

POSITIVE CAMBER

By: Gerry Burger

Herein We Expose the Details of Dana Red

THE DETAILS! Those are the elusive touches that, while minor when singled out, can collectively catapult your car from the mundane to the insane state-of-the-art hot rod we see today. From the "nice car ya got there, buddy" to "damn, whatta rod."

We say these details are elusive because not everyone seems to be able to see the potential in excellent workmanship and design in the more obscure areas of a hot rod. And, like many things, what was once considered super detailed is now standard, which in turn raises the bar yet a notch higher. The real trick is to build a car with outrageous detail, thought and design while the car still remains driveable. It is all too easy to fall prey to the "build it until you can't drive it" syndrome. Pushed to its limit, you can actually build the "anti-car," a piece that, while it appears to be an automobile, is actually not capable of providing transportation.

Here at STREET ROD BUILDER, we spend a lot of time on the details. You see, finding out what makes a car "work" is not only our specialty, it's our job. Much like the builders who perform the work, it takes a keen eye to pick out these extraordinary details and pass them along to our readers.

All of this talk about details brought about some reflection on when street rodding began to be elevated to this high level. No doubt ever since the first few hot rods and race cars were built, there have been varying degrees of craftsmanship and design. Some good, a few great, and then there are those that just plain missed the mark. If we limit this discussion on detailing to what might be referred to as the "modern

era" of street rodding (think street rodding rebirth of 1970 and later), we come up with some of the same names every time. People who pushed the envelope, built cars with timeless design and a level of workmanship that still turns heads 30 years later. Names like Brizio, Buttera, Coddington, Dana, Ewing, Fenical, Lobeck, Pete & Jake, and others. In the '70s, these people made their mark by building great cars for themselves. Soon after, most would become full-time builders of hot rods.

While the above list is by no means all-inclusive, there is one name that for me is synonymous with details. Henry Dana was a man who could take a car we had all seen thousands of times and elevate it to a level never seen before. While other builders would amaze you with their prowess on a milling machine or fabricating entire frames, Dana (along with his former wife, Nancy) would quietly assemble a flawless automobile using fewer modifications, but with more details. It was his ability to assemble a pile of parts in such a precise manner that made his cars stand head and shoulders above the crowd. And then there was The Color.

In 1979, Dana would take a Deuce 3-window with a stock top, hood, cowl lights, bumpers, running boards, grille shell, windshield frame, door handles and bumpers and assemble it from the ground up in such a fashion that it literally stunned people at that year's Street Rod Nationals (and for the record, it was driven there). The fit of the car, the attention to detail, was so flawless that you could study the car for hours. Everything from the equal spacing of the tie-wraps on the wires to the selection of polished stainless steel hard-

ware and the unbelievable panel fit, it was all meticulously assembled. It defied mathematics by becoming more than the sum of its parts. A Dana car would be entirely (and we do mean entirely) assembled in finished primer, complete with a layer of masking tape on all door edges to simulate paint thickness. Then the car was dismantled, painted, polished and reassembled. It took over 2,000 hours for Dana to assemble that car (roughly one man working 40 hours a week for one year). It showed, and then there was The Color.

One of the things that made street rodding in the '70s and early '80s fun was that new builders were emerging, and with them came building secrets and new ideas. Most of these secrets didn't last long, as others would simply copy them or the original designers would mass-market the pieces (which went a long way toward eliminating any secrecy), but not The Color.

While we can expound on the high quality of craftsmanship on the Dana Deuce, we would be remiss were we not to credit The Color. In the '70s and early '80s, Porsche India Red was "the color," considered to be the ultimate in the red spectrum. When the Dana coupe rolled into the Nationals that year, the bright red color was the talk of the fairgrounds. "Have you seen that RED 3-window?" echoed in every group of hot rodders.

