

# ROAD TEST: TRANS AM

# CARS

PERFORMANCE & CUSTOM MONTHLY magazine

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**7 TRANS AM  
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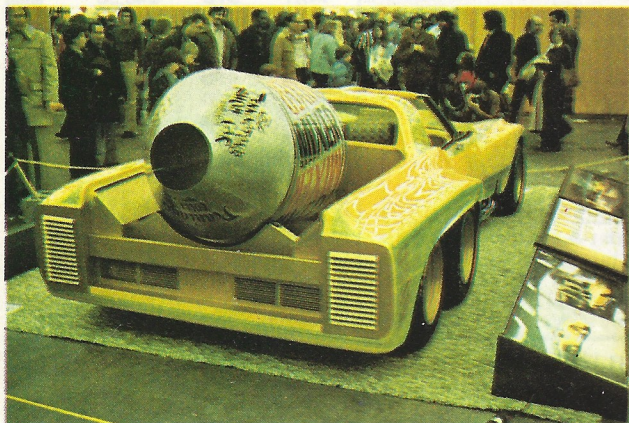


**CARS 13th ANNUAL NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS**



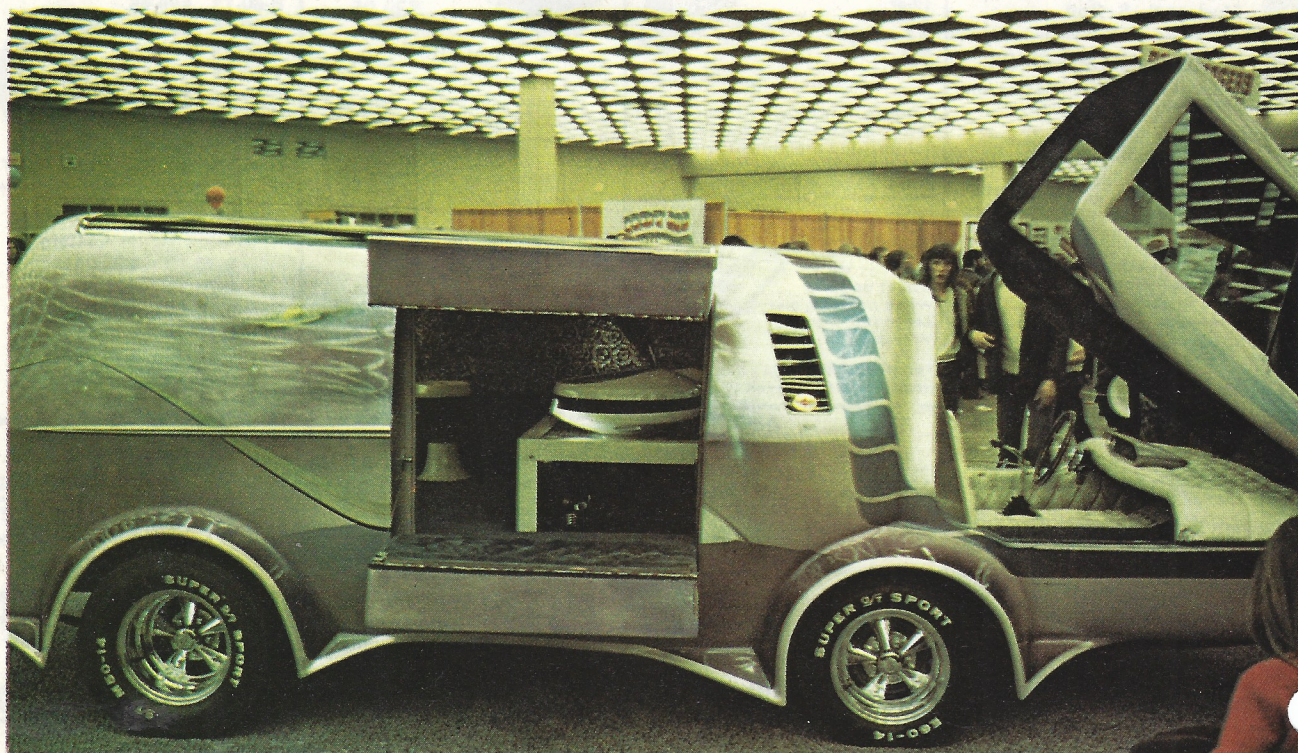
# MOTOWN ON DISPLAY

A trip through Detroit's two big auto shows; one outrageous, one disappointing



For quick-setting cement, call the "Mixer"—Pennington Collision's strange tandem rear axle custom Corvette.

