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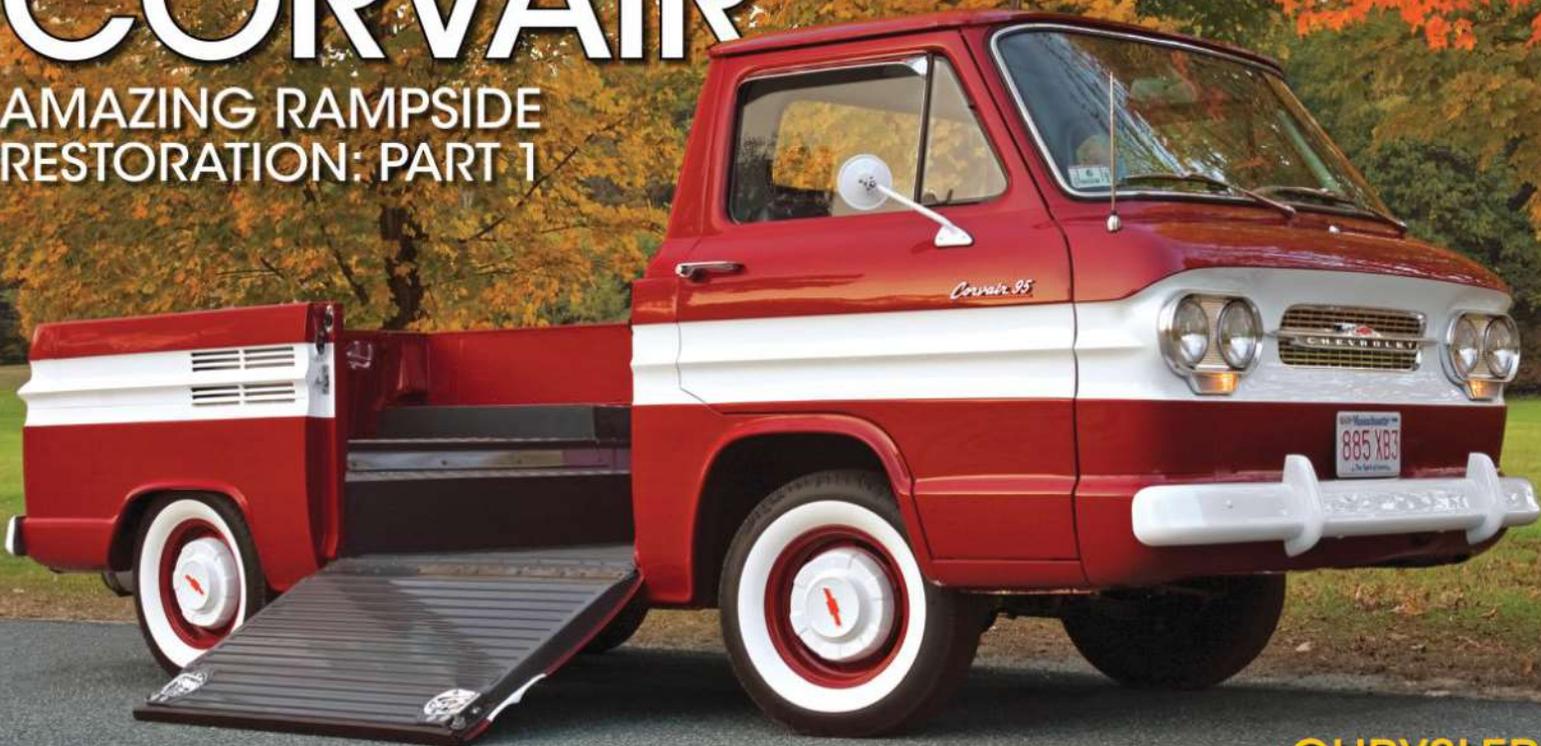
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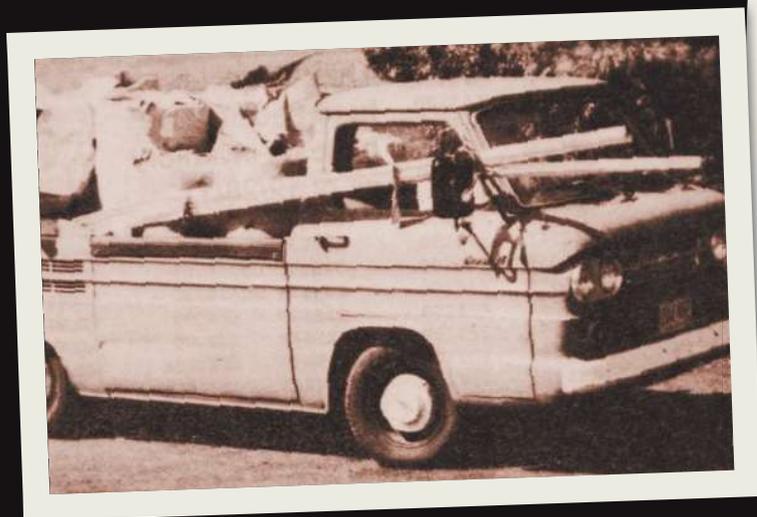
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Rejuvenated Rampside

