

# TOM DANIEL AND HIS ARTWORK

ROD & CUSTOM'S SKETCHPAD ARTIST FROM THE OLD DAYS

By Don Emmons • PHOTOGRAPHER DON EMMONS



Tom has long been fascinated with the steam-powered train era, and has painted many "iron horses" over the years. This one is called "Blowin Down," a very nice watercolor he painted back in 1980. It's a stem locomotive that was used on the narrow gauge railroad that ran along the Eastern Sierra Nevada mountain range. That train is in display in Sparks, Nevada. Tom produced prints on this one, and says that it's still a good seller 20 years later.

Tom Daniel grew up in Southern California, a perfect place for a teenager with a fascination for cars and the ability to draw them. Similar to many young fellows, he was always penciling anywhere there was an open space—book covers, textbook margins, assignment papers, and any plain piece of paper he could find. Tom loved cars, so drawing his version of what he thought to be cool cars came naturally. That was the early '50s, and several top custom and rod shops were within a short distance of his Huntington Park home, including the Barris Brothers, Bill Hines, Gaylord, Jeffries, Junior's House



This 20x30-inch painting of a super smoothie '39 Ford phaeton with a Carson top really looks sharp. Tom did a number of automotive paintings that were featured in the Hot Rod Show in the lobby at the '91 SEMA show.

How many car owners are fortunate enough to have their vehicles featured on a magazine cover—much less several in one year? Tom Daniel's artwork graced three covers in '65. A wild T-bucket was the single image for the January issue. The June issue shows Tom's version of a custom Model A woodie. This showstopper would fit in right now as the new millennium woodie. The radical '32 coupe on September's cover would be center stage at today's car show. In the corner of the June '67 issue is Tom's rendering of R&C's "Volksrod" project. One of Tom's restyling ideas for the new '67 Camaro was found on the January '67 cover.



Here's a Daniel rendering that made it to one of street rodding's most recognizable Track Ts. Tom was given the assignment for the January '73 issue to design some different Track Ts around an early '70s Datsun running gear. Their thought was that the overhead fourcylinder powerplant would fit easily under the hood of a street rod T roadster. Well, Tom Prufer liked the drawing so much that the nearly duplicated the car, less the fender portion of the original design. According to the fanfare in the rod magazines, it remains one of the most attractive "Trackers" ever built.

of Colors, Cernies shop, and Chrisman's garage to name a few. He was intrigued with what they were building, and sometimes the shops would even let him hang out when they noticed that he was drawing their project. He became known as "that kid who's always drawing cars."



Well, it never stopped. Tom still draws cars and has made his living doing it all of his adult life. Tom took all the art classes in high school that he could, and lucky for him, an art teacher also like cars and recognized his potential. During his junior year, the students went on a field trip to Art Center College, a well-known school of automotive design in Southern California. Tom learned that automotive manufacturers recruit design staff people from that school. One trip there, and young Tom wanted to

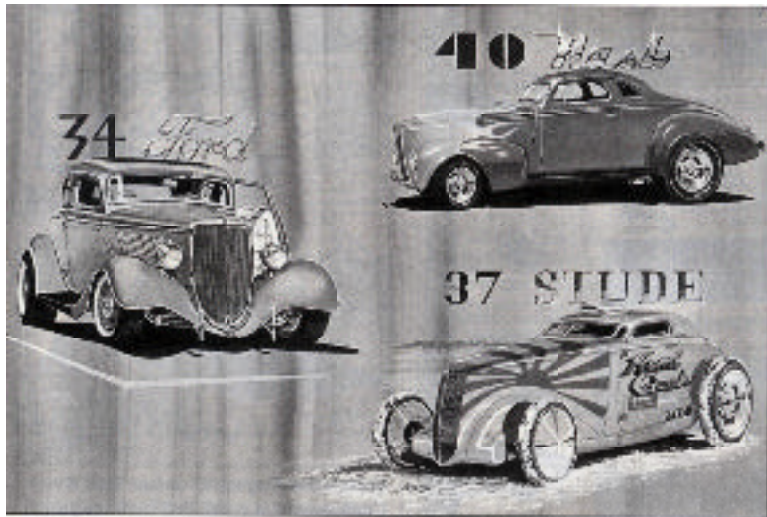
attend Art Center College one way or another—however, the school required a four-year college diploma and an exceptional portfolio to be considered for acceptance. Tom's high school teacher insisted that he should assemble and submit a portfolio midway through his senior year. After seeing his exceptional work, Art Center accepted him without the college requirement.

