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Richard Zocchi's '59 Plymouth  
Fury Custom

# Long On Looks

By Tim Bernsau  
Photography: Ron Kimball

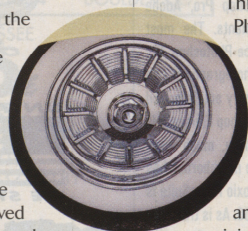
Anything you could say about any of Richard Zocchi's customs would be an understatement. Every vehicle to emerge from the man's imagination is not just remarkably conceived but extraordinarily built. When Zocchi started out in the late '50s, his cars were what he refers to as semi-customs: "Lower 'em, drop 'em, and paint 'em a fancy color," as he puts it. His contribution to the custom hobby in the second half of his career has been more noteworthy. All of the 25 or so cars he has owned in the last 25 years have received well-deserved honors.

Despite the exploding popularity of traditional-style kemps, Zocchi prefers to play with cars not typically considered for customizing. Since the attention-getting Cool '50 Merc—which served as his reintroduction to customizing

back in 1976—his choice of raw material has moved farther and farther from the mainstream. Lately, he's been creating show-winners from often-neglected Mopars of the mid-to-late '50s and

early '60s. "These were luxury cars that nobody customized too much in those days," says Zocchi. "I'd done the traditional stuff earlier and started heading in this direction. I liked the fins and all that, and I just didn't want to do another '57 Chevy or something."

This knockout of a '59 Plymouth Fury is the most recent Chrysler product to get the Zocchi treatment. Richard found the two-door hardtop in the Atlanta area. He likes to start his projects with good-condition cars, and this one was in primo original condition, including paint, interior, and all chrome and glass—and mileage under 50K. During a 12-month buildup, the all-



original Mopar was modified into an extraordinary custom and christened Furious I.

The transformation from Fury to Furious I began in Pittsburg, California, where Frank DeRosa & Son performed the bodywork. All exterior hardware and ornamentation were removed, and the wing-like rear fins were stretched forward all the way to the rear of the doors to accentuate the length of the body. Wheel openings and rocker panels were extended almost to the ground.

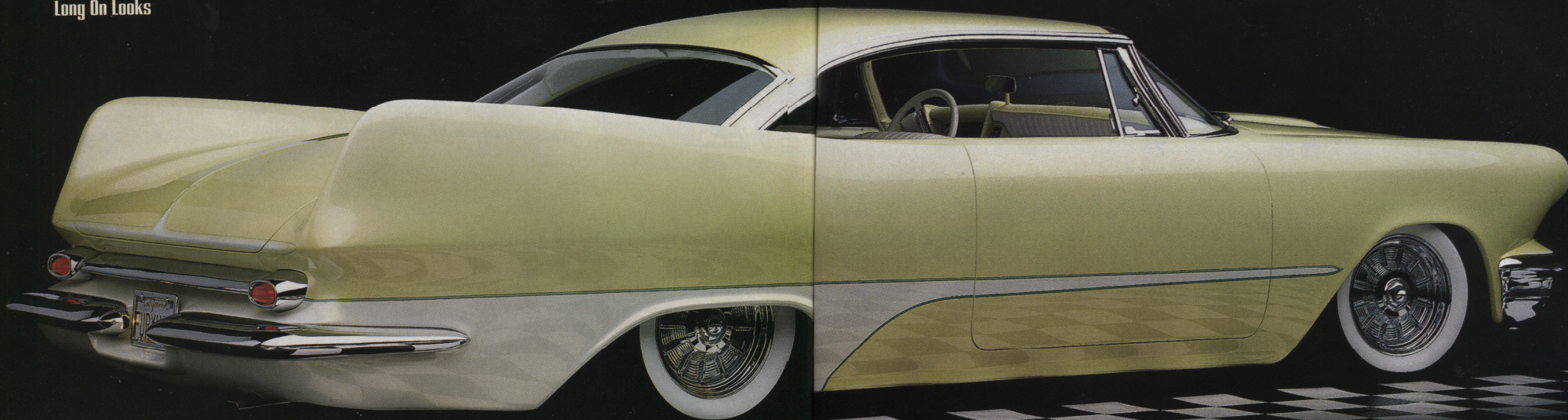
Modifying the front of the car with a '57 Buick grille and '57 Chevy bumper (widened 4 inches to fit) required wrapping the front fenders around and bringing the front of the hood down several inches. Hood corners were rounded, and a GTO-style scoop was added. Frenched '60



Every corner of the cockpit has been rebuilt. Bob Divine out of Martinez, California, constructed and upholstered the custom bucket seats and rear bench. The white vinyl upholstery with chartreuse piping combines tuck 'n' roll and button-tuft patterns, and extends across the dash. Divine also created the center console and handmade headliner and finished the trunk.