This \$40,000 experimental road car with an aluminum nose and fiberglass body is called "Indy Coupe," designed by Herb Grasse.



This is the wildest custom van we've seen! Darri Starbird's "Vantasta" has four chairs, tables, stereo and color TV stashed inside its hand-formed body. It's motivated by a Chevy engine which develops 500 horsepower.



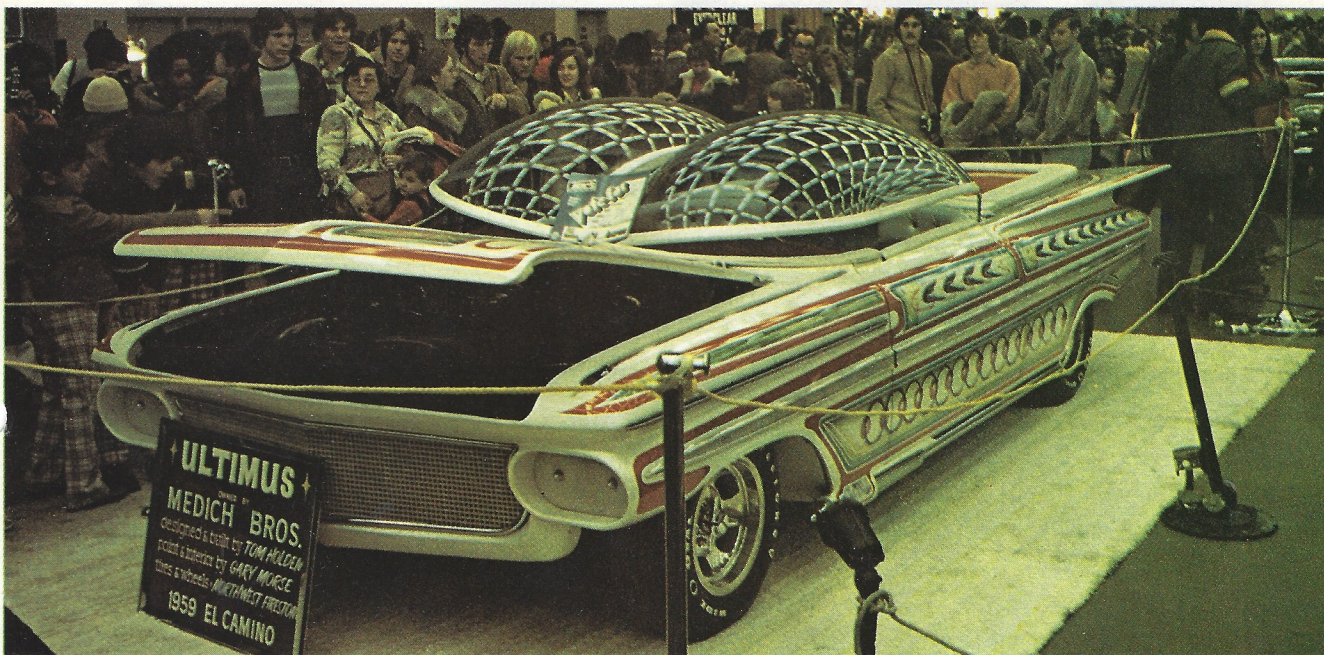
BY GARY WITZENBURG

**T**HE SEASONS ARE OUT OF SYNC in lower Michigan. November thinks it's September and May acts more like March, but by the time January rolls around, there's no question that the miserable Great Lakes winter is in command. January in Detroit has to be one of the worst combinations of times and places in the known world.

But there is one reason for rejoicing in Motor City even in the depths of winter—if you happen to be a car freak. January means Autorama, the happening for which enthusiasts all over the area crawl out from under the snow for at least a one-day's jaunt to Detroit's Cobo Hall.

Autorama is billed as the largest show of its kind in the world, and it's Cobo Hall's all-time daily attendance record-holder, according to its promoters. (We can believe it, having bucked the crowd trying to take these pictures on a Saturday afternoon.)