Part 1: Though most have been forgotten, this 1961 Corvair 95 Rampside pickup gets treated to a ground-up restoration worthy of a trophy-winning Full Classic

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY TERRY SHEA
RESTORATION PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF CALVIN CLARK, JR.





With the Rampside disassembled, it was mounted on a rotisserie so that it could easily be moved around the shop and worked on. The original Omaha orange paint had been the fleet color for the first owner, who had bad luck with the Rampside.



Proper restoration meant removing any and all components from the Corvair's unit-body chassis, including all doors, glass, lighting, wiring, suspension and undercarriage, the entire interior and all decorative trim.



Despite being stored indoors for over 20 years, the Rampside still continued to corrode in some places. Though the rot was largely confined to the lower extremities, it also included the integrated frame pieces.



With substantial holes in the floor and no suitable reproduction or used panels to weld in, the restorers had to fabricate appropriate pieces to complete the body. Reproduction side panels, however, were available from his company, Clark's Corvair Parts.

Trucks are for work. Period. Or at least they used to be anyway. Before there were Denali editions or King Ranch versions or fancy cowboy-sounding names like Laramie, pickups were asked to come to the loading gate or the work site ready to roll. Plain and simple.

Cal Clark, Jr. brought home this 1961 Corvair 95 Rampside in 1974 with very low miles on the odometer, but also with a big hole where the engine once sat. "We were checking through *Hemmings*," says Cal, "because we were looking for a Rampside, and I saw one advertised that said 'no engine,' and it had very low mileage. So, we called the guy and his story was that he ran a trucking operation. He had bought this Rampside in the Omaha Orange of his fleet. He drove it for less than a year and the crankshaft broke.

"He took it back to the dealer," Cal continues. "They took the engine out. Chevrolet would not do anything. The dealer would not do anything. He was so upset about it that he parked it in one of his buildings. That's where we picked it up in 1974. It still had his trucking logo on it and was sitting there in near-perfect condition, except it had no engine."

While the lack of its rear-mounted, air-cooled powertrain might deter most folks, Cal was in the Corvair business. And by being in the Corvair business, we mean well on the way to making Clark's Corvair Parts the largest supplier of Corvair parts in the world. (Clark's Corvair Parts was previously profiled in *HCC* #21, June 2006.) With an engine and associated parts available and the expertise to get it all back into the Rampside, Cal turned the once-abandoned truck into a



When restoring the ramp, which had to be disassembled, precise alignment of the guiding pin was critical, as the closed ramp provides an important structural component for the bed that would otherwise flex substantially when the pickup was moving.



