

Jim Jennings' '32 Roadster

In 1960 several teens were huddled near Victoria High School when a red street rod rumbled by. "That's the ugliest thing I've ever seen!" exclaimed Jim Jennings from within the group. Ironically, three decades later Jim would rescue and restore that same roadster, which is quickly becoming an icon on the West Coast.

At the moment this '32 roadster sits in Jim Jennings' laneway in Victoria, BC. Jim first purchased it in 1992 when most of the body was chopped up in pieces and hanging in a garage. His intention was to build his own custom street rod, but destiny changed that when someone offered to trade his parts for a '34 Ford. Jim hesitated about trading for two reasons:

- A. Firstly, he already had a closed car. Secondly, he wondered if there was more to his car than he knew. "Why would someone want to trade a complete car for boxes of parts?" thought Jim. His intuition was rewarded in 2003 when his son-in-law received an envelope from friend Steve Salmon with of Jim's "Candy Apple" roadster in Hot-Rod Magazine (December 1960). "It was then that I knew all my previous work was going to be taken apart," he said. "I had to rebuild it the way it used to be in the '50's. So, basically, I was building it all over again for the second time. "Shortly after another friend remembered seeing Jim's rod in Car Craft magazine (November 1958). Intrigued by two articles in top US magazines, Jim started researching its journey and located many of the previous owners—all starting with Vancouver's Joe Mahovlic in grade 12. Jim has a picture of the car in 1950.
- B. When Joe bought it from his sister after completing the Hot Rodded '32, Joe's focus changed. Like most rodders in time, Joe began looking ahead to start a family and decided to sell his roadster to an eager youngster from Burnaby. At that same time two brothers also had an offer on the table, but it was not attractive enough, Joe added. However, that did not deter the brothers, Charles, and Wallace Robinson (aka Chuck and Whimpy), who immediately persuaded the young man to sell it to them a week later. Incidentally, Chuck worked with Joe at the same GM dealer's body shop from 1954 to 1956 where Chuck was the enamel painter (Bowell-McLean [Bow Mac] body shop on Burrard St.). It was the Robinsons who were responsible for this '32 earning the name 'Candy Apple', and here is that story.

Chuck, late in 1955 went to California and ran into Andy Brizio in a garage. A young girl entered with a shiny red apple on a stick and motioned that if they could paint a car that same colour, they would really have something. This was a challenge to Chuck who was a painter and sales rep for Ditzler Paint (now PPG) so he had the technicians mix the colour for him. Unfortunately, the colour was only close to the candy apple so, according to Jim Jennings, Chuck went to the corner store and purchased red food colouring, which he tossed into the mix to tint the paint. Jim suggested that is why the paint faded so much. (Similarly, and around that same time, customizer George Barris was creatively grinding up shiny fish scales to create pearlized paint jobs.)

At this point in the story, the current owner of Joe's '32 roadster, Jim Jennings of Victoria, fills in more details. Jim's research found that the third owners, Chuck and Whimpy, dismantled the car, swapped out the Studebaker mill and dropped in a brand new '56 Buick motor with a warmer cam. They showed and raced the roadster in the Pacific Northwest

(1956-57) and earned the Abbotsford Racetrack BCCCA Top Eliminator trophy (123 mph/13.1 seconds on October 6, 1957). Two more trophies were awarded at the Seafair Autorama (Seattle, 1957) for Best Hot Rod and Best Competition Roadster. A colour photo shows the roadster as it was displayed at Victoria's old curling rink (Tillicum, 1958).

The Robinson brothers kept their 'Candy Apple' '32 into the early 60s when Ray Bowerman of Port Alberni purchased it, Changed the colour to purple and raced it at Cobble Hill dragstrip, which was a rock haulage road nicknamed 'San Cobble' This is where the roadster was rumoured to have spun backwards into a rock wall. It was a few years after this that Jim first glimpsed the 'ugly' purple car that became a major part of his life decades later. While Jim was rebuilding the roadster, he found the rear corner was quite damaged, which helped him confirm this was the same rod. Jim heard from Ray Bowerman another story relating to the faded candy apple body. Ray said he was so anxious to pick up his roadster after he repainted it purple that he hurried over on a Saturday morning to bring it home and the next night that body shop burned down, which probably prevented Candy Apple's complete demise. If fire was not enough, after Ray sold the car, a Tsunami in lower Port Alberni (1964) flooded the area and the roadster sat in eight inches of salt water.

Gradually each owner thereafter would add, delete and modify the rod to reflect their own personality, including owners Romeo St Jacques, Bruce Adams, Lyle Kidd, and Bob Kapchinski before it started to fall apart and was sold to Barry Edwards who found the body and frame in a barn sometime in the late 60s. Barry used the frame in an engine hoist and traded the white upholstery with buttons and pleats for an English wheel. Barry sold the remaining body parts to Gordon Boyd in Victoria around 1989. In 1992 Jim Jennings bought the pieces from Gordon Boyd but the front axle had been sold and installed in a Model T in Port Alberni, he said.