The big Mopar's ground-scouring stance was provided by Bill and Tom Fraser of Antioch Muffler in Antioch, California, who added dropped spindles to bring down the front end and replaced the original front drum brakes with AMC discs.

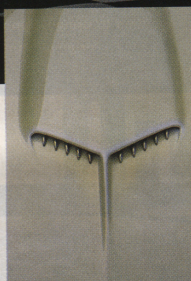




*"I go into the cars that nobody builds."*

—Richard Zocchi

Buick headlights replace the stock lamps and eyebrows. The result is a much cleaner look up front. A small peaked ridge between the lights dresses up the top of the fenders.



The same total treatment was applied to the rear. A '55 Chrysler New Yorker bumper was stretched 6 inches to fill the concave area just below the deck. The New Yorker backup lights

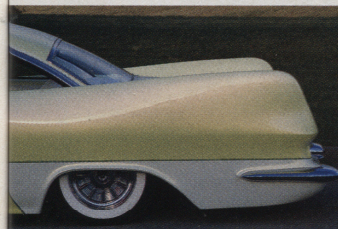
serve as taillights, using lenses from a '50 Ford. Below that, it's a split rear bumper and lower panel from a '60 Buick.

At Marco's Lucky 7 Customs in Antioch, California, John Aiello

performed the 2-inch chop to the top of Zocchi's Plymouth. Aiello, who has had a hand in many of the topnotch customs of the last several years, retained the rear glass by sinking the

window into the deck. Venerated shooter Art Himsl applied the custom paint at his Concord, California, shop. Zocchi says the color is a mix of char-treuse and off-white with red pearl over the top plus "a slight twinkle of glitter." The side panels were painted to resemble the side trim of a '57 DeSoto.

Since its debut at this year's Grand National Roadster Show, the Fury has done a tour of the West Coast's most prestigious events, including the Sacramento Autorama, the Oakland



Finding the right rolling stock was as important as every other customizing decision on the Plymouth. These 15-inch Segundo wheels from Colorado Custom were chrome-plated at Sperm's in Sacramento, California. Wide-white radials from Diamondback Classics measure P195R75/15. The rear was lowered using airbags from Air Ride Technologies, installed by Greg Westbury from Concord, California.

## Another Sam Barris Prize

During its brief time on the show-car circuit, the Fury appeared at the '02 Sacramento Autorama, where it won the Sam Barris Memorial Award for Excellence in Paint and Body Work. It is the fourth of Zocchi's customs to receive the prestigious award. In 1976, the honor went to the "Cool 50" '50 Merc. He won in 1981 with his Carson-topped '54 Mercury. In 1990, his chiffon-cream-colored '57 Buick took the prize, and this year, the Fury.



As a customizer, rather than a hot rodder, Zocchi typically keeps things stock in the engine compartment. The Fury is still powered by the low-mileage original mill, an indestructible 318 polysphere V-8. In factory form, the engine is fed by a single 4V Carter and backed by a Torqueflite automatic transmission.



Rod and Custom Show, and Paso Robles, picking up awards all over the place. But you've missed your chance to see it out and about, since this super-clean custom now resides at Darryl Starbird's museum in Afton, Oklahoma. Zocchi is now busy working with Marco's Lucky 7 on building a '57 Ford and a '62 Pontiac Grand Prix, both scheduled to appear at the next Grand National Roadster Show.

Richard doesn't consider Furious I,

or any of his rides, radical customs. "I don't like anything radical," he claims. "Although some of my cars seem to come out radical, they really aren't. I like simple and basic, smooth and

clean. I want to see something clever—more than just a lot of hacking and smacking. I want to see something really trick."

That, too, is an understatement. **R&C**