It was one thing to be accepted into Art Center (currently Art Center College of Design) and another to remain in the very rigorous school both productively and financially. Tom had

to work a side job just to afford it. His luck was running at full speed when he met another student who was doing freelance work for a couple of magazines owned by Petersen Publishing Company. Tom made an appointment



Creating alternative designs for early model cars in the *R&C Sketchpad* led to a long association with Monogram Models. Over the years, Monogram produced more than 75 models of some way-out Tom Daniel designs, and even now, Tom is conjuring up more wild ideas for the plastic kit builders. There's a group of hardcore model kit collectors who search out all of the early Tom Daniel model kits. Some unopened kits sport a healthy price tag.



In early '73 *R&C* Editor Bud Bryan asked Tom if he would do a piece for the May '73 issue on the 20th Anniversary of the *Sketchpad*. Tom was free to choose the three cars as long as one was a "traditional Ford hot rod" with a primer paint job. He was told to make one a salt flats car (how about a Stude coupe?) then finished up with an early '40s non-Ford street runner. Do it up bright, as it will be a two-page color spread. The '34 Ford's top was chopped, and the car was finished off in gray primer. The '40 Nash also had its top lowered and was given a nice smoothie treatment. The '37 Studebaker came out as a neat-looking Booneville machine. Tom's drawings look as if they could have just run today instead of some 25 years ago. This is the original acrylic painting.



While Tom had his gallery in Sedona, Arizona, he painted several different subjects to add more variety to the display walls. He did a series of '30s aircraft. He still owns this one, and it shares a spot on his studio wall today. It's the Grable Brothers R2 Gee Bee racer.



Tom was asked to do an illustration for the 20th Anniversary of *R&C's Sketchpad*. He penned this self-portrait sitting at the drawing board thinking back over the years. On the drawing board is the first *Sketchpad* he created back in '59. It's ironic that he incorporated into the drawing his career span as "1959 to 19???"—and here in 2000, he's back in *R&C*.



Here are two early Tom Daniel drawings that became the basis for full-size show vehicles. Barris built the "Surf Woodie" after seeing it in a *Sketchpad* layout done in the February '64 issue of *R&C*. George jumped on the design and had the car built in time to be on the November '64 cover.

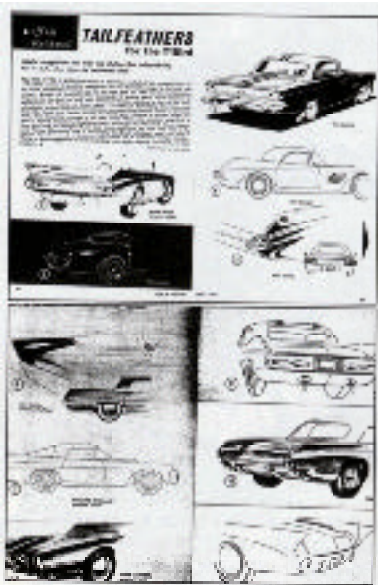
with Lynn Wineland, art director of *Rod & Custom* magazine. Lynn gave Tom an assignment using a '49 Ford to illustrate first as a basic Southern California cruiser, and work it into an all-out streamlined salt flats racer. Lynn liked what he saw, and decided that *R&C* had its new Sketchpad artist. Over several issues, *R&C* had been restyling an early T-bird, and readers were sending in ideas for the project. It was time to rework the rear portion, so Lynn gave Tom the assignment to incorporate readers' ideas into professional style artwork for an upcoming

Sketchpad. That Sketchpad appeared in the May '59 issue and "Art Work by Tom Daniel" (for a period his byline was Eugene T. Daniel) graced the pages of *R&C* for years. The Sketchpad is a regular feature that continues today.