Though most trim components had held up well, the ramp latch had taken more than its fair share of weathering and hard use. The rechromed component shines better than new and operates flawlessly when opening the restored ramp.



The engine bay, easily visible here with the bolt-in engine covers removed, sits high in the bed and behind the rear axle. It was largely solid, but much like the rest of the lower extremities, did require some work due to so much salt exposure.



The Rampside's unique, mid-bed door gave the chassis an obvious weak point, the rocker panel essentially the only structure holding it together. More than a dozen locking pliers were required to keep the piece straight when welding it back together.

workhorse for his rapidly growing business.

"We used the Rampside for picking up boxes," recalls Cal. "We used it as our work truck. We parked it in 1985 or 1986 because it was in need of a full restoration. They were rust prone anyway, and driving it for 10 winters just really did it in. It was to the point that we couldn't drive it any more. It was parked inside, but unless it's really heated and really dehumidified, things continue to rust inside."

Those New England winters had taken their toll on the truck, but Cal's and his wife, Joan's, faith in the charming and very useful Corvair had not run out—not by a longshot. Though Cal had junked a handful of other Rampside's over the years for his parts business, there was no doubt they would eventually give it the restoration it deserved: "We really figured that we owed it to it

since we had pretty much used it up."

In 2009, with the business doing well and Cal and Joan enjoying a bit more freedom from it, the time had come to do right by the Rampside. Cal had a rather expansive shop, complete with a lift, paint booth and plenty of space to work on the Corvair. Knowing that he wanted to tackle the job at home, he hired a body man to come to the site, instead of bringing the car to a commercial shop in the more conventional manner. "Really, with a project this big," says Cal, "it's virtually impossible to send it to a body shop and have any control. And I like to have control."

In June of 2009, work commenced with the teardown of the once mighty truck, and the Rampside's condition came into sharper focus. "I knew it was rusty," says Cal, "but until we started really looking at it, I didn't know how rusty.



Organization is key to any successful restoration, but particularly one when a car is completely disassembled. Parts were organized onto heavy-duty roll-around shelves with each component labeled and organized accordingly on the appropriate shelf.



New England winters spare no steel. Even the doors required removal of some surface rust and complete disassembly and re-assembly. After removing all glass, polishing compound was used to brighten up each piece before re-installation.



Three coats of Martin Senour 2K Primer Surfacer were each smoothed down with up to 600-grade paper. A final coat of sealer was applied before base colors were laid down. Very little body filler was used, no more than $\frac{1}{16}$ th of an inch at the most.



With its 360-degree access, the rotisserie allowed the undercarriage of the Rampside to be painted in a detailed manner, giving the once forgotten pickup a truly top-notch, bottom-up restoration.

There were places where you could almost put your fist through. But, a lot of it was seams and places that you knew the rust was in there, and if you didn't get it out, if it wasn't a hole now, as soon as you sprayed it, it was probably going to turn into a hole."

Cal had been down this road before with a 1957 Chevrolet convertible, so he knew the ropes. Anything and everything that came off the Rampside was labeled. Parts were grouped, such as for the interior, wiring, lighting and so forth, and those parts were all organized on heavy-duty rolling shelves that could be moved around the shop as needed. Any components that could be removed from the body were removed, including the cab doors, deck lid and ramp door, and all glass. Only the windshield, taken out years ago to test a gasket, was missing.

After setting up part of the large main room in his shop as a blasting space, Cal used plastic media to remove all of the paint from the body and bed. After sufficiently removing as much of the finish as possible, he then used aluminum oxide, in both fine and coarse grains, to attack the rusted metal. Once they had the existing metal cleaned up, Cal and his body guy took stock of what was salvageable, what needed to be replaced and what needed to be fabricated.

