



After taking years of bemoaning and bad mouthing about their general ineptitude in the styling salons, the motor-city bunch sneaked up on the customizers and ran 'em down with a flock of classy carriages that ended an era. Like restyling ain't what it used to be baby. Considering this, it would be a real compliment if an enthusiast took one of those same svelte buggies, waved the

wand of creativity over it and served up a finished product that gave viewers the impression that that's the way the thing should have looked to begin with. Right? Right.

So when you get ready to throw some bouquets, throw one down Charlotte, North Carolina, way to Ed Skelton, an electrical contractor, who wanted a '66 Falcon Ranchero but didn't entirely buy the overall styling of a rounded front end that somehow failed to square with a more angular back. Ed thought that the Fairlane front saddle and grille represented a likelier choice so he ordered a new Ranchero body shell and went to work tailoring for himself what has become the watchword of the industry these days; a "personalized" vehicle. Knowing that the Falcon and Fairlane lines share a common unit body, Ed felt

it would be little more than routine to get the front end pieces from one attached to the other, but, being caught up more than slightly in the total-performance concept (he also owns one of the better running Mustang funny cars), he sought more go and stamina as well.

But first things first. An entire GTA fender assembly — hood, bumper and back bars (Part Nos. C60Z 16612-B, C60Z 16005-6-A) — was added for the biggest sheet metal change. Realizing that the Fairlane options the 390 cube engine and that a 427 possesses identical external dimensions, a brand new medium-riser, Grand National honker-type mill was bolted in. However, this unit has a pretty gung-ho, rump, rump idle as it comes from Holman & Moody; not one you would recommend for towing race cars around. So, a 427 cam blank

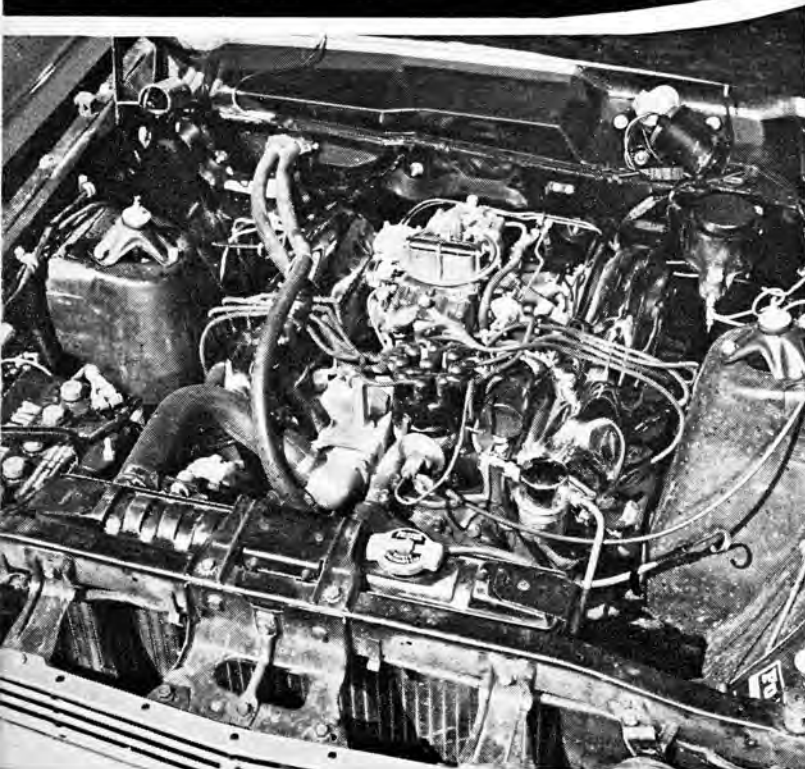
ABOVE — From the up angle this S. Carolina chariot looks like a normal Fairlane. But wait! Farther back we can see the Ranchero's utility.

FUTURE FORD

Text and photos by Eric Dahlquist



AT RIGHT — This is the way a lot of people thought the later model Ranchero should have been done up the first time around. Notice the centered rear wheel.



was reground to hydraulic lifter 406 Ford high performance specs, the tappet bosses were drilled to pump oil in from the main gallery and a set of TZ juice truck lifters (DZ's are regular) were installed. Although it might seem slightly redundant, what with hydraulic lifters and all, the 427 adjustable rocker arms were retained and worked out well. To attain the desired lash once the lifter is filled with oil, the rocker arm adjustment is run down until the clatter disappears, backed off until an audible "click" is heard and then snugged a quarter-turn more.