After graduation, General Motors recruited Tom. He moved to Detroit and began working with the Advance Design Department, where he remained the entire tenure with GM. Being a born and raised Californian,

Tom had a problem with Michigan winters, so he left GM and headed back to sunny Southern California. His job as a design engineer was a good credential, which helped him to pick up several clients right away to help develop their products. He continued to work with *R&C*, not only on the Sketchpad, but on other layouts as well.

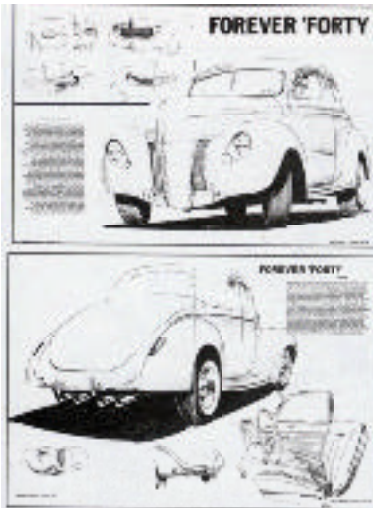
In the early '60s, model car building was so popular that *R&C* devoted much of its editorial space to various model-related articles. Some issues



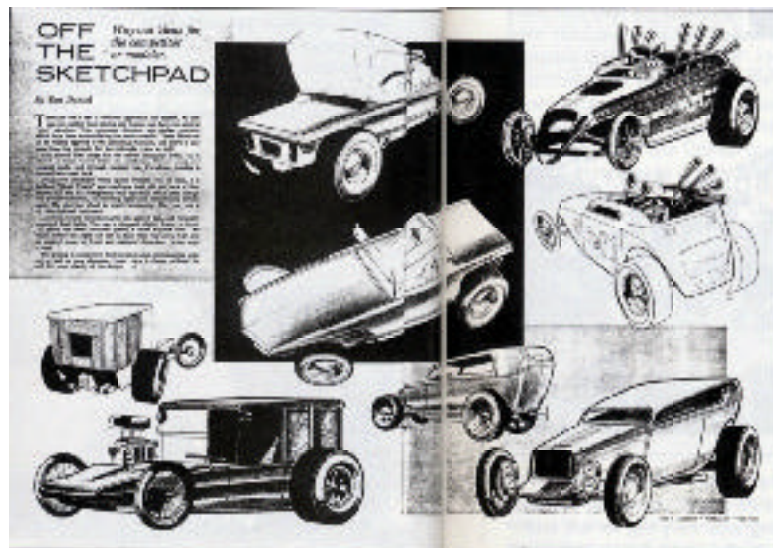
In '58 and early '59, *R&C* editors were using the Sketchpad to restyle a '56 T-bird with help from readers who sent in ideas. Tom took some of those ideas and combined them with some of his own for the May '59 issue.



Gary Gabelich held the World's Land-Speed Record at 622.407 mph for more than 10 years in his rocket-powered LSR vehicle, the "Blue Flame." Tom and Gary teamed up for his try at recapturing the record. Tom worked on the design for over half a decade before the team settled on this version. This 3-foot long model was built for Gary and Tom so they could secure sponsors for the attempt to break the sound barrier. Gary's untimely death in a motorcycle accident ended the quest. The machine looks as if it could really scream. It's a cross between a stretched airplane fuselage and a rocket on wheels.



Before the August '61 issue *Rod & Custom* was a small 5x8-inch magazine. With the August issue, it went fullsize, and Tom's Sketchpad cars became big, too. The first large subject was a '40 Ford coupe in a four-page layout with a front view covering the entire two-page spread. That was '61, and the coupe was as smooth as a '90s machine.