Jim has researched the rod's early history by speaking with various owners, including Chuck Robinson who played a pivotal role in its racing history. It was in May 2008 that Jim Jennings had been invited to bring his 'Candy Apple' roadster to the Teen Town Dance and Car Show in Port Alberni after being contacted by Whimpy Robinson's nephew Larry Forrester. Larry was given trophies and photos of the Ford's early years after Whimpy passed away. Larry mentioned that Chuck Robinson was still living in Parksville at that time. Immediately Jim was on the phone. "Chuck was absolutely blown away," said Jim, who told Chuck he was coming to town. "And that's when Chuck mentioned that he still had the original registration and jokingly said he would like to have the car back!" Jim took photos of Chuck driving and posing in the car the way it appeared in Car Craft magazine (1958). "Chuck joked a lot," said Jim. "He liked the car better than when he owned it in 1956 and really didn't want to get out of the car!" Chuck passed away in mid-June 2013 but shared many great stories with Jim, which helped him piece together Candy Apple's history.

Like many previous owners, Jim added his personal touch to the roadster, but keeps newer elements low-key so 'they are not in your face'. He chose an original Ford banjo steering wheel on a Lime Works column but with infrared switches in the centre for the horn and eventually the wipers. He prefers a '33/'34 fibreglass Ford dash over the original flat style. While it has no radio, Jim still remounted the antennae on the passenger side to match the original rod. All the wiring was neatly installed by Dave Hopkins in Victoria. Jim added dog-dish hubcaps and anticipates adding wide whites to complete the period look. He changed the vintage top to create an 'Al Capone visor-look' over the windshield, which then slopes

back like the early boat-tail roadsters of the 30s, said Jim. "Now it looks like it's in motion all the time". The top and trunk upholstery were crafted by Dan Michaelis of Victoria Auto Upholstery. Another unique feature is the bellybutton rear window sourced from a Portland, Oregon swap meet. It's an original beveled glass and frame window (circa 1912) complete with patina and scratches. Jim had it etched by Charles Gabriel Glassworks in Victoria with scripted 'Ford' letters to complement his restoration: 'something old in the new. With no side glass in the roadster, the front vent windows can be angled as necessary to wind and rain, which Jim tested firsthand during a storm. He also installed narrower front and rear bumpers, which he will remove since Candy Apple originally had nerf bars. His son wants him to remove the fenders and running boards too but at this point Jim has no such plans. "I wanted full fenders as this is the 'wet coast', said Jim. "I wanted it to look as low as it did in 1958 and yet have headroom for a top, so I sectioned the frame to make the body lower."

To move the roadster along, Jim wanted to reinstall a Buick 'nailhead'. The motor is not the original from 1956, but many parts to build it were sourced from two Buicks (401 ci, 1961-1966 era), then bored .030 over. Jim laughs when he tells the Chevy guys it's now a 409, 'just to get their eyes rolling around in their head.' The narrow block of the early Buick V8 fits almost anywhere and is easy to work on, he said. "Even the cast iron manifolds fit like headers that tuck in cleanly between the rails," said Jim. "This allowed the original oil filter canister to attach in the right spot, something not often seen on conversions." Mounted to a thick aluminum firewall is a fuel pressure gauge but hidden from view is the coil, which resides neatly inside the cabin. He chose an aluminum firewall to match Joe's original rod and made it thick enough for self-tapping screws. He chose not to upgrade the points and condenser to electronic. A chrome custom alternator bracket attractively keeps the unit mounted high and out of the way. Each and every detail has been well thought out throughout Jim's build, including the vintage, polished aluminum finned "Edmonds scripted" valve covers. The horn came from a Fiat and an electric fuel pump resides in the rear. Jim's has no power steering because the cross-steer rack and pinion turns the roadster comfortably. Lejeune Performance & Fabricating in Victoria engineered the rolling chassis with an adjustable titanium torsion bar across the back to stiffen the ride. Disc brakes up front slow the momentum and coil over springs in all corners keep the ride both adjustable and smooth. The original chrome front axle is on a Model T hot-rod in Port Alberni. Jim mated the nailhead to a 700R4 automatic with electric overdrive that turns the Ford's posi-track 9-inch with 3:1 ratio. This time the tranny adapter plate came from Bendtsen's Transmission Centre in Minnesota.

At one point during this 10-year Jim became temporarily stumped' because the back below the trunk lid was missing. He later discovered the car was lowered with about two inches of sheet metal removed from the sides. Jim and his son Russell made a rotisserie to rebuild the steel body that had been cut into 12 pieces. By using 1935 Ford cowl patch-panels they were able to match the curving lines of the fenders. Since there were no patch-panels for the missing lower trunk area, they made templates from another '32 and flipped the dies for the right or left sides. Many other body mods were done to allow for the 2 ½ " dropped body, which is not channeled or sectioned, he said. Son Russell tack-welded the patch-panels, the new rear floor pan and sub-frame, and Richard Lejeune TIG welded the body together. Then Frank Alde of Coastal Performance Products custom built from fiberglass the '34 Ford dashboard with its two 4" TPI gauges and glove box, the fenders, running boards, grille shell and hood, which again was 3 ½" longer than stock. (Exactly like Joe's Candy Apple) He also completed the final fit and finish, including mixing and spraying custom paint. Frank and Jim worked for days trying to mix a color that would look like faded 'candy apple'. "Frank used

silver and gold metallic flecks in the red tones," explained Jim. "We tried to replicate a somewhat oxidized look. I guess you might call it Metallic Candy Cranberry now".







