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CLEAN, MEAN, GREEN

DRIVING GM MACHINE

IT WAS ONE OF THE UNDISPUTED HITS OF LAST FALL'S SEMA SHOW, PROVING THAT HIGH PERFORMANCE CAN CO-EXIST WITH ENVIRONMENTAL FRIENDLINESS. AND THROUGH A FORTUITOUS SET OF CIRCUMSTANCES, EDITOR

RICH TRUESDELL WAS ONE OF THE FIRST TO GET BEHIND THE WHEEL OF THE GM PERFORMANCE PARTS E-ROD, A 1955 CHEVY ESTABLISHING NEW BENCHMARKS TO SIMPLIFY THE BUILDING OF OUR OWN PROJECT CARS.



IF YOU'RE OF A CERTAIN AGE, SAY 50 OR OLDER, YOU MAY REMEMBER A PARTICULAR ROCK CRITIC MAKING THIS PRONOUNCEMENT: "I'VE SEEN THE FUTURE OF ROCK AND ROLL, AND ITS NAME IS BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN." THE YEAR WAS 1974, AND THE CRITIC WAS JOHN LANDAU. AND HE TURNED OUT TO BE QUITE A PROPHET. ON NOVEMBER 3, 2009, AT LAST FALL'S SEMA SHOW, I SAW THE FUTURE OF HOT RODDING - AND ITS NAME IS E-ROD.

Being a car enthusiast today comes with a certain stigma. We constantly find ourselves under assault by the green movement, whose activists would have us all riding bikes or mass transit to work, as if those are truly universal alternatives to a car. And of course, there's the matter of our hobby cars, the ones typically with a carbon footprint of a thousand Toyota Prius hybrids (but with better brakes). Nowhere is this more an issue for project-car builders than in California where I live.

Here, the California Bureau of Automotive Repair regulates all aspects of the certification, registration and licensing of project-car builds. And now, thanks to the foresight of the folks at GM Performance Parts, if properly assembled to BAR guidelines, you can install this LS3 V-8 package under the hood of almost anything originally built between 1975 and 1995.

The bottom line is this: If you have an OBD-I or pre-emission car sitting in your garage in need of a heart transplant, this is your ticket to a no-hassle upgrade. (I already have my eye on a really clean 1994 Camaro in need of exactly this kind of swap.) While the \$9,375 price tag for the E-ROD package might seem steep, when you check off all the boxes at the GMPP parts counter at your local GM dealership, it brings together all the requisite components to power your ride.

I wouldn't be surprised - as a matter of self-survival - if the performance mavens at Ford Racing and Mopar aren't all that far behind. But for now, GMPP is leading the charge with its E-ROD system, bringing crate-motor performance into the 21st century, giving those of us who still love to wrench and build our own cars the means to do so ... all while receiving the blessing

of those who wish to regulate us out of existence.

The minute I laid eyes on the E-ROD at the SEMA Show, the white-and-green 1955 Chevy post car, I knew I had to get behind the wheel - fast - and, I hoped, before my colleagues at other publications did. Knowing the way these things work, I figured it would be a while before my turn came, probably this summer at the earliest. But with fate and the intervention of Dr. Jamie Meyer (see his bio on page 14 in this month's Shifting Gears conversation with our own Terry Cole), I got my chance in January, at the GM Arizona Proving Grounds the Wednesday after the Scottsdale Auctions.

The E-ROD was between appearances at the Barrett-Jackson Auctions and a test session before the California Air Resources Board, affording me a three-hour window of opportunity to get behind the wheel



before the car was loaded onto the transporter for the West Coast first thing the next morning.

At the time of its SEMA Show unveiling, Meyer had put the program in its proper perspective. "With the E-ROD system, you're getting 160 percent more horsepower than the original small-block V-8 offered in 1955, but with emissions

performance and efficiency that wasn't even dreamt of half a century ago," he said. "This is how modern hot rods will be built. They'll have the efficiency of a modern GM high-performance vehicle, be environmentally conscious and emissions-compliant - all while providing the owner with a smaller carbon footprint."