The February '64 issue had a different approach to the Sketchpad by offering multiple cars with different designs. For the "Meat Wagon," Tom suggested the rear portion should be made of natural finish hardwood, and for a vintage flair added a chrome T-bucket two-piece windshield. The wild '32 sedan in the other corner was far out for '64, but not too unreasonable for 2000.



contained Tom's Sketchpad in addition to a Model Sketchpad that dealt with redesigning a particular model. In '64, *R&C* introduced a magazine called *Rod & Custom Models*, which had a short run of eight issues. In those issues, Tom did various articles using his illustrations as others used photographs. *R&C Models* contained many slot car racing articles, so Tom did a series of articles on various famous tracks around the world. Each issue featured a series of drawings on different areas of the track and construction of the grandstands and other buildings. Each article

provided both photos and drawings for an overall look at a particular track.

Tom's work was featured on three full covers of *R&C*, plus two that he shared, and two of his designs were built into fullsize cars that graced the cover. The June '65 cover has long been a favorite of ours. It's a trick-looking '90s style Model A woodie that could be a sharp-looking model or full-size rod for that matter.

Speaking of fullsize cars, some of Tom's Sketchpad designs were turned into the real thing. The "Surf Woodie" was a part of the February '64

Sketchpad. That was the first time they ran a four-rod design layout. George Barris saw the drawing and contacted Tom about building a fullsize show car. *R&C*'s August '64 issue featured the start of the project, and a finished machined graced the November '64 cover. George asked Tom to make a few changes to the design, but it remained very close to how it was originally drawn. Dick Dean, A Barris



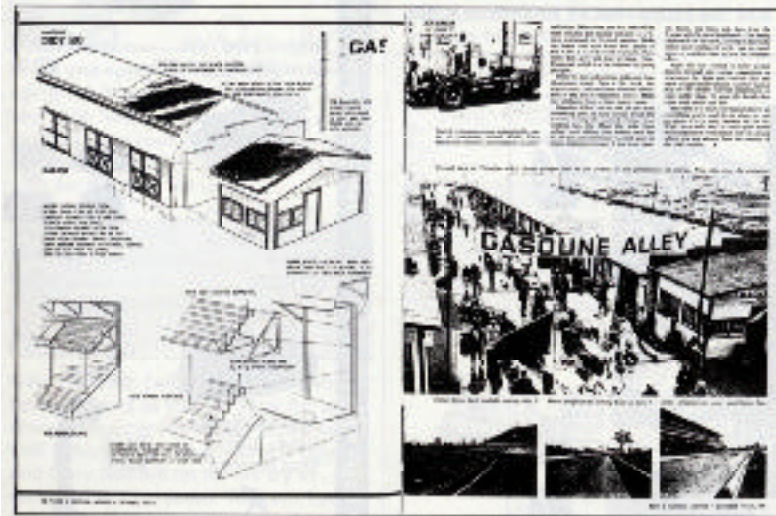
No sooner than the February '64 issue had hit the newsstand, George Barris was on the phone wanting to build the "Meat Wagon" with a few minor changes. He would call it the "Surf Woodie" and construction began in the August issue with the finished vehicle in living color on the November '64 cover ready for the show circuit.



Tom restyled his Corvette many times over the years on the pages of *R&C*. It became his "Darth Vader" style machine, and that was years before *Star Wars* was produced. Monogram Models made a model of this version. Tom still owns the Corvette and is starting to restyle it into yet another version.



Tom's love for old trains has been going on a long as he has been interested in cars. He likes to draw trains, build them, and design railroad layout buildings and accessories. Here are three new items that he designed and built as prototypes for Model Railway construction kits. A railroad car ferry sits in the foreground.



