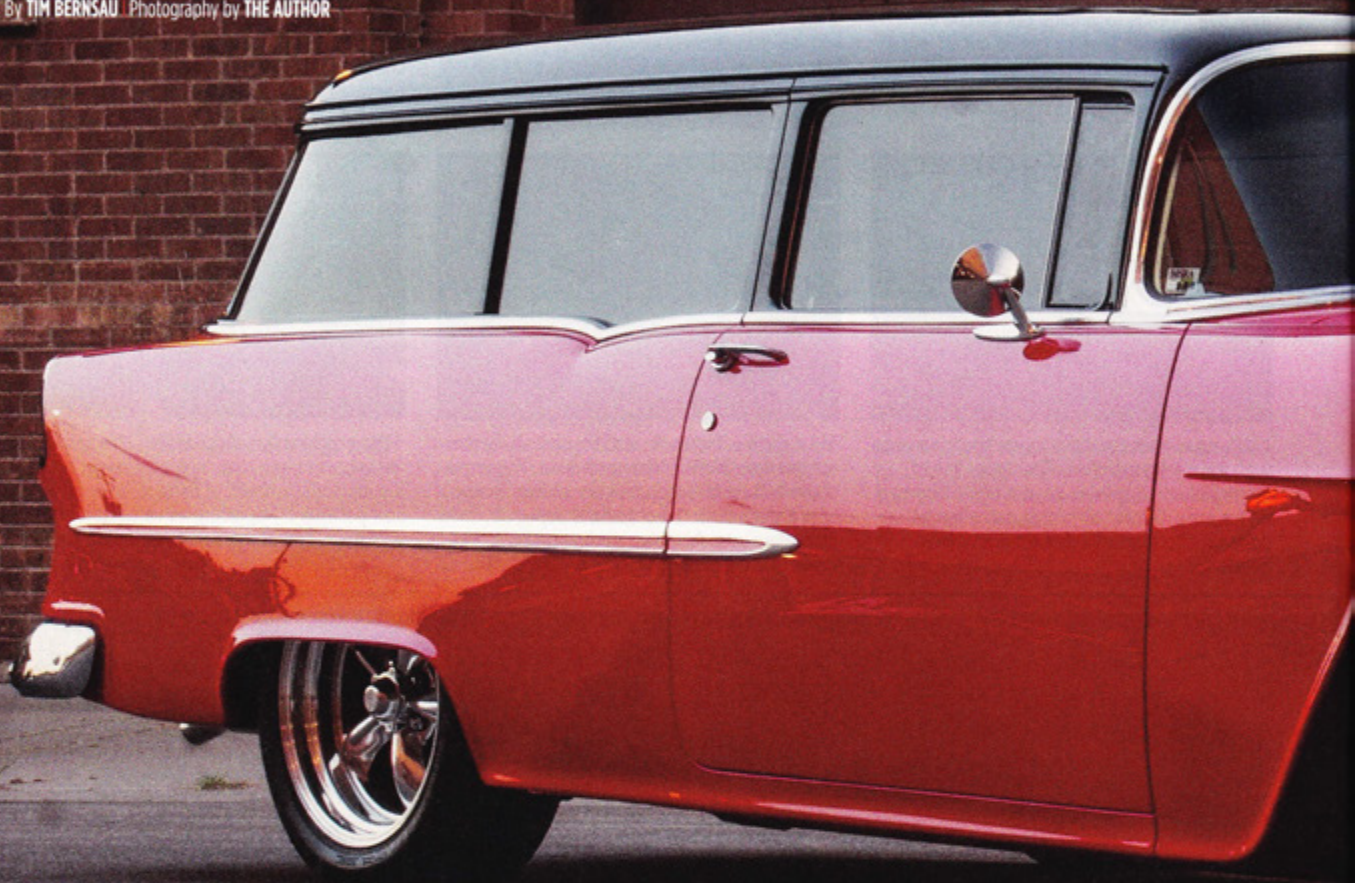


feature

# NORTHER

Is This '55 Chevy Wagon the Hottest Handyman in Minnesota?

By TIM BERNSAU Photography by THE AUTHOR



**O**f the 100 cars that won the Painless Performance Products/*STREET RODDER* Top 100 awards in 2015, 24 of them were Tri-Five Chevys. One of them, Billy Sampson's '55 Handyman wagon, landed on our runner-up list for Street Rod of the Year. We spotted Billy's car at the Minnesota State Fairgrounds during the Back To The 50's car show.