For '76 the show ran January 2-4 and featured more than 400 custom cars, antiques, vans, hot rods and classics, plus several particularly interesting and unusual vehicles: "Indy Coupe," a \$40,000 experimental highway car built on a Can-Am Lola race car chassis; "Kop Kar," a 600-hp blown and fuel-injected police cruiser funny car; "Vantasta," a futuristic 500 hp mid-engine van-like creation; the "Solid Gold Cadillac,"



The Medich Brothers' bubble-topped "Ultimus" is based on a '59 Chevy El Camino.

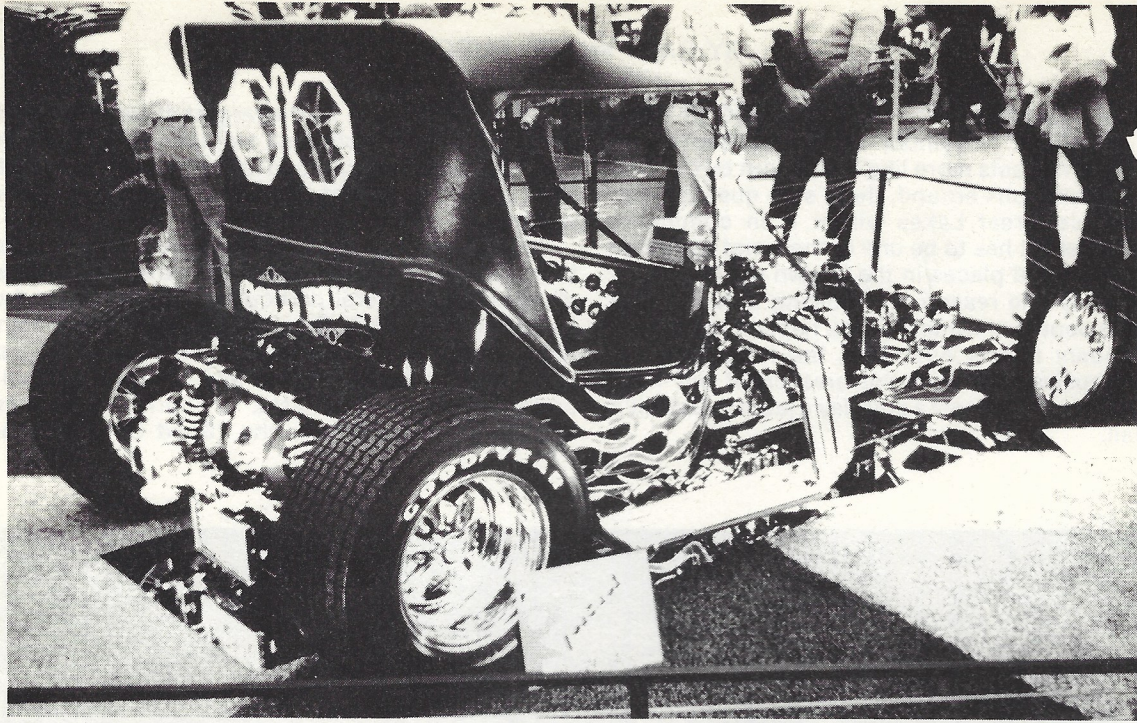


Sharp curves on this custom pool table called the "Hustler" put a mean spin on the ball!

