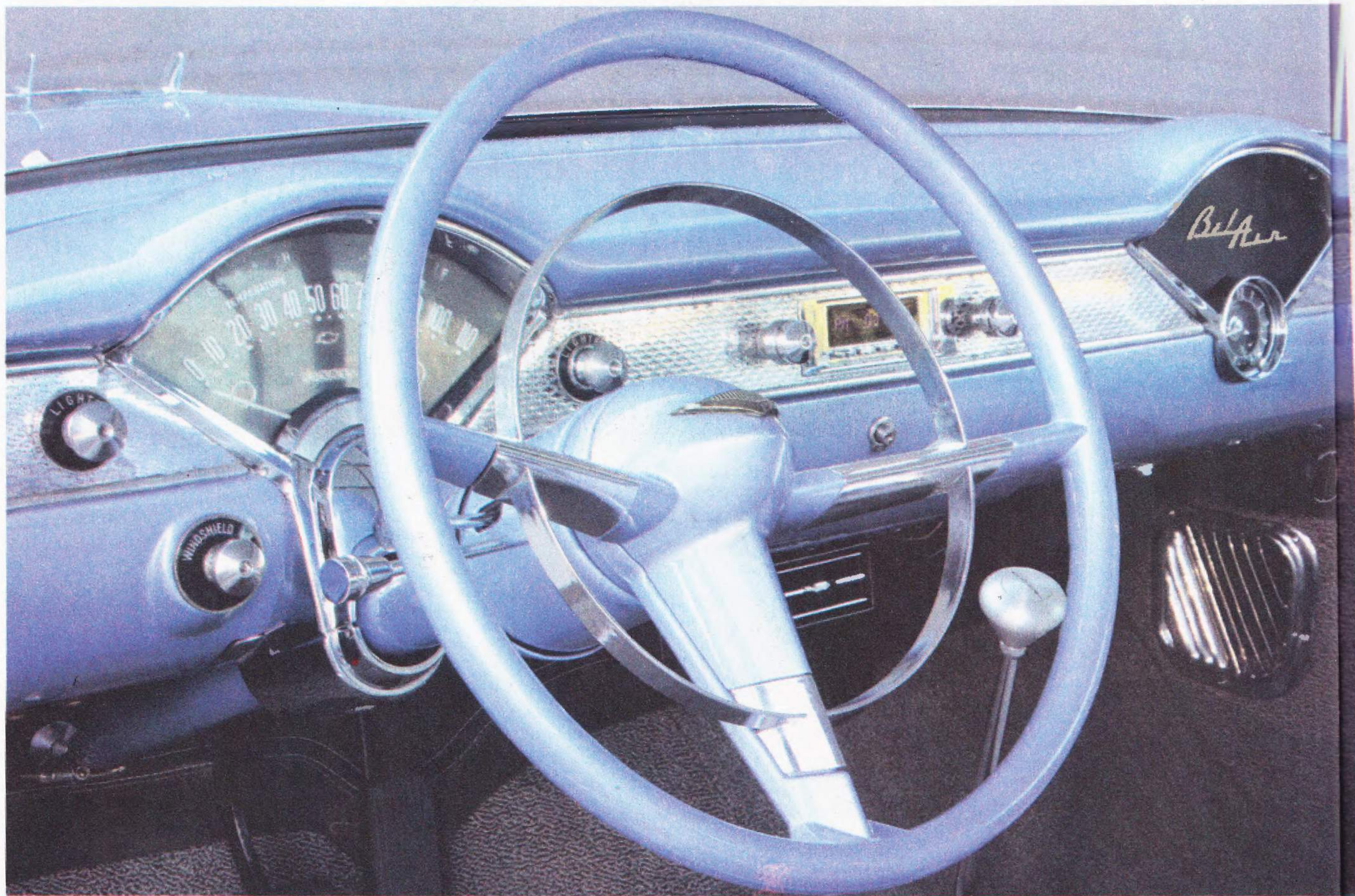


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Above: Lifting the hood exposed a healthy Target 350ci crate engine.

