

Built to Stay Tough

By Ron Henrich

Why not build a flatbed truck out of a Rampside? This is a story of how I did just that. Not just once, but twice. The first version is called "Flat Fred." The second one is owned by my brother, Bill, and is called "Flat Frank." Let's start with the story about "Flat Fred."

I purchased the 1962 Rampside in January 1980 from the local Chevrolet dealer. He was restoring another Rampside and had this one for parts. As it turned out, all he needed from this truck was the front bumper and brackets. In a minute he sold me what was left of the Rampside for only \$4.70 (the price of a title transfer in the State of Ohio). The appearance of this eyesore sitting on the side of his building probably convinced him to get rid of it so cheap.

It wasn't until October 1980 that work began. The weather was getting colder and I wanted to get some of the rotten sheet metal cut off before the snow set in. The engine had already been removed as had the rear suspension. The next step was to cut the remaining bed sides off. Everything was going fine. I almost had the left side cut into two, but I kept hearing strange noises from somewhere within the rusty hulk. I finished cutting the last several inches of the rear uni-body. To my surprise, there was no more engine compartment! The frame which goes up from the center of the floor at a 60° angle to attach to the engine compartment rails had collapsed on both sides.

After several days of sitting on a five gallon bucket trying to decide whether to forget the idea or not let a little thing like a frame transplant kill the project, I continued on. Stashed behind the barn was a '62 Corvan with a beautiful frame under it. Much of the exterior sheet metal had been removed from the van before I had purchased it from the junk yard. Off came the Rampside frame just behind the point where the seat belts bolt to the floor area. Now the cab is sitting with its front bumper still attached, but resting on the barn floor. The Corvan was cut at about the same place. Then the two halves were brought together for the welding (sort of like a wedding?—Ed.). After another long day with torch in hand the cab and frame were once again a unit. The rear suspension was re-installed and tires were mounted up. Now the Flatbed could be rolled around the shop and placed in storage for the rest of the winter. The next several months were spent taking measurements, making a few more drawings, and gathering the necessary parts to complete the project.

Late in the Summer of 1981, the drivetrain and brakes were installed in the rolling chassis. Now the Flatbed could be moved around the shop as needed. Also, it could make its first public appearance. Our club,

the Tri-State Corvair Club of Bryan, OH, has an event each year called "Scab Night." This is a competition for the worst looking Corvair in attendance (Note: The vehicle must be driveable—no trailed beaters allowed—Ed.). With no door glass, the entire lower section of the cab missing and the tail lights screwed on to the engine compartment frame, it had to be a shoe-in. Needless to say, the rest of the entries looked Mint compared to the condition of the Flatbed.

Work progressed slowly during the summer months. It always seemed like there was an event to go to on the weekends or there wasn't much time after a full day of work. Little by little, the detail work was completed and the Flatbed was ready for its first real showing at the Tri-State Corvair Show and Swap Meet in the Spring of 1983. It was an instant hit!



Between May 1, 1983 and October 1, 1983, the Flatbed, now with the nick-name "Flat Fred," had been driven over 11,000 miles. The big trip was out to Seattle, WA and the 1983 CORSA National Convention. We drove 48 hours from Ohio to Richland, WA. There we rested and picked over some rust-free cars that were headed for the crusher. The trip back to Ohio took 58 hours as the Flatbed was now loaded with 2,350 pounds of Corvair cargo and passengers. We were very pleased to find out that not only was the Flatbed fun to drive, it could also be used as a work horse.

My brother, Bill, liked "Flat Fred" so much that he wanted one for himself. During the construction of the first Flatbed, someone saw the idea, liked it, and started on his own. He got a good start, but soon realized how much work was going to be involved to complete the project and quickly lost interest. I picked up what was left and began work on Bill's truck. Boy, did the second one go easier than the first (Note: Ron told me that he had about 600 hours in this second truck!!!—Ed.). Work was started in January '84, mostly on Saturdays until the Second of July. Then we went full bore for 22 days out of the next 23, pushing for the deadline of July 25th and the National Convention in New Jersey. At 7:30 p.m. on July 25th, we called it a day for some well-deserved rest before starting out for Parsippany.

This second Flatbed, nick-named "Flat Frank" because during its construction it had so many of its exterior panels cut off and grafted back on that it looked like Frankenstein, has many refinements over "Flat Fred." More storage space under the bed was built into 'Frank.' A chrome rear bumper with built-in tail lights was used. The oak flooring on "Flat Fred" looks very impressive, but is very hard to keep looking nice when you use the truck everyday. We used 1/4" steel diamond plate for the bed of 'Frank.'

We left Ohio at 4 a.m., Thursday morning with only 33 miles on the completed Flatbed. The engine was a used 140 that was donated by a tired daily-driven '65 coupe. New seals and new paint on top and the engine was fine. We weren't sure if the transaxle was ready for the trip. All we did know was that the differential had all of the teeth in the right place.

The 1,200 mile round trip to New Jersey was made with little trouble. We lost one fan belt and the secondary carb linkage stuck open due to a misplaced spark plug wire. "Flat Frank" delivered around 20 MPG and "Flat Fred" pulled 22.7 MPG at 55-60 MPH. Both trucks represent a lot of hard work and long hours. Bill and I use our trucks. 'Fred' is the daily parts runner for my Repair Shop, *The Early Shop*, in Deshler, OH. Would I do it again? Give me a call after I've had a chance to rest up after the trip to New Jersey!

Specifications — "Flat Fred"

- 1962 Rampside/Flatbed
- 1961 4 speed truck trans
- Tinted Windshield
- Front bumper guards
- Oak floor and side rails
- Rally Wheels & Radial tires
- Deluxe Interior trim
- 1964 110 HP engine
- 1963 3.27 differential
- Ventshades
- Rear step bumper
- Tilt steering
- 25.5 Saddle gas tank
- Under bed storage

Specifications — "Flat Frank"

- 1962 Rampside/Flatbed
- 4 speed trans
- Dual master cylinder
- Sun Roof
- Rally wheels & Radial tires
- Deluxe Interior Trim
- 1965 140 HP engine
- 3.27 differential
- Spring loaded Vega Clutch
- 25.5 Saddle gas tank
- Full tinted glass
- Stewart-Warner Guages