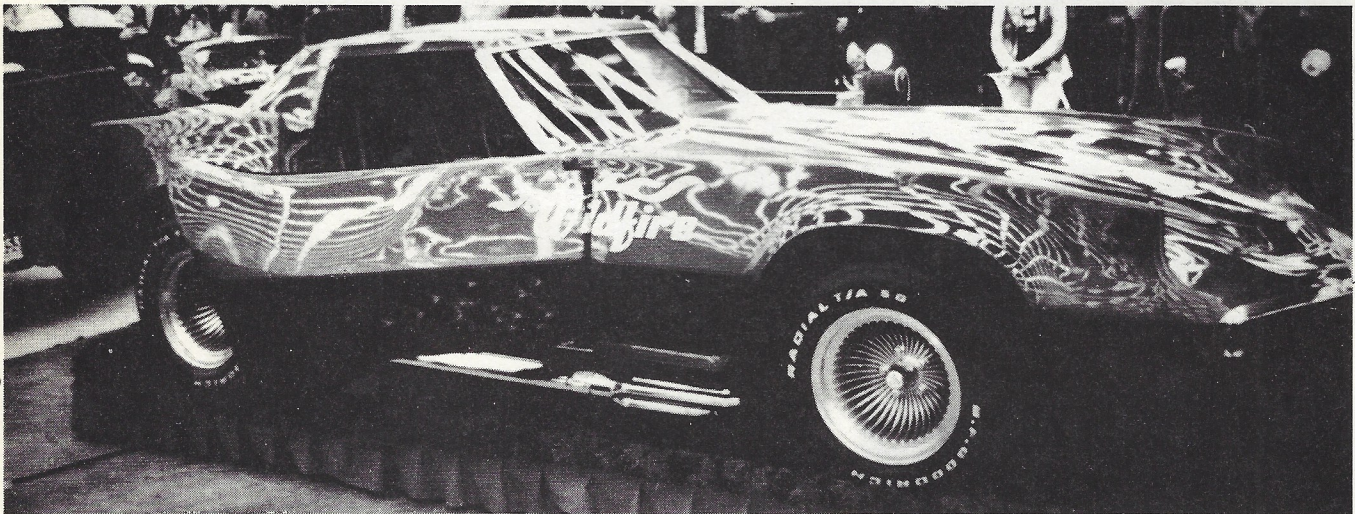


This beautiful racer-like winged "Disco" is based on a '25 Ford and gets its power from a glistening turbocharged '69 Chevy 409 bored to 440 cubes.





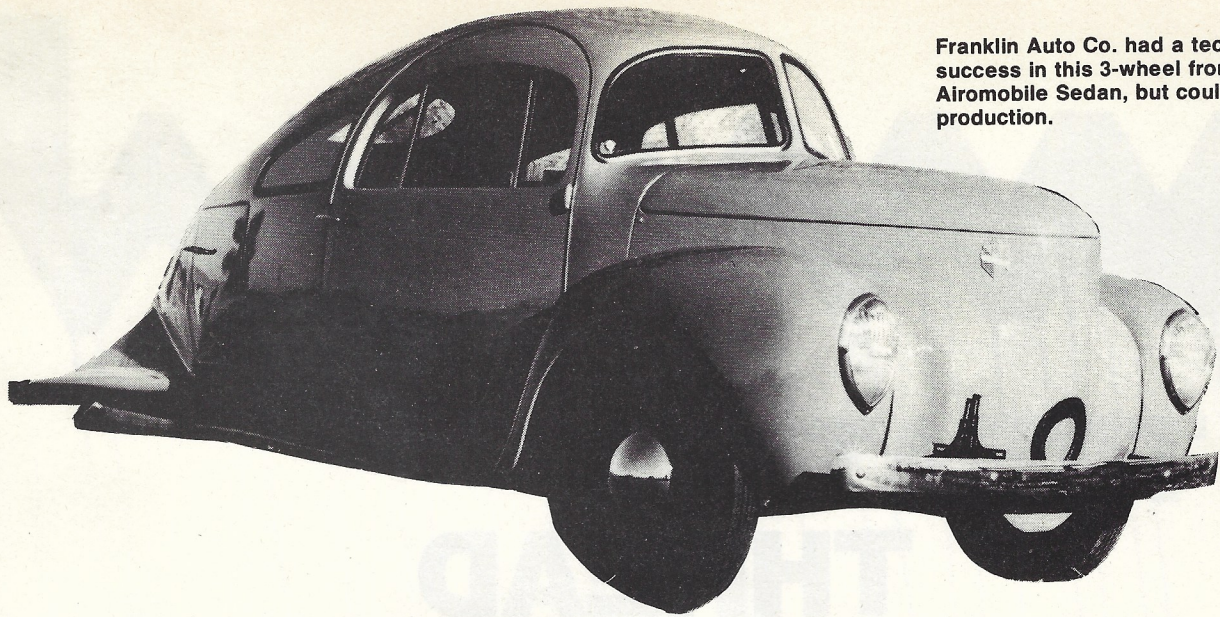
Russ, Bill and Tim Cole own this fine brass-trimmed '15 Model T Ford rod with a modern 302 Ford plant. Below is "Wildfire," the luxu-car custom Corvette put together by Pennington Collision of Troy, Michigan.



