



# Practical Restyling

By Henning and Ritch

FOR THOSE devoted readers of this magazine who never miss an issue, we would like to refer to the August number. "Detroit, Quo Vadis" (Latin for "What's up, Doc?") was the title of an excellent article by Mr. Eugene Jaderquist, one of the biggest writers in the Automobile field (233 lbs.). In the article he refers to the Willys as the only practical new design, and we are inclined to go along . . . with reservations, of course. (These reservations about auto designs are the basis of our livelihood.) His comments on the mechanical aspects of this car are penetrating and revealing, so, for the benefit of millions of Willys owners, we will herewith endeavor to correct the shortcomings and to bring the car to a peak of perfection in performance and styling not yet attained by factory engineers.

A brief review of Willys history is interesting. The name has always been associated with radical, or at least advanced, stylings and developments. We well remember the Willys Knight of '28 or '29 that was brought into a local garage for a valve job. This simple undertaking baffled the mechanic, a comparative youth, who tore the engine down but was unable to locate any valves. The Willys was a sleeve-valve job at that time . . . but not very successful. Another innovation which failed to capture the public's fancy in 1929 was locating most of the controls,

which are ordinarily found on the dashboard, on the steering wheel. If memory serves, the Willys starter was connected to the horn button . . . pulling up actuated it. Most of us remember the stark lines of the '34 models. Technocracy, Robots and the Chicago Fair must have influenced this design which made free use of angles rather than curves. A few of these light cars, powered by the forerunner of the Jeep engine, are still rattling over the roads. The 'Americar' followed a company reorganization and was striking, to say the least. The grille and fenders reminded many of a large dill pickle between two wienies. Successful production of the Jeep during the war led to the continuation of the square design into the post-war Jeepster and Station Wagons. Lines were softened a bit in the later Station Wagons, but the real departure came with the Aero models, and it is with the latest of these that we are prepared to deal.

We will deal to the right, so, let's start at the front. Remove hood ornament, "W" and cross bar, and parking lights. The hood will be stock, except for filling in the hole left by the removal of the ornament. Just below the hood, however, it is necessary to square off the top of the grille opening and fillet it into the fenders (refer to drawing). Next, we move the bumper up 3". Having discarded the bumper guards, we fair it into the fenders and

build up the center section with sheet metal leaving an opening above and below. Being on a "screen" kick at this time, let's use some heavy mesh to cover the upper grille opening. This and the new bumper will have to be plated, of course.

Rounding out both front and rear wheel openings is advisable to escape an otherwise "squat" look when we lower it 2" fore and aft. Removal of the rub strip will add to the smooth effect which we are trying to achieve. Frenching the headlights is optional, but worthwhile, if it doesn't run the budget up too much. Alterations to the rear end go like this: Remove the tail lights and bumper, fill in and extend fenders so that they slant back rather than forward, and latch onto any late caddy or Kaiser bumper. It can be reworked to resemble the drawing and complements the car perfectly. Tail lights should be relocated in the body section between deck lid and fenders. Any flat tail-light-stop-light combo can be used.

In addition to lowering, the use of 50-50 shocks and a longer pitman arm will make the car handle better and steer better. Engine modifications include headers, dual carburetion and reworked distributor with double springs. In hotting up the F-head, we will be guided by Riley experience (the resemblance between the two heads is remarkable). Those of you who have had dealings with an old four-banger know the fine dividing line between go and sour, so, we feel it inadvisable to try to get too far out on this job. A modest cam with emphasis on low-RPM power and acceleration characteristics would be best. Porting and polishing would complete the engine modification project.

The work on the Willys has been held to a minimum in this instance, and could well be called a "poor man's custom." Additional modifications could be the substitution of solenoids for door handles, and, to really do a job, a 5" sectioning operation. Such a body-job would easily put the car in a class with any European creation. If you are waiting for a "Detroit Dream Car," you might work on this project instead. Your chances of having a distinctive car are a lot better.