

Project Fast Lane Part 6

HILL'S HOT RODS ASSEMBLES A BETTER BED WITH PRO'S PICK AND BE BOPS GLASS WORKS

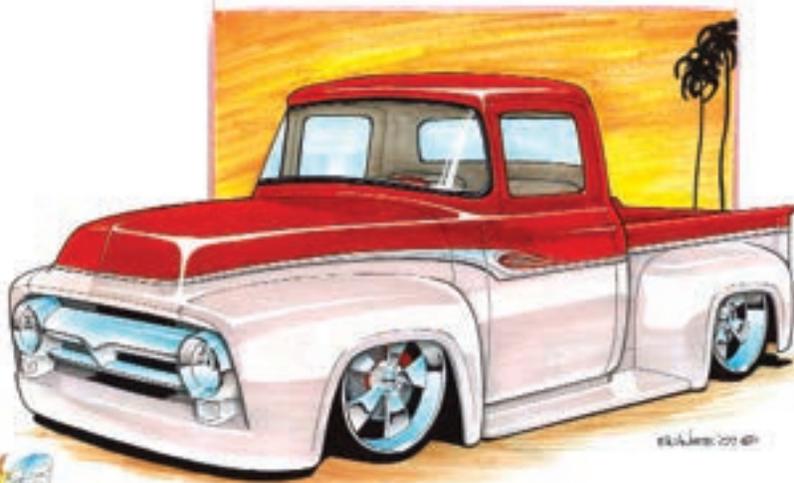
OLD SHEET METAL THAT IS IN DECENT CONDITION AND ABLE TO BE SAVED IS A RARITY THESE DAYS. Most of the good trucks are already spoken for or tucked away in barns where daylight never travels. When they are out of sight, generally they are also out of mind, and typically the property of some old farmer who would rather let the truck sit within the confines of a rickety old structure composed of termites holding hands than have his palms greased with a stack of hundreds and the truck hauled away.

We consider ourselves lucky to have found a mostly original 1956 Ford F-100 pickup with solid sheet metal worthy of saving. Like most projects of this vintage, the original bed was the largest problem area. Back in the days when

these old pickups were first produced people actually used them as trucks, putting the beds through torturous hauling, which resulted in massive dents and deep scratches that invited rust. Unfortunately, by the time enthusiasts get their hands on these trucks to build at the present time, the beds are so hammered that it takes a great deal of labor, time and cash to straighten them back out for use on a show truck.

Pro's Pick Engineering Components has the solution for an original battered bed with their 1956 Ford F-100 replacement custom bed. The box assembles easily and is a much cleaner version of the F-100 box, devoid of stake pocket openings and available with a smoothie tailgate kit for a truly custom look right out of the box. Supplied tailgate straps keep the tailgate fully functional, while a custom latch system with billet aluminum trigger release looks extra trick and high tech. To finish the bed off we opted for one of Pro's Pick's custom aluminum flush-mount tonneau covers, which will keep our custom bed looking great inside.

In addition to the original beds on these trucks being a problem, the fenders are usually pretty beat up as well. Ours were no exception. To remedy this issue we turned to the crew at Be Bop's Glass Works for a pair of their 3-inch wider custom fiberglass rear fenders. These were popped fresh from the mold and shipped to Hill's Hot Rods, where the bed was to be assembled. After we took inventory of all of the parts we got down to business at Hill's Hot Rods and assembled this smooth bed with new material from front to back. ■



Our Pro's Pick box is designed for the '53-'56 F-100, but Pro's Pick also has custom replacement beds for Ford trucks from '48-'72. The fresh steel and quality construction will save us tons of time in the bodywork department. Be Bops fiberglass fenders also cut down on the prep time and will allow us to run a large wheel and tire package with the 3-inch wider than stock structure.



Before beginning we laid out all of the parts included in the Pro's Pick bed kit. A bulkhead panel, two bed sides, three bed frame cross members, one rear cross member, and a smoothie tailgate were set up to start the job. Tools needed included 1/8, 5/16, 11/32, and 17/32-inch drill bits; a drill; 9/16, 1/2 and 7/16-inch wrenches; a tape measure; and a felt tipped marker.

The Be Bops Glass Works fiberglass fenders are a fresh start for our project by providing the room we need for the large wheel and tire combo we aim to run out back. They will never rust and will save us loads of time repairing the originals.