For eight months, beginning with the June '64 issue, Petersen Publishing Company produced *Rod & Custom Models*. There were 90 pages featuring various articles on model cars and slot car racing. Slot car racing was very big in '64 and plenty of people were building elaborate layouts, so Tom did an in-depth article on a major track. Shown here is part of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway feature. In addition to an overall view of the entire track grounds, he showed different buildings with exploded views to help in building them, along with photos of various spots around the track. For that article, we went to Indy's brickyard and did all of the photographic work, and Tom did a great job reproducing it.



employee, built the woodie. The other cover machine that evolved from Tom's pen was the "Druid Princess," a wild coach thing that only Ed Roth could love. Ed had the idea, and Tom laid it out. The coach appeared on the January '67 cover.

R&C was heavily involved in the model car scene in the early '60s, and Tom did many illustrations and some model-building as well. After Tom's association with Ed Roth and his "Druid Princess" design project, wild things sort of stuck, and in the early '70s Tom designed some wild, way-out drawings for Monogram Models. When I say "design," that's what Tom did best. During that time period, model companies were producing character

models. Quite simply, a character model is a created design that did not have a real car as its basis. Designs like the "Red Baron," "Paddy Wagon," "Bad Medicine," "T'rantula," "Ice T," and so on had become the norm for Tom. Over the years, 75 of Tom's designs were turned into model kits. Even today, some of the more popular kits are being re-released, and some of the more popular designs were made into Hot Wheels. That came about when Mattel purchased Monogram, acquiring the rights to the designs for use in its very popular small die-cast lineup. Some of these continued to be reproduced over the years. Tom continues to work with Revell/Monogram on some new projects

and does new artwork for some of its releases. A totally different side of Tom's industrial design career was his involvement with the late Gary Gabelich and his land-speed-record endeavor. After the Blue Flame, land-speed assault, a new attempt was planned, and Tom worked on the vehicle's design over five-year period. The design changed several times as the team studied the latest plans and worked out how those changes would affect the vehicle's performance. Several people added input to the vehicle's design, and Tom reworked it until he felt that it was time to build a scale



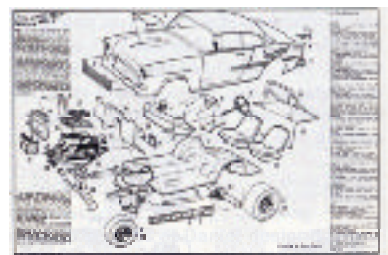
Over the years, Tom has worked with most of the model car companies, but designed wild creations primarily for Monogram. It produced more than 75 kits featuring his wacky designs, and he continues to create them today. Shown are some of the most popular. The "Red Baron" is the all-time seller.



This is a watercolor of what Tom calls "the golden days of drag racing." Here we see Gary Gabelich staging the famous "Purple Gang's" dragster for a hard charge off the line at the old Stardust Raceway strip in Las Vegas, Nevada.



The February '63 Sketchpad shows some restyling ideas for the '50 Mercury. Tom said in the article that all good customs must have their headlights frenched, and in this case, the turn signals, too. Three different frenched treatments were offered.



Another monthly feature in *R&C Models* that was carried over to *R&C* was this model kit instruction type illustration. Don Emmons was given one of the feature cars for the issue and made up a list of where each part could be found to build a duplicate of the car. From that list, Tom would draw an exploded view of the car with each part numbered. Very often it was difficult to find all of the items, and some would have to be scratch-built.

model. The model was built, and Gary and Tom did extensive canvassing for sponsorship for the project. Unfortunately, Gary was involved in a fatal motorcycle accident near his home in Long Beach, California. That was a hard time for Tom, as he lost a very close friend and his hope of designing a world land-speed-record-breaker.

In the early '80s, Tom moved to Sedona, Arizona, and opened an art gallery to showcase his wide range of

artistic abilities. Tom's canvas works span a wide subject range, from cars and trucks to landscapes and trains. Tom's love of old trains goes back as far as his love for cars, and he says he has built as many model trains as cars over the years. His Sedona gallery was filled with all types of paintings, plus those of other local artists. After several years spent in one of the most picturesque areas of this country, Tom left a need to return to industrial design, which he loved the most. Now he keeps

busy in his Las Vegas studio working on industrial design projects, new prototype models for a Johnny Lightning series, and some plastic kits for Revell/Monogram. Another of his interests includes designing model train layout parts such as vintage buildings and accessory kits for model railways.