We knew it was from nearby Eagan. We didn't know it had originally come from California. Billy, a 34-year member of the Minnesota Street Rod Association, told us the backstory.

"I've always liked '55s," Billy told us, "and I wanted something different, so I put out the word that I was looking for a two-door wagon. My friend Jerry found this one advertised in *Hemmings Motor News*. The car was located at D&P Classic Chevy in Huntington Beach, California, so I contacted a friend in

California, Larry, who went to see the car. Larry made the deal with D&P and arranged for the car's delivery to Minnesota. I was at Back To The 50's the day it arrived."

In the beginning, Billy's plans for the Handyman were similar to the people who bought these wagons new. A lot of Chevy Handyman owners in 1955 may have chosen the make for its style and the model for its function. Billy says it was going to be a driver, used to haul parts to and from swap meets and

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the local scrap yard. "That idea didn't last long," he admits. Soon the body was off the frame. With Billy's friend Gary Wirth helping, the frame was blasted and bodywork began.

The Chevy was treated to some classic custom mods. The body was nosed and decked, and the Chevrolet script was left off the front quarters. The front bumper guards were removed and the bumper smoothed and rebuilt as one piece. Above it, the stock grille was swapped for '57

Corvette grille teeth. At the other end, the factory taillight lenses were exchanged for '55 Buick lenses.

Somewhere during the process, the progress slowed, then stalled. "The Handyman became an empty beer can container for a while," Billy says. Fortunately another friend, Brandon Hansen, showed up to jump-start the project. The beer cans were evicted and the bodywork continued. One signature detail on Tri-Five Chevys—the body dip in the beltline—is

found on every body style except the wagons. Brandon and Billy made sure that omission was corrected, transplanting the dips from a pair of sedan rear doors to the Handyman.

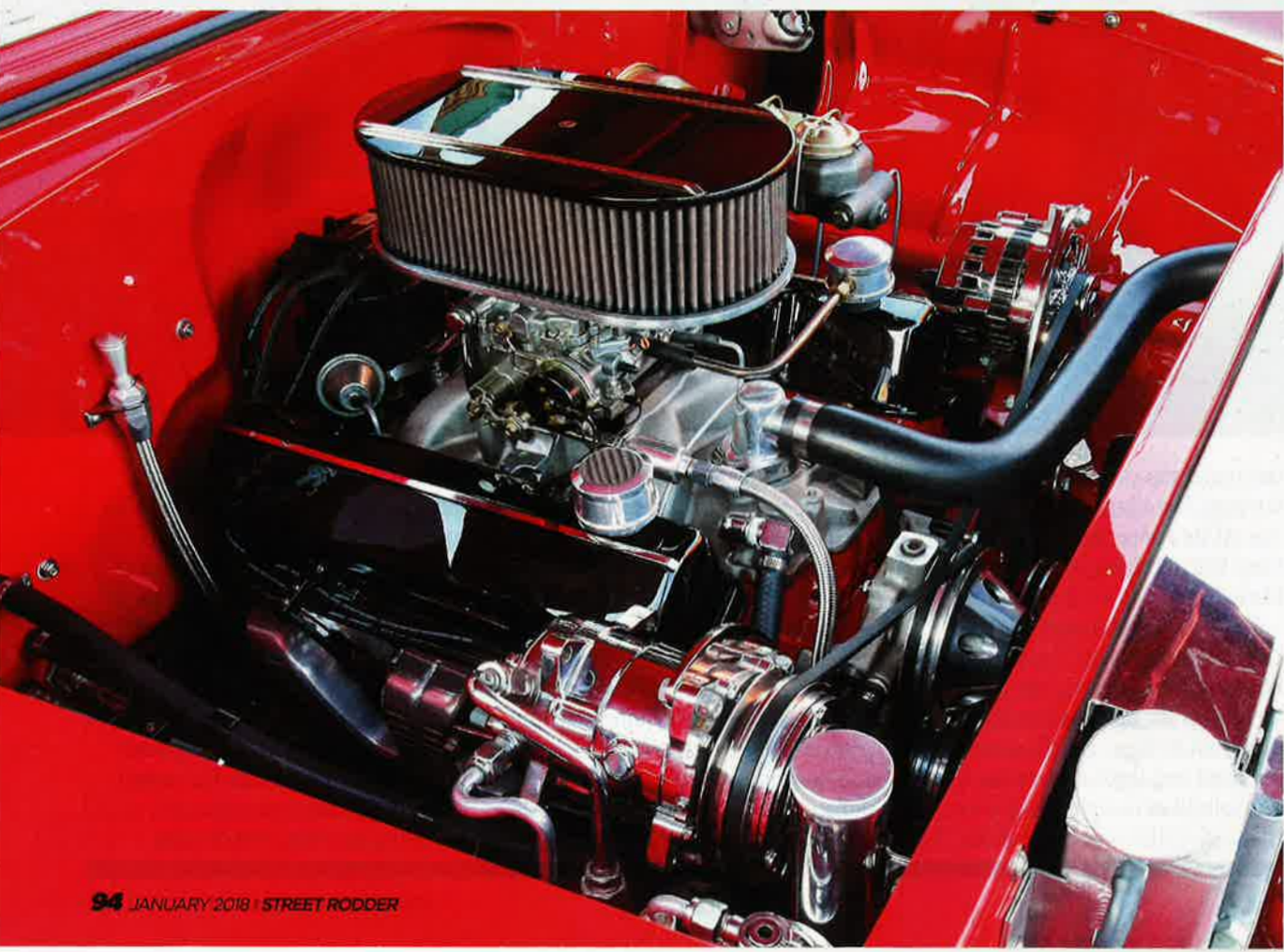
The frame and suspension work was completed using the factory frame and much of the stock suspension. The GM 10-bolt rearend is equipped with a 3.73:1 ring-and-pinion with limited slip. De-arched leaf springs with reversed eyes lower the rear. QA1 shocks are



