



NO PAIN



STORY & PHOTOS BY DARRYL BACHELDOR

FAST PONY



AFTER SHOOTING PHOTOS OF LYLE VASS'S '71 MUSTANG CONVERTIBLE IT WAS NO SURPRISE TO LEARN HE WAS INTRODUCED TO METAL WORK ALMOST AS SOON AS HE COULD WALK.

His father owned a bodyshop in Lestock, Saskatchewan and when Lyle got older the school bus would drop him off right outside the shop every day. Until he was 20 years old, Vass spent a lot of time working at his father's shop. Maybe he would have kept working there, but when his father passed away suddenly, then 20-year old Lyle decided to get out of the business and get an Engineering degree.

He worked in the oil patch for 11 years, but always kept the idea of running his own shop in the back of his mind. When it was time to build a house, Vass planned ahead building a shop and garage along with it. During a slow year in the oil patch, he started the prep work for his business by travelling to California to attend metal work courses at Lasse Metal Dreams and also to Tennessee to attend a course at Metal Crafters where he met Lou Santiago from the TV show *Muscle Car*.

The birth of his son in a way also led to the birth of his own business, Rods 'n Restos. Vass wanted to spend more time at home, and a home-based business allows him to do that. Vass specializes in sheet metal fabrication and what better way to advertise then to build a project car to show off his skills.

The '71 Mustang convertible didn't start out as a full custom project. Vass found this example for sale on the "Ed's Project Cars" web site in December 2006. The original plan was to restore it to factory original, but after he began to take the car apart, he discovered the pictures had hidden many sins. When he stood on the front bumper the doors would pop open and he found that the floor had been subjected to the "backyard bodywork" treatment of multiple layers of bondo, window screen,



and a coat of tar. This would turn out to be the worst car he had ever worked on.

The project began in earnest in November of 2007 and Vass entered his Mustang in the Calgary World of Wheels in February of 2008 as a rolling shell to help promote his business and show what he could do.

After World of Wheels, Vass continued to work on the car for six months straight to get it to the stage you see here.

Body modifications are extensive, and begin with the Mustang being widened in the rear by using '70 Mach 1 quarter panels. The peaks of the rear fenders are 2 3/4 inches wider than the factory setup and the front end is narrowed by an inch. The nose is pressed down about an inch. The wheelbase was stretched about an 1 1/2 in the rear wheel section. A full frame is now under the car and the floor was raised an inch so it could sit lower. A '71 Mustang coupe race car donated front frame rails and the transmission tunnel. A '73 Mustang Mach 1 he's owned for 20 years also donated many parts, though there is plans for a rebuild of the Mach 1 someday.



The '71's bumpers are flush fit and custom contoured to match the body while belly pans were added front and rear. The taillights were custom made by Acrylic Concepts in Calgary and blink sequentially like the taillights of it's Mercury Cougar cousin.

The engine bay, firewall, shock towers, aprons and engine cover were all hand fabricated by Lyle. The engine and transmission were raised $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch for ground clearance. The door handles have been shaved and door locks, trunk lock and marker lights were removed for a clean look. The original hood hinges were turfed in favor of an under dash setup. The hood shocks came from an '80s Mustang hatchback.

The rear suspension is a custom built three-link setup Lyle designed and fabricated. The front suspension started out as parts from Total Control Products that were modified for air bags.

The Wheels are 18-inch Wheel Vintiques Magnum 500s with Mustang center caps. Tires are from BFG with 245/45's on the front and 275/40's on the rear.

The engine, although hidden by Vass's metal handiwork, sounds and performs as it should. It's a 351 Cleveland built up to an estimated 450 – 475 HP by Del at Deltech Automotive. The heads and intake are from Edelbrock. The carb is a Holley 750. Roller rockers were used. The compression ratio came out to 11:1 and the engine is balanced, ported, and polished. The ignition system is a Duraspark setup that Del modified to work with the engine setup. It's the only ignition setup they could get that would fit under the engine cover. Sanderson provided the block hugger headers. The 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ inch stainless exhaust system and the Flowmaster mufflers were installed by Vass during an all night thrash that lasted until 6 a.m. The exhaust exits from underneath the rear bumper through a '69 Shelby Mustang modified tailpipe setup. Shelby purists turn your eyes away!

The water pump needed to be a custom built reverse

flow unit so that the desired serpentine belt setup could be used. Vass had been warned not to stick with his choice of a T-5 transmission but after some searching on the net found Astro performance builds a bullet proof T-5 with straight cut gears that would fit the bill. A Lake-wood scatter shield and clutch finished off the trans needs. Out back sits a Ford 9-inch rear end narrowed two inches with a 2.70 posi.

The air bags are the ShockWave package from Air Ride Technologies. Ride height is controlled by a Dakota digital controller. Stopping this beast is taken care of by a custom built under dash brake system, a Baer disc brake setup in the front and a Ford Lincoln disc brakes in the rear.

All engine wiring and plumbing is hidden to continue with the clean look. Once all the bodywork modifications were completed it was time to lay on a little paint with stress on "little." Only the hood, trunk, side strips and under carriage were painted using black PPG sealer primer to continue the Boss theme. The rest of the body was treated to a Scotch-Bright polish down to bare steel so that all the body modifications are easy to see and appreciate. The interior is your basic stock setup except it was upgraded to a deluxe interior with a/c, power windows, cruise, 8-track radio, and a full gauge package.

To walk around Lyle's shop is mecca for metal gear-heads. He has an English wheel that was custom made to his specifications, a homebuilt planishing hammer, modified bead roller, and a power hammer. He also has a Pull Max machine that he found at auction and then modified to suit his needs. A lathe and milling machine are also on hand so he can make his own dies for his metal shaping tools. A louver press was under construction when CHRC visited his shop. Looks like the Mustang's going to get some louvers in the future! You can check out the before pictures of the Mustang and other projects at www.rod-snrestos.ca. See more pics at www.canadianhotrods.com.