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5<sup>th</sup> Annual Aeromotive NMRA Ford Nationals

**104 DELAYED GRATIFICATION**

18<sup>th</sup> Annual Peach State FFW Nationals



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**30 COVER  
STORY**

**BLOWN AND BLUE**

Tom Settle's S197 Mustang tackles the twisties, the track, and the gas station



# MODER

AND



Story by **Geoff Stunkard**  
Photos by **Geoff and John Stunkard**

# RN ART

## *SHOOTING STARS*

**CRUISING, CORNERING, AND CRAFT**  
CAME TOGETHER IN STEVE CARTER'S '65 COMET





## MODERN ART AND SHOOTING STARS

STEVE CARTER'S '65 COMET CALIENTE HARDTOP

**T**he modern era of street machining, it seems, has developed into three basic categories. One is full-tile OEM restoration, though in many respects the cost and perfection of such projects is often only reserved for the rarest examples. The second is Pro Touring, the process of taking classic Detroit iron and converting it into a 21st-century equivalent in terms of driveline, suspension, and comfort technology. The third is what so many of us grew up with and remain involved in—personal touches that make the car our own. Steve Carter has chosen category number three.

### PERFORMANCE PATH

Carter, who operates a shop called Carter Kustoms in Brentwood, Tennessee, ([www.carterkustom.com](http://www.carterkustom.com)) owns the '65 Comet seen here. This was the second year the Comet was a threat on the dragstrip, and guys such as the late Dyno Don Nicholson, Eddie Scharman, and others raced into the history books in 427ci A/FX and 289ci B/FX models. On the street, the Comet was appreciated for its styling, but horsepower was not its strong suit. In fact, it was that crisp styling that drew Carter to this machine, and he then began the upgrades to make a serious street and track runner out of it.

Buying the car in rough but basically street-legal condition, the build started in 1993, and Steve spent four years on

it. To some extent, the plan was to make it into a statement for his business, but it was going to be his weekend wheels as well—something that could be driven, thrashed on, and enjoyed. To that end, he began with the basics: changes to the chassis and suspension that would help take on whatever abuse he might eventually decide to give it.

### STEVE INSTALLED A REAL TWIN-FOUR '60s-ERA COBRA INTAKE FROM HIS PARTS COLLECTION TOPPED BY TWO CARTER 500 CARBS AND A CUSTOM-HAMMERED AIRBOX THAT USES A FLAT FILTER OVER THE CARB THROATS

Martz Chassis 2x3 channel pieces tied the car together with a road-race-style front frame, which also added the rack-and-pinion steering. A set of replacement front disc brakes off a Chevrolet went under the front end. The rear is assisted by a set of traction bars and NASCAR-style shocks, though the drums back there proved to be enough to help slow the car,

which weighs only about 2,700 pounds sans driver. To keep with a vintage theme, American Racing wheels are on all four corners, though they're fully polished and 17 inches tall. The tires are Bridgestone Potenza, P215/40R17 front and P245/40R17 in the rear.

After prepping for paint and removing the door handles for a smooth look, Steve shot the panels in a DuPont turquoise mix. This included coloring in the rear panel and taillight bezels for a custom stealth appearance. Against this hue were added subtle silver flames that really only become evident when giving the car a second look; it appears that the fire is literally stripping the car down to bare metal. The raw hardtop Comet design lends itself well to the semi-custom rod theme.



## MODERN ART AND SHOOTING STARS

STEVE CARTER'S '65 COMET CALIENTE HARDTOP

Inside, seats from an '87 Mazda offer great cruising support and a Grant steering wheel gives solid road feel. Chromed skulls adorn the shifter (which is on a modified floorpan due to the transmission), door locks, and cigarette lighter. On a more serious note is the Auto Meter tach and stock gauges. This is a machine that gets driven regularly. If it looks a little used inside, it's only because we didn't give Steve a lot of time to vacuum it out!

### PUMPED UP

He decided to stick with the 289 engine that came new in the car, dicing it up to a dyno-proven 320 ponies. This included replacement 10:1 TRW pistons and a balanced bottom end, courtesy of the now-defunct LA High Performance. Into this went a streetable hydraulic 0.500-inch lift/280-degree Comp cam kit, which included Comp roller rockers and a roller timing set. To keep the air moving, Steve installed a real twin-four '60s-era Cobra intake from his parts collection topped by two Carter 500 carbs and a custom-hammered airbox that uses a flat filter over the carb throats. These feed the explosive air/fuel mixture to the pistons through a set of aluminum Edelbrock heads. Hooker headers and a full exhaust that dumps just behind the rear wheels finish it out.



### THE DETAILS

Steve Carter's '65 Comet Caliente Hardtop

#### ENGINE

289ci small-block Ford (293ci now)  
4.030-inch bore  
2.87-inch stroke  
TRW 10:1 pistons  
Cobra intake  
Twin 500-cfm Carter AFBs  
Edelbrock Performer 5.0 heads  
Comp Cam hydraulic flat-tappet cam,  
0.500-inch lift/280-degree  
MSD Ignition

#### TRANSMISSION

Tremec T-5 five-speed  
McCloud clutch

#### REAR END

Stock Ford 8-inch  
3.25 gears

#### EXHAUST

Hooker headers  
2½-inch dual exhaust tubing  
Flowmaster mufflers

#### SUSPENSION

Front: Martz front frame clip with new A-arms, shocks, and rack-and-pinion steering  
Rear: Leafsprings, NASCAR-style shocks, traction bars, and custom antisway bar

#### BRAKES

Front: 11-inch rotors with GM calipers  
Rear: Rebuilt factory drums

#### WHEELS

Front: American Racing Torque Thrust II, 17x8  
Rear: American Racing Torque Thrust II, 17x8

#### TIRES

Front: Bridgestone Potenza, P215/40R17  
Rear: Bridgestone Potenza, P245/40R17

#### INTERIOR

Grant steering wheel, low-back seats from an '87 Mazda, Auto Meter tach

#### EXTERIOR

Shaved door handles, most trim removed; silver painted flames over DuPont blue base paint



## MODERN ART AND SHOOTING STARS

STEVE CARTER'S '65 COMET CALIENTE HARDTOP

Behind the engine is a Tremec T-5 five-speed coupled to a McLeod clutch, which is the major reason that the floorpans were altered. Out back is a stock Ford 8-inch peg-leg housing with a 3.25 gear.

We caught up with Steve at the YearOne Experience at Road Atlanta a few months ago. This event let him try his hand at a variety of courses, including the road course (where the lack of a rollcage prevented him from really screaming down the front stretch). As the photos show, this car was meant to be driven and has some battle scars on the suspension. Seeing this thing in action is a tribute to the era when Comets really did fly. **MMP**



SEEING THIS THING IN ACTION IS  
**A TRIBUTE TO THE ERA WHEN  
COMETS REALLY DID FLY**