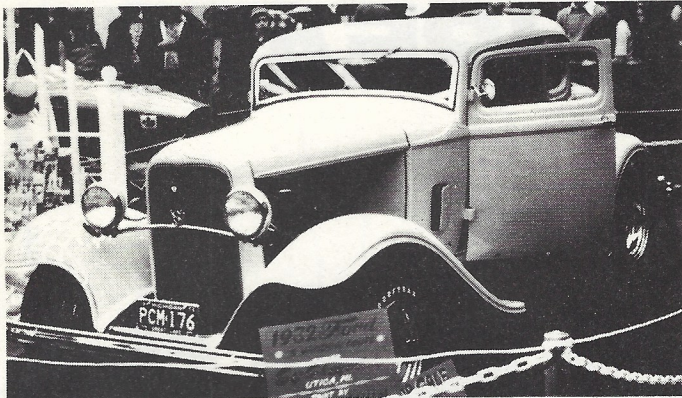
The 1938 "Phantom Corsair" designed by Rust Heinz was at the Detroit Auto Show. Featuring aerodynamic engineering, airplane cockpit instrumentation including altimeter, barometer and compass, it seats four in the front seat and two in the back facing the rear.



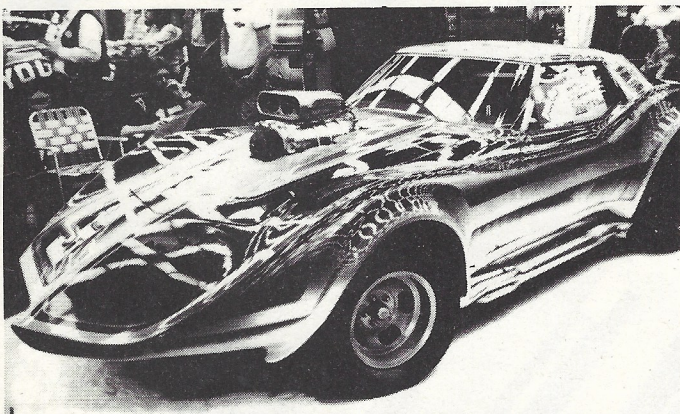




Franklin Auto Co. had a technical success in this 3-wheel front drive '37 Airmobile Sedan, but couldn't finance production.



This is Sy Gregorich's classy chopped '32 Ford 5-window coupe.



This eye-catching rainbow-striped supercharged Corvette has a unique asymmetrical design from the nose on back.

title of a '50s comedy movie but also an automotive reality on display at Cobo Hall.

Visitors not excited by such mundane machinery might be interested in the hoopla instead: the chopped 1950 Mercury from *Happy Days*; Fonzie's motorcycle; Batman and Robin (in the flesh) to sign programs and show off their Batcycle; stuntman Joe Gerlach to demonstrate his one-wheeled vehicle that rotates around its driver; rock-n-roller Chubby Checker and much more.

It's quite a show, and a momentary break from the grip of winter.

On the other end of the excitement scale from Autorama is the lackluster Detroit Auto Show, a 4-wheeled, rubber-tired, chromed and stripped automotive bore, which also manages somehow to set new attendance records in good times and bad, year after year.

The trick at the Auto Show is to try to ignore the fact that for over a solid week Cobo Hall is transformed into one huge showroom and every second body you bump into is trying to sell you something, usually a car. From the plastic hubcaps on the cars to the plastic models on the platforms, the whole thing is a great big mind-boggling commercial.

So you wander through the jungle of plain-Jane Ma-and-Pa machines looking for something interesting—and it's there if you look hard enough: Chevy's trick Cosworth-powered Monza Super Spyder II show-and-go car; Pontiac's lovely Blue-Bird interpretation of the Firebird Formula; Buick's turbo-V-6 Century Indy pace car; Ford of England's flared-and-spoilered Capri R/S; British Leyland's V-12 Jaguar SCCA racer; Chrysler's aging-but-timely turbine car; Dodge's Street Van and Chevy's 4WD "Biker" pickup. It's all there if you look.

There was also some special-interest iron this year, the bulk of which was on loan from Harrah's auto collection in Reno, NV.; such as the '37 Airmobile 3-wheeler Sedan and the sleek '38 Phantom Corsair—both experiments that never made it into production.

But perhaps the highlight of the Jan. 10-18 show came with the introductory press conference given by Pontiac, when Alex Mair, the division's general manager, predicted a minor performance rebirth. "I think the American car-buyer is about to return to the day when buying—and especially driving—a car is fun," said he. "America's proverbial love affair with the automobile will return—if indeed it ever went anywhere."

Right on, Alex!