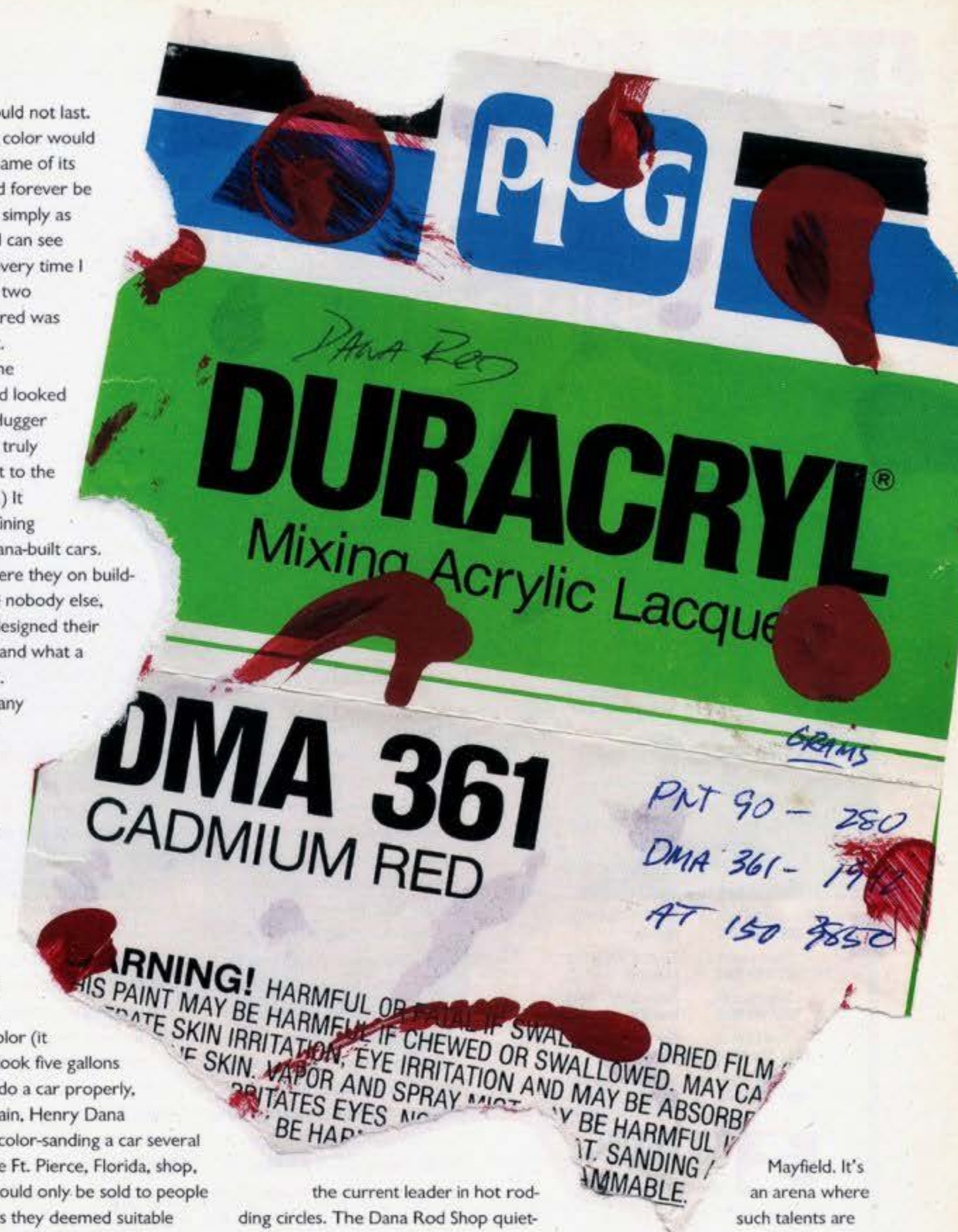
The red they were referring to was a custom mix developed by the Danas by simply mixing tints until they had an awesome red. Rumor had it there was some purple in the paint; others insisted it was a form of candy paint. Dana originally called the color Electric Red,

but that would not last. Rather, the color would adopt the name of its founder and forever be referred to simply as Dana Red. I can see that color every time I utter those two words; the red was that vibrant. Suddenly, the Porsche Red looked more like Hugger Red (it was truly orange next to the Dana color.) It was the defining detail on Dana-built cars. So intent were they on building cars like nobody else, they even designed their own color, and what a color it was.

Now, many secrets just don't last, but Dana Red remained a mystery and the subject of much speculation. While they would

apply the color (it was said it took five gallons of color to do a car properly, but then again, Henry Dana believed in color-sanding a car several times) in the Ft. Pierce, Florida, shop, the color would only be sold to people building cars they deemed suitable (read that of high enough caliber) to wear Dana Red. It was marketing genius not driven by marketing, but by a desire to keep the perfect red on a limited number of proper cars.

Over the years, new pigments have come a long way, and Porsche India Red has been replaced by Viper Red,



the current leader in hot rodding circles. The Dana Rod Shop quietly closed its doors in the '90s, and Henry Dana moved to North Carolina to apply his considerable talents as a fabricator to the world of NASCAR racing. Currently working at Penske Racing, Dana brings his eye for meticulous detail and craftsmanship to the race cars of Rusty Wallace and Jeremy

Mayfield. It's an arena where such talents are appreciated.

After several years without a street rod (although Dana did the bulk of the work on Rusty Wallace's '33 coupe), Dana decided it was time for another street rod. This time it would be basic, simple and painted "plain-ass red." The Dana color would not be applied to