

1941 Ford Coupe HOW-TO CHOP IT!

with Larry Zimmer

A while back we decided that we wanted to get into some in-depth how-tos. While attending the Hot Rod and Performance Trade show in Louisville, Kentucky, we came across Larry Zimmer. Larry's background is old cars, trick paint, and metalwork. We asked him whether he would chronicle a top chop for NRM, and he agreed to do so.

The project vehicle was a 1941 Ford coupe. Larry stated it was the ugliest color combination and worst paint job that we had ever seen so it didn't bother him to cut it up.

Larry has been building rods, customs, and restoring cars for a long time. His past experience made him a natural for our project top chop. Larry restored cars for Universal Studios and folks like Marie Osmond, Hogle Carmichael, and even Red Fox. Quite a list of stars on his build list!

The following is Larry Zimmer's chronicle of the top chop of the '41 Ford Coupe:



In **Photo 1** the car arrived at my shop in Batavia, Ohio. I said it was ugly!



Photo 2 displays the inside of the shop where we stripped the glass and started to brace the inner structure with 1" water pipe. We ran the braces side-to-side and front-to-back. The structure was

so strong I lifted the body off the frame with my Cherry picker. The bracing is necessary to keep everything in alignment when the top is chopped off. We marked a line 5 inches from the rear window opening. (Note the bracing in the rear window.)

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In **Photo 3** I am using a high RPM cutting tool when I made the big cut.



The shot in **Photo 4** shows me cutting out the corner of the top and quarter glass. I have also laid out the cuts on the B-post. I cut through the drip rail because they will be deleted on the final body modifications.



OK, the top is gone! By looking at **Photo 5**, you can see that we have a lot of work to do to get this ole girl back together. Both sides are cut identically.

Now we're getting serious! The uppermost cut on the windshield post is first, then lift the top off. It is easier to make the last cut on the post when they are solidly attached to the cowl.



In **Photo 6** I took out 3 inches of windshield height and 4 inches in the rear. Notice my high-tech 2x4s holding the top in place; this shot shows that moving the top forward misaligns everything.



Photo 7 shows the pieces that I cut out earlier and sandblasted for ease of welding. The door corner left a 3-inch gap that will have a sheet metal panel fabricated and welded in place.



As **Photo 8** shows, to align the door corner piece I welded a piece of 3/4-inch square tubing for alignment. On the rear 1/4" window insert you can see the multiple relief cuts it took to form the rear of the window reveal and achieve the proper radius. Looking at the ugly finish coat finally prompted me to get rid of it—yes, now the body is stripped!

At this point make a plywood template of the 1/4" glass openings to insure they are the same on both sides. Cuts were made on the upper quarters to eliminate the old top subroof sections.



As **Photo 9** exhibits, the complete rear window section was tacked in place and the braces tacked to give me the correct curvature for the next filler panels.