When I found myself less than three months later at the GM Proving Grounds north of Yuma, I was met by Jim Miller, an engineer on the GM Performance Parts team who was working on transmission calibrations in preparation for the E-ROD's scheduled appearance before the





shop area where the E-ROD was up on a lift.

This afforded me the opportunity to get some undercarriage shots, which clearly illustrate the attention to detail of this build and restoration, as well as the dual catalytic converters that are an integral part of the E-ROD package (GMPP part number 19244805).

The package also includes an LS3 engine wiring harness, an engine-control module, exhaust manifolds, oxygen sensors and sensor bosses, a fuel-tank evaporative-emissions canister, a mass-airflow sensor and sensor boss, an accelerator pedal (for use with the LS3's electronic throttle), an air filter and an instruction manual for plugging this motor into any OBD-I or pre-emissions vehicle.

Viewing the car from beneath, you'd almost think someone had swapped a current Camaro drivetrain in place of the classic small block. (The E-ROD's engine is directly related to the 6.2-liter LS3 found under the hood of the current six-speed manual transmission Camaro

Air Resources Board the following week. After being asked not to photograph other cars I might encounter (I guess my reputation as a summertime Death Valley spy photographer had preceded me), I went into the expansive



SS, producing 430hp at 5,900rpm and 424lb-ft of torque at 4,600rpm right out of the box ... er, crate.) Miller noted that this particular '55 Chevy has lived many lives within GMPP prior to its reincarnation as the E-ROD, most recently as a much lower-tech, more traditional Tri-Five.

I hadn't driven four hours to look at the underside of the E-ROD, however. I was here to drive the beast, which meant a trip out to a 1.4-mile slightly banked oval that ties together two .7-mile drag strips. After figuring out the lighting angles and getting the required photos, it was my turn to get behind the wheel.

Have you ever walked up to a car and said to yourself that everything is just right? That's how it is with the E-ROD. From the color combination to the wheels (18-inch Camaro steel wheels accented with bright trim rings, lug nuts and center caps) to the materials used to trim the interior supplied by CARS, everything about the E-ROD says "drive me."

Just put your key in the ignition and the LS3 comes to life, its exhaust note striking an almost perfect balance between the need to resonate with an air of authority and conformation to noise regulations. As many of you know, that's a very

To properly install the E-ROD package, the builder must also source the following:

- Fuel tank
- Fuel lines (re-circulating or returnless)
- Fuel pump
- Fuel-tank vent line from the tank to the evaporative emissions canister
- Pure line from the canister to the engine-purge solenoid
- Air-induction system that incorporates the mass-airflow sensor
- Exhaust system behind the catalytic converters

Additionally, the LS3 engine requires a front-end accessory-drive system suitable to the specific vehicle. The instruction manual includes recommendations for the accessory-drive kit, as well as the transmission, gear ratios and more.

(Additional E-ROD systems available soon include a 6.2-liter LS3 for manual-transmission applications, 5.3-liter engines for both automatic- and manual-transmission applications, with a 7.0-liter normally aspirated and a supercharged 6.2-liter LSA on the horizon.)

fine line. Getting the car out on to the oval, I resisted the temptation to really hammer it, but Miller made it clear that I certainly shouldn't hesitate to do so.

As this was a hastily arranged informal drive, my stopwatch remained in my pocket, but it wasn't too hard to imagine the E-ROD zipping from zero to 60 in less than six seconds. It felt that quick off the line in spite of the fact that Miller was still making adjustments to the calibration of its 4L65-E four-speed automatic transmission (GMPP part number 19156260) mated to its companion transmission controller (GMPP part number 12497316). This is the suggested transmission but not part of the E-ROD package and

must be bought separately.

You experience a strange sense of mental disconnect when driving the E-ROD, which is a good thing. You're surrounded by all the familiar cues that come from driving a classic Tri-Five, especially when you look over the adjustable Ididit steering column topped off with a Grant steering wheel and glance down at the instruments. Then you realize the drivetrain is cutting-edge 21st-century technology, with a tailpipe that emits less than one percent of its 1955 counterpart. E-ROD is the new standard for powering a project car and is proof positive that you can have your cake and eat it, too. ■



SOURCES

GM PERFORMANCE PARTS

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