Either the 390 or 427 engine would fit with equal facility except that on the latter, the exhaust manifold's bolt pattern interferes with the spring towers. There are several ways to circumvent this condition and Ed chose the custom

header route, supplied in drag-car profile by Balanger Brothers. Another item that would have fit was the stock 3-speed Cruise-O-Matic transmission but it is a matter of conjecture that it could keep hanging in there under hard usage. If it ever was a possible problem, it won't be now, for a 428-Police Interceptor automatic (Part No. C60P 7000-H) fell in behind the engine. Now Ed had strength but he wanted snap, so the 428 valve body was removed and swapped for the GTA number. While they were at it, the shift linkage was turned in for a floor-operated type.

Things were looking pretty good in the drive train now and the only question mark was the stoutness of the rear axle assembly. Just to make sure, a rather large looking, but nonetheless neatly fit-

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If that rear axle looks on the beefy side, remember that it's one of those elephantine T-Bird jobs. Axles for this honey are super-big 31-spline.

Ed Skelton made some sneaky changes to his Ranchero — both inside and out. The crystal ball shows he may have beaten Ford to the punch with a new model

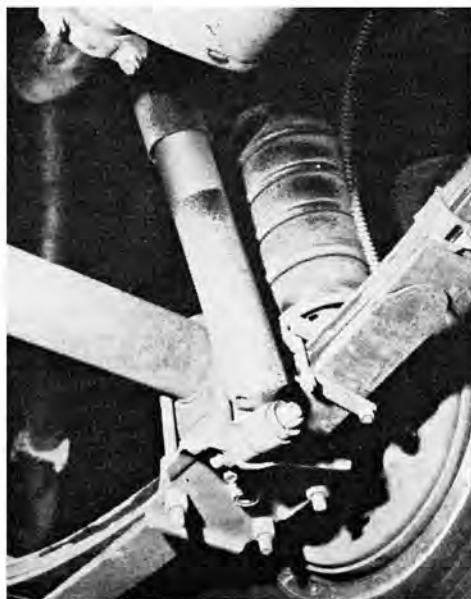


FAR LEFT — Not satisfied with standard 289 fare, Ed Skelton opted for a faster as well as fancier 427; a unit, incidentally, that happens to bolt right into place.

LEFT — Rear quarter of Ranchero is set off by taut white tarp. Sag is controlled by two tubular aluminum bows.

FAR RIGHT — Inside, conversion consists of GTA instrumentation, Sport Shift and stereo tape facility that is integral with padded panel.

RIGHT — Optional heavy-duty Ranchero rear spring pac is augmented with inflatable Air-Lift arrangement. Combination allows safe ride, loaded.





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FUTURE FORD

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ting, '66 T-Bird unit got the nod (Part No. C6SW 4200-H). Right now you are probably asking yourselves why, out of all the possible heavy-duty-cum-high-performance choices a person might have in the FoMoCo parts box, a relatively plush bucket like the 'Bird might have the hot tip on rear ends. Well, to begin with, the T-Bird is a nice heavy machine, so it gets a nice heavy axle. OK? Then, as a bonus, it has those ultra-hard, 31-spline axles that they use in competition, not to mention a 9 $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch ring gear (biggest in the Ford passenger line) and an Equal-Loc limited slip. You better believe this Skelton guy is all business when it comes to knowing the parts book.

Alright. When Ed put the rear end in he'd already relocated the heavy-duty leaf springs 1-inch behind stock position because the truck could use a little more wheelbase for ride and besides, this way the wheels would be centered in the well. A set of Air-Lifts in conjunction with Monroe 500 shocks finished off the area nicely. (Springing in front is by a set of 1980-pound coils). Bridging the gap between the transmission and the rear axle is a stock, uncut, unrebanded 390 Fairlane station wagon driveshaft (Part No. C60Z 4602-S) that just happened to fit.

With all this power pounding the bricks, and with a trailer to worry about, Ed thought it was time for a little up-graded anchor action. There's no argument that the giant economy-sized, finned T-Bird drums would do their share on the rear but up front, something that offered a mite more security was in order. Well, what about trying a set of Mustang factory funny car discs that have identical bearing area to the Falcon and will bolt on? Fine and dandy.

There were a few more items like a stereo tape that fits sleekly into the dash instead of being hung on underneath, Fairlane wagon blinkers, and a couple gallons of Night Mist Blue paint. The critical thing chassis-wise though, is that Ed Skelton had what amounted to a 427-street Fairlane months before the factory announced theirs (reported on in our July issue). Doubtless the people in Dearborn had a prototype along these lines a while back too, but when you're a Ford fan you can't always wait for the next model run.

Style-wise the quality of Ed's creation is belied by the fact the casual observer thinks the thing is the genuine article. Further, our agents in Detroit say that the '67 Ranchero may look nearly identical to the truck on these pages. Should this be true, Ed Skelton will have had the unique distinction of owning an ultra hot luxury version of next year's model before the factory built it. ■ ■