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employed to smooth out the ride at both ends of the car. In front, TCI 2-inch dropped spindles and cut coil springs contribute to the hot rod rake. Steering is handled by a Classic Performance Products 500 Series power steering box. Stopping is provided courtesy of GM front discs and stock rear drums, and a CPP master cylinder and proportioning valve.

The wheelwells are packed with a time-honored wheel and tire combination. Billy likes the look of American Racing Torq Thrust five-spokes, and chose 18-inchers for the rear and 17s for the front. BF Goodrich g-1-force tires measure 235/50R18 and 205/50R17.



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The super sanitary engine compartment houses a carbureted 383 Chevy small-block. Steve Murgic at Murgics Automotive in Rosemount, Minnesota, performed the machine work and assembly on the 390hp engine, which is equipped with Dart heads and a Scat crank. An Edelbrock manifold and 750 carburetor feed fuel and air. Dress-up items include a pair of Chevrolet Performance valve covers and a custom air cleaner finished with black granite paint with red pearl. The exhaust travels through a set of Sandersun cast small-block headers and fully Jet-Hot-coated exhaust pipes built by Troy Bottcher, and corked with Flowmaster 50 Series mufflers. A Be Cool aluminum radiator ensures against overheating. A Lokar short throw shifter selects gears in the 700-R4 transmission, built by Master Transmission in Rosemount.

At Unique Body & Paint, Ron

Gorrell and his team took care of the body prep and paint, with Gorrell pulling the trigger. The combination of Viper Red and Black Granite makes a great visual balance, especially in contrast to the bright interior.

Hansen made the initial mods to the dash. That's the original Handyman dash, but with the circular double humps removed and the flat top hump from a '55 truck added to the driver side. A Mullins instrument panel and custom bezel surround the Classic Instruments speedo and quad gauges. A Mullins tach is mounted on the Flaming River steering column (with an Impy's Classic wheel on top). The rest of the dash has been smoothed, except for the heater controls. The glovebox was welded and the center panel got some flames over the body color paint. Hansen fabricated the console, using a pair of billet wheel center caps for the cup holders. At Mark Walter's

Upholstery Specialties, a pair of '65 GTO buckets were upholstered with cream leather, contrasted by bright red Corvette carpet. Behind the seats, the entire cargo area was covered in more leather and stainless strips made by Hansen. Kenny Ingram used a Haywire system to wire the '57.

Billy decided to go on vacation before doing the final assembly on the wagon. To his surprise, he got home to find a completed car. Hansen had once again stepped in and got the Handyman finished and ready to drive. That wouldn't be the last surprise for Billy. His fellow members in the Minnesota Street Rod Association selected his beautiful wagon as the MSRA Custom Of The Year. That honor was followed by a Painless Performance Products/STREET RODDER Top 100 award and SROV finalist finish. What's in store for the Handyman in 2018? That too, will be a surprise. **SR**

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