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With the fender mached up using a 20 x 10-inch wheel and tire combination (approximately 12 inches wide with tire mounted) as a base, we could see these fenders would provide ample room for our rolling stock. The tire specs were P275/35ZR20. This combination was 27.5 inches in overall diameter. The wider fender will allow for proper clearances of the rolling stock and will tuck a large amount of the wheel when the truck is laid out. We would never be able to accomplish this with the stock fender.



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The body guys at Hill's Hot Rods begin by mating the bulkhead and bedsides together. Since we are nowhere near ready to set the bed on the chassis and get it square, we will save welding the bulkhead in place for later.



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Using a set of clamps, the side panels and bulkhead were clamped together at the 1/2-inch returns on each end of the bulkhead. The returns are designed to fit inside the side panels. This will hold the assembly together until we can get it squared up and welded. We prefer to do this once the cab is back on the frame and we can accurately line everything up. You can either bolt the bulkhead and bedsides together, or weld it for a smoother look.



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Moving to the rear of the Pro's Pick box the X-member holding the tailgate hinges is secured to the bedsides. James and Brennan line everything up and proceed to install the hardware.



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As shown here the hardware threads through the inside of the rear X-member and into the pre-drilled and threaded holes on the lower rear corner at the inside of the bedside.



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A socket is used to crank the hardware in place.



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The hinge system is fed through the existing slits on the tailgate jamb and lined up with the hardware holes on each end of the tailgate.



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After matching the holes in the tailgate jamb up with the holes in the hinges, James runs the supplied hardware in position.

James assembles the Pro's Pick tailgate latch mechanism by following the instructions. The latch is a spring-loaded assembly that slides one way to unlatch and back the other way to lock into a mount secured to the bedside. It's pretty trick and certainly better than using a bolt to hold up the tailgate.

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Here is a close view of the Pro's Pick latch mechanism with its high tech aluminum knob, simple and effective.

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James installs the hardware, securing the tailgate strap fitting to the inside edge of the tailgate.

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Using the previously made markings, the strap is fully extended and the mounting hole is marked with a Sharpie.

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This threaded insert will be installed to secure the bedside end of the strap in position.

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The Pro's Pick X-members should all be marked with a tag to determine their position. It's never a bad idea to mark them with a felt tipped pen so you have a constant visual. Exact placement of the X-members in our case is not a definite at the moment since we will be building a custom, raised bed floor to accommodate our deeply notched frame. If you are installing on a stock F-100 chassis, follow the Pro's Pick instructions.

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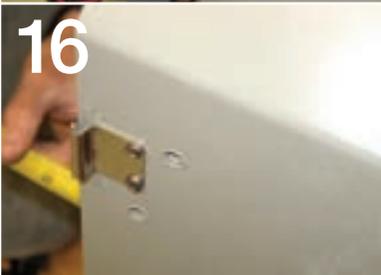


After closing the tailgate and deducing where the latch would need to be placed when the tailgate is closed for it to sit flush with the bed sides, James consults the Pro's Pick directions and mounts the latch pin brackets.

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Following the instructions for the smoothie tailgate, James measures from the back of the bedside panel inward to get a mounting location for the tailgate strap bracket.

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After the first measurement was taken, a straight edge was used to run a clean line up to the exact mounting point. Consult the instructions here for an exact measurement and placement.

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After installing the Pro's Pick tonneau cover mount at the bed's front panel, Jason lifts the custom aluminum tonneau cover in place as James negotiates it into the mounts. This is a quality piece and would look right at home on any classic.

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The Pro's Pick aluminum F-100 flush mount tonneau cover is lowered down to sit just below the bedrails completely disappearing when viewed from the side. The hot rod-styled aluminum cover will provide a secure home for cleaning products and other valuables at a show, while adding a finished look to the bed.

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Our completed Pro's Pick box capped off with the precision crafted Pro's Pick aluminum tonneau cover and custom 3-inch wider Be Bops Glass Works rear fenders looks stunning in raw form. Later, once everything is squared up, we will weld the bulkhead in place and drill the fenders for mounting. With the cab out being stripped and dipped we will be able to line everything up at a later date. Be sure to follow the Pro's Pick directions when mounting your bed because there is all kinds of information on squaring up the chassis. Take your time with the fitment.

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This is where we will leave you this month. Stay tuned because next month we will peel back 50 years of rust, filler and primer from the cab and leading edge sheet metal.

Sources

AIR RIDE TECHNOLOGIES

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