REV Classic Anthracite 5-spoke wheels (17"x7" and 18"x8") in Ingens A-1 radial tires.





The kit included an Edelbrock polished aluminum water pump, Marval power steering pump, power steering reservoir, Sanden SD7 AC compressor and Power Master 140amp alternator. An MSD Ignition, Blaster coil, A-1 Ignition Box and Distributor deliver precise timing and spark to the engine. A pair of Hedman 2-inch diameter, block hugger, long tube headers collect into a Plaza Muffler 2-1/2-inch diameter stainless steel exhaust that flow into a pair of Magna Flow mufflers. Gear selection was performed by an Art Carr GM 200R4 4-speed automatic transmission and converter with a 2,200 rpm stall. A LoKar long neck shifter allows for effortless shifting and the Inland Driveshaft is responsible for measuring, cutting and installing the new driveshaft connecting the 200R transmission to the rear end.

A custom interior was designed and crafted by Sergio Necoechea at Orange Auto Upholstery Interiors in Orange, CA. The '55 Chevy SS bucket seats were removed to make room for a 1957 Chevy Bel Air bench seat, which was notched to allow clearance for the LoKar long neck floor shifter. The dash was fitted with all new Danchuk factory style gauges. To guarantee that Bev and Tom would cruise with all the creature comforts, Duane Mayer at American Hot Rods in Anaheim, CA did a superior job installing the Vintage Air heating and air conditioning system under the dash.

The interior dash was painted the body color, Toyota Clearwater Blue, and received a new Danchuk '55 Chevy Bel Air gauge cluster, trim pieces, knobs, ignition switch and clock. The factory steering column was sanded and painted to match. The steering column was then capped with a new Danchuk factory 15-inch diameter steering wheel also painted in the same color.



Bev remembered her sister Gloria's Bel Air had a front bench seat. It was decided to remove the '55 Chevy Bel Air Super Sport bucket seats. A '57 Chevy Bel Air bench seat frame and springs were rebuilt, then covered, using high quality off-white leather with a '57 Chevy upholstery pattern. The seat was notched to make room for the travel of the LoKar long neck shifter. Before carpeting, a layer of Dynamat was laid down over the floor pan. The carpet was matched to the doors, and rear panels were covered in a two-tone off-white and Clearwater Blue leather. A matching off-white leather headliner with chromed bows finished off the interior.

Whether you are on a short cruise or a long road trip, rock 'n' roll tunes are a must. Ferris Rezvani and his crew at "Z" Auto Sound in Orange, CA installed and wired a Retro Sound Bluetooth LA-1500 BT head unit that replaced the factory AM radio. The Retro Sound system came complete with FM RDS, iPod doc, Bluetooth, hand remote and USB connectivity. A 10-inch subwoofer and amp from Crutchfield are concealed in the trunk behind the backboard. A pair of 6x7-inch speakers are located in the back seat area and more speakers were installed in the front kick panels.

With Bev's '55 Bel Air complete, Rick and Tom arranged for an unveiling of the car at a local Italian restaurant in Orange. This was attended by those who were involved in the build and friends. The car was uncovered for all to see and the keys were presented to Bev. Both Bev and Tom enjoy cruising and showing the car at many Good Guys events and local car shows. Most of all, Bev gets a kick out of cruising past Wilson High School on a Friday night after a football game playing Tommy James and The Shondells, "Crystal Blue Persuasion" on her car stereo before heading up to roll up and down Whittier Blvd. Oh those were the days...



The original paint was stripped, straightened, skimmed, block sanded, sprayed with a couple of coats of primer and block sanded again eliminating any flaws. The body surfaces were masked then coated with multiple coats a PPG Off White. After some time to cure, the white body was then masked in a two-tone pattern, then received multiple coats of PPG 2014 Toyota Clearwater Blue before being buried in multiple layers of PPG Clear.