As the owner of a Corvair parts business, Cal had access to and had squirreled away some panels that were needed, but not everything was available, either as used, NOS or reproduction. "The external panels I had saved over the years, but I never found a side panel; however, we sell those as a good reproduction anyway," Cal explains. "And then the front wheel openings are



Despite Cal's insistence that working with doors is perhaps his least favorite aspect of restoring old cars, the Rampside's doors turned out as perfect as the rest of the body and continue to close properly after very careful alignment.



Three coats of Martin Senour Crossfire Platinum base were used for the white-and-Romany Maroon two-tone before they were top-coated with four layers of clear. All were painted at the owner's well-equipped home shop paint booth.



Matching the correct gray of the bed was no mean feat. It required finding an original bed that had been kept from too much exposure to the sun and other elements, and careful mixing of two GM paints: charcoal green and charcoal gray.



With the seats still removed, it is possible to see the extent to which the owner went to properly restore and refinish each and every surface of what was once merely a delivery vehicle, a working truck, but now is a bona fide concours Corvair.

very convoluted and complex panels made up of multiple panels, and luckily I had saved some of those. But, when it got into sections of the floor and sections of the frame underneath—that just all had to be fabricated. The wheel wells were okay. It's pretty much the floors and frame unit and braces underneath that had to be made."

One of the first people Cal had to help him out was a body man from Portugal with old-world skills that represent the best in craftsmanship. "He just made some fantastic little brackets and things that went underneath that nobody will ever see," Cal recalls. "He would start with a piece of flat metal, a chisel, a hammer and a thick piece of steel, and he would just start pounding on it. And he would do that with pieces that had 90 degrees but that also had a little quarter-inch flange along them." Although health issues forced Cal's gifted assistant

in the restoration to move on, the components he created remain with the Rampside.

Cal then hired Brandon LeBlanc of Westhampton, Massachusetts-based Big B's Autobody to assist with the completion of the bodywork. But Cal insisted on handling the DeVilbiss GTI spray gun himself. He first laid down three coats of Martin Senour 2K Primer Surfacer. Having block sanded on previous projects, Cal handed that job off to Brandon, who smoothed the surface with up to 600-grade paper. After applying a coat of sealer, he then laid three coats of Martin Senour Crossfire Platinum Base, first in the white for the side stripes and then in a shade that most closely matched Romany Maroon, an original Corvair color. After four coats of clear, Brandon finished flattening the surface with 1000- and then 2000-grade paper.

Fortunately for Cal, most of the chrome was in good shape, but he did have to send the ramp and tailgate latches to D&S Custom Metal Restoration of Holyoke, Massachusetts, for replating. For the inside of that ramp and the rest of the bed, Cal wanted to have it as close to the factory hue as possible. "I got that color," he says, "by going back to my other 1961 Rampside that hasn't been on the road since 1971 and has always been inside in a dark environment. And that's the paint that I went by to try and match. It's a gray that has a tint of green, which is the way I mix it. I take a GM charcoal with a GM charcoal green and mix the two together."

Despite very intimate familiarity with the Corvair and all its variants, final assembly of the body was not without its pitfalls. Not a big fan of working with doors, Cal reports that getting them hung properly was not an easy task: "I think my wife and I worked on the final door adjustment for hours it seemed. You would move it the absolute minutest amount, and the bottom would be out too much or in too much or back too

much or forward too much. I just don't get along too well with doors."

"The thing I cannot understand is that these guys doing the level of restoration of Pebble Beach or something of that caliber, how do they do it without scratching something? I have never been able to do a restoration where maybe I am tightening a bolt or something and not scratched somewhere. And I just don't know if they immediately take it off and restore it all over again. I defy anybody to do a full restoration and not have something that gets damaged while they are doing it."

The result of the very thorough body and paint process is a stunning two-tone Rampside with an absolutely rich and deep finish that defies the Corvair's humble economy-car roots. Though the workmanlike orange color is gone, no one can deny the hardy appeal of the now maroon pickup.

Next month, we'll look at the drivetrain, interior and finishing touches of this high-caliber restoration. 🏠



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