



Jack and Sherry Lelah show off their '46 Chevy flat bed during Hermosa's St. Patrick's Day parade. Photo by Ken Handman

VINTAGE Machines

A different kind of woody

by Ken Handman

There were a number of interesting vehicles in the Hermosa Beach St. Patrick's Day Parade. One was a '46 Chevy flat bed. This truck did not catch my attention for the usual reasons, such as its being a rare model or a beautiful hotrod. No, this vehicle grabs you in a different way, namely as a design concept for the business it represents.

Its most distinctive parts are the magnificent wood bed, the traditional two-tone paint and fabulous attention to detail. And to make it even more interesting, it is a daily driver.

Jack Lelah is the truck's owner and the proprietor of "Top Drawer," a custom woodworking shop on Ardmore Avenue in Hermosa Beach. His business, shop and power tools would make a memorable "Tool Time" TV show. Tim "The Tool Man" Taylor would go through extreme angst after casually stopping by Top Drawer when he hears that the place builds custom furniture. To say that Tim would be green with envy at Jack Lelah's level of craftsmanship would be a monumental (even for Tim) understatement.

The moment you walk in the place you know that it is a very different type of business. I have a deep and passionate interest in wooden boats and the legendary craftsmen who built them many years ago, and I will tell you that Jack Lelah's woodworking skills are among the best I have ever seen.

The difference is, Jack is only in his early 40s and the other craftsmen are long gone. Another thing about to look at in the shop is Jack's photo albums of original designs, many inspired by his wife Sherry.

To get back to the truck, Jack and his brother David rebuilt it eight years ago to very high standards. It has a stock six engine and makes that very distinctive, six-cylinder-sound that you hardly hear anymore. The interior is the original Spartan stuff that trucks had in the 40s and 50s. As I said earlier, the thing that draws you to the truck is its overall appropriateness to the task of supporting a one-of-a-kind business. And the main reason for that is the fabulous wood bed, side gates and other wood trim pieces.

If we continue the Tim Taylor theme, we have to mention the sailboat that Jack and Sherry live aboard in King Harbor. Can you just picture Tim talking about this guy he interviewed for the show? "He has this woodworking shop, lives on a sailboat, has a custom-built cabin in the mountains where he finished the interior and he drives the coolest work truck I every saw."

Tim would be particularly envious of the sailboat, a Falmouth Cutter, which is a rugged, cutter-rigged (similar to a sloop rig, except the mast is stepped half way between the bow and stern, instead of one third, two thirds) vessel of British origin. It has a fiberglass hull with a wonderful wood(are we surprised?)cabin and interior. There is a bowsprit and bumpkin fore and aft, which helps the little boat stretch its length to carry more sail. It is one of the best looking "traditional" boats around.

If you like fine craftsmanship, power tools, boats and fun vehicles, you have to look at Jack and Sherry Lelah and think that they are living a great life.

Jack will enter the truck again this year in the annual Project Touch Car Show, held each October at Clark Field in HB. The show will feature only American-made cars and trucks this year and will be better than ever. More about the show in future columns.

If you have an interesting car, boat, motorcycle or airplane, call me with some details (310) 379- 6319 or email khandman@gte.net. *ER*