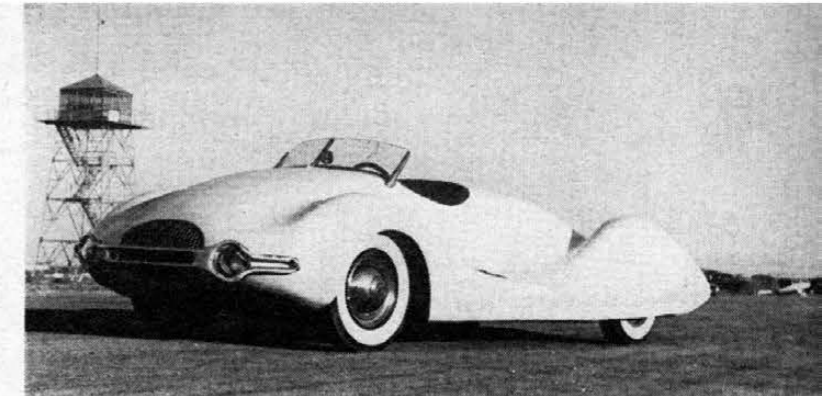


Influence of GM's LeSabre resulted in LaRocket by Bob Metz, of Shelbyville, Indiana. Mounted on a LaSalle chassis and powered by an Oldsmobile V-8 engine, it has no doors, uses

recessed step in panel for entrance. Front end combines '41 Olds fenders (without headlights), Cadillac bumper. Rear has '49 Buick fenders to which fin-like extensions were added.



One of the most famous postwar customs is this 1941 Chevrolet club coupe, another Joe Bailon job. It took some seven years to build, features a dash with estimated value of \$1200.



Custom with a novel history. Built prior to 1950, it has been recustomized within recent years. Body was built out of aluminum, has unusual airfoil shapes, curves formed in panels.

When it became a custom

BY OCEE RITCH

Part IV of Four Parts

CUSTOM CAR STYLING, which had followed a trend toward the bulbous and massive look until 1950, turned the calendar into a new decade with a flood of fresh ideas.

The typical *California Car*, sometimes disparagingly referred to as a "lead sled," bore a certain similarity to the unitized, step-down body of the Hudson, without broad chrome sweeps to break the lines. With the top chopped, body channeled over the frame, lowered to within six inches (or less) of the ground, and with heavy front and rear bumpers, these cars—stripped of all external projections—looked as if they were cast of solid metal.

Opposition to this concept arose concurrently with the revision in styling which the Ford underwent in 1949. The new Ford appeared with full fadeaway fenders, a low hood and a minimum of

chrome. Obviously, it was a natural for further Barris treatment, which it received. However, the postwar publicity about Italian automobiles and the importation of many to the West Coast, attracted the attention of a number of body men and the influence soon made itself felt on the 1949 and 1950 products of the River Rouge plant. One direction taken was the sectioning of the body.

In contrast to chopping a top, removing a longitudinal section completely around the body is exceedingly difficult. Beneath the exterior shell lurk many formers and braces which must be dealt with and the strip must be taken from precisely the correct spot or the two halves, when rejoined, will not match.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to identify the first hero who undertook the formidable task, but the car most often

described as the first is a '50 Ford two-door which, at last report, was owned by a Mike Stone. The five-inch section took enough weight off the springs so that four-inch lowering blocks only let it down a couple of inches. Frenched headlights, a grille with the center replaced by the floating bar from a Kaiser, push-button door and trunk latches completed the treatment. Its clean lines and large glass area, unlike the armored-car slits, then so common, caught the imagination of many and within a short time several similar customs were on the streets.

Another splendid example of sectioning was that accomplished by the Valley Custom shop in Burbank, Calif. The '50 Ford club coupe, owned by Ron Dunn, had one basic difference. It sported wheel cutouts which gave a light look seldom seen on American cars. And a horizontal

beltline, starting from a handmade grille center bar, is carried through with the stock rub strip to give a further impression of slim length. Imaginative taillight treatment involved use of DeSoto and Ford components, while the exhaust was brought out through the fender.

One of the most bizarre and advanced of Midwestern cars was *LaRocket*. Influence of the GM dream car, the *LeSabre*, was evident, but many contributions by builder Bob Metz made it more than a copy. Metz spent more than 3,000 man hours shaping, filing and welding. In a year and a half of work he used '41 Olds front fenders, '41 Buick rear fenders, Cadillac bumpers and a '39 LaSalle hood (which became part of the deck lid in the startling rear end).

Meanwhile, in the Los Angeles basin, men who went in for alterations on a

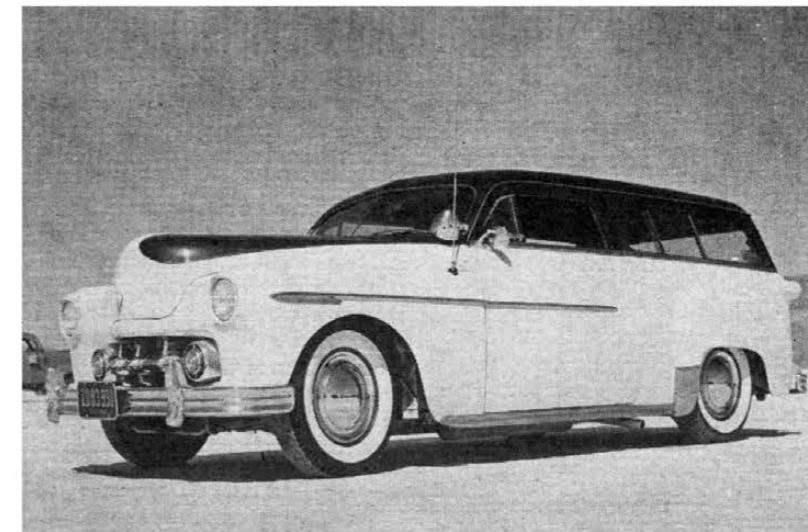
Passenger car body (1950 Ford two-door) formed the basis for this novel pickup, by Joe Bailon, of Hayward, California. A five-inch sectioning operation, stiffening of side panels were the principal tasks he performed.



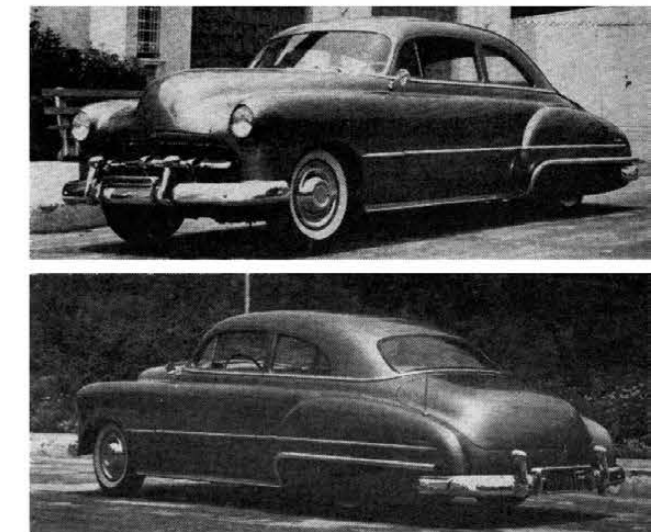
Typical custom touches of early Fifties are Frenched headlights and floating grille, worked into this '50 Ford by Bob Travers of Oakland.

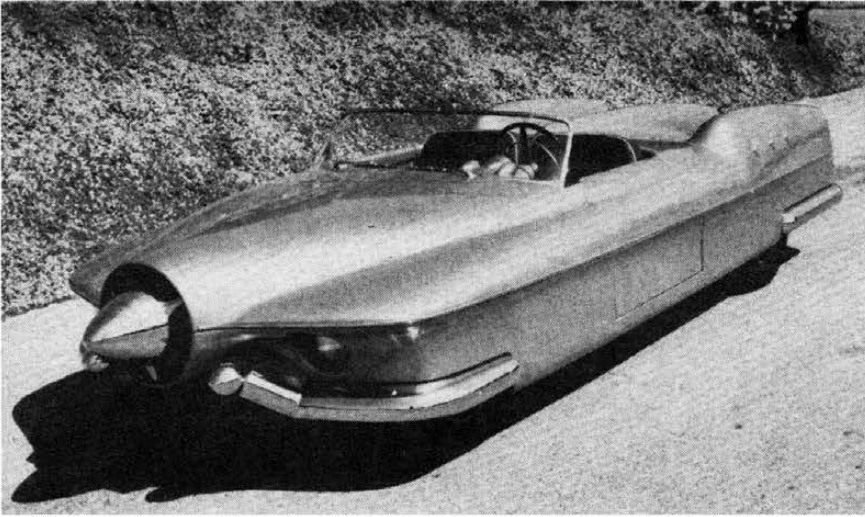


Station wagons also get customizing treatments. This one is a 1950 Plymouth Suburban, restyled by George Cerny, of Compton, California. Top was lowered about four inches, grille combines '53-'54 Chevrolet units in oval.