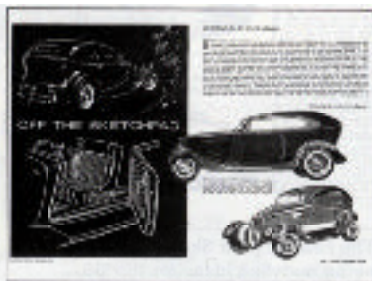
When we visited Tom at his Las Vegas studio, his drawing board and walls were covered with artwork in progress for a number of clients in the automotive and railroad fields, plus some newly commissioned artwork. He was also working on the new Sketchpad that appeared in the February 2000 issue of *Rod & Custom*. It was Tom's idea to do the Sketchpad in one of the first issues of *R&C* in the new millennium. "Art Work By Tom Daniel" continues to come from his drawing board, and the pages of *Rod & Custom* are richer for it.



In addition to the Sketchpad and model car features, Tom illustrated various articles on tech and how-to stories. Here's the second part of Editor Bell Neumann's article on customizing a car. Bill asked Tom to work his magic on the drawing board after giving him the item that he wanted to incorporate into the restyling project. Here is another Tom Daniel drawing that turned the real car into a cover car.



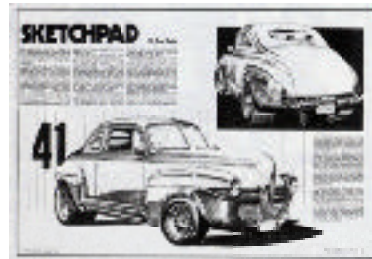
During the mid-'60s, *R&C* was into almost anything on four wheels that was being raced. The winner of the '65 SoapBox Derby was featured in the March '66 issue, and the editorial staff asked Tom how he would design a winning car. The long-running All American Soap Box Derby was open to 11-15 year olds, with the Championship final held at Akron, Ohio. Tom really delved into it with this layout. Like we said, *R&C* was running "way-out" in the '60s.



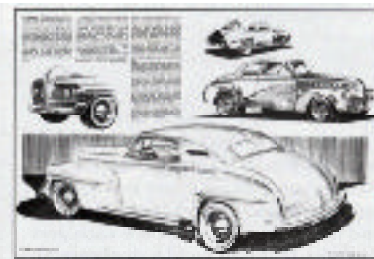
On September '62 Sketchpad, Tom's reworked '34 phaeton looks like it could have been penned recently. Reshaped fenders with headlights molded into the fenders and the windshield chopped about 4 inches and laid back to 50 degrees has the look of today's rod. Get rid of the whitewalls and steel wheels, replace them with 18-inch billets, and you would look cool coming into the new millennium.



In '84 Tom was one of the three outside designers hired by Peterbilt Trucks to come up with some new ideas for future models of its big highway haulers. Shown is one design that Tom proposed.



In the early '70s, *R&C* was on hiatus. When it returned, Tom was asked to start up the Sketchpad again. He did a four-page illustration, working his design magic on three '41 business coupes: a Ford, a Chevy, and a Plymouth. That four-pager was very impressive, with a full spread artist drawing that seemed almost three-dimensional, and the restyling was real cool, too.



In the mid-'90s, Johnny Lightning released a series of Daniel-designed vehicles in 1:64 scale called "Wacky Winners." They became instant collector's items that sold as quickly as they hit the stores. The company put together the big "Ten of Tom Daniel's Most Popular Model Kits" in this collector's edition, and it's nearly impossible to find unless you are willing to part with some greenbacks. Tom is working on several new designs for Johnny Lightning now—if you are a Tom Daniel fan, pick them up the minute they hit store shelves.