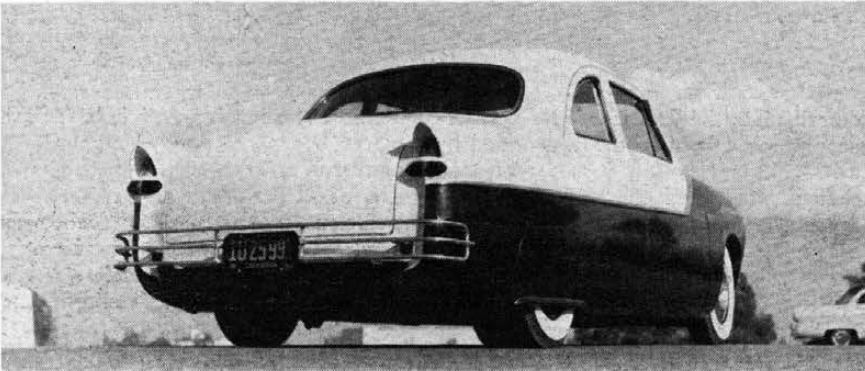


Rear end of this 1949 Chevrolet two-door, customized by Spencer Murray, Rod & Custom editor, was so low it needed casters!

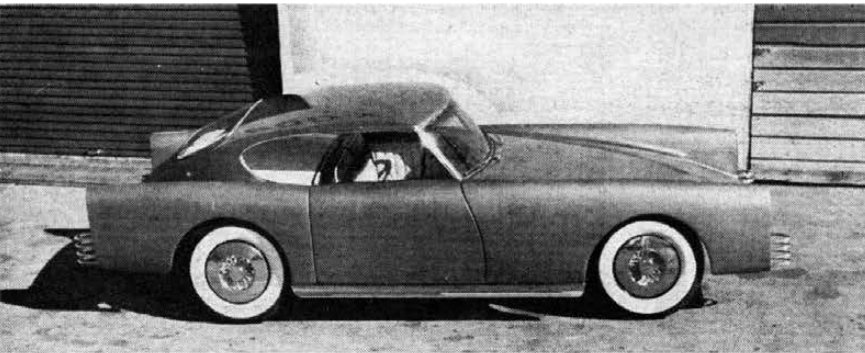




Futuristic note was supplied to 1950-55 era by the Manta Ray, by Glenn Hire and Vernon Antoine, of Whittier, California. Jet aircraft influence shaped plastic body.



Completed only a few months ago, this 1950 Ford, by Tad Hirai, of Los Angeles, shows use of current side trim. High nerfing bar is for protection of low body.



European flavor is obvious in this original custom, by Jay Everett, of Los Angeles, who prefers to work in aluminum. The radiator is at rear to allow a lower hood line.

Latest word in customizing comes from the Barris shop in Los Angeles. It is the Golden Sahara, worked up from a '53 Lincoln. It has phone, bar, tape recorder, TV.



major scale were now getting into the upper price brackets and brand new transportation was rolling directly from the dealers' showrooms to their shops.

The Barris brothers work on Mercury convertibles and on Sam's own 1950 Buick were good examples of their restyling. The Mercurys had chopped Carson tops, remote controlled deck latches and door triggers, a minimum of chrome, heavy grilles and extreme lowering.

Sam's Buick came into his hands as a wreck and consumed a couple of years of spare time. Using 1953 Frenched Buick headlights and extended rear fenders incorporating Pontiac station wagon taillights gave it a new, longer look and directness. The toothy Buick grille was replaced with Olds and Lincoln parts, while the top was sectioned five inches in front and three inches at the rear. The car was lowered three inches and further accented by a reversed Lincoln chrome spear. Finished in golden maroon bronze with maroon mohair and antique white leatherette interior, the car represented a true labor of love . . . and no small influence in the trade.

As an indicator of future restyling trends, Gaylord's Olds may be considered as an accurate forecast. The most striking feature of the automobile is a sharp overhang above the rear window. The padded top is extended over full-width glass. Kaiser taillights carry out the strong straight line of the Olds fender, which has been reworked to accommodate the new glass. Exhaust tips in the bumpers, chrome set-off paint sweep and padded dash add individualistic touches.

With all these remarkable developments as background, we may ask "What's ahead?"

Maybe this is significant. As we gathered material for this report, we leafed through George Barris' scrapbook, as he stood by. And we noted that he would pounce upon a photo of a neat appearing roadster or coupe—almost stock—and say, "Isn't that clean. Now, that's what I like!"

The roadster, as popular as ever, has been brought to a high degree of perfection here and its functional lines may counteract the effects of the *Golden Sahara* and others. A typical example of what can be done with an old and almost forgotten chassis is Les Callahan's roadster, which is based upon a 1922 Dodge. Handbuilt nose and low top with lavish use of chrome plating set it apart. The success of such bodywork and the neat, but not gaudy two seaters, has led even the foreign car element into the customizing byways.

These scattered clues, including a boom in padded tops for Corvettes and Barris' current reworking of Cadillac's *Le Mans* dream car may point the new direction. The custom has taken a grip on every part of the country and every phase of car building, as well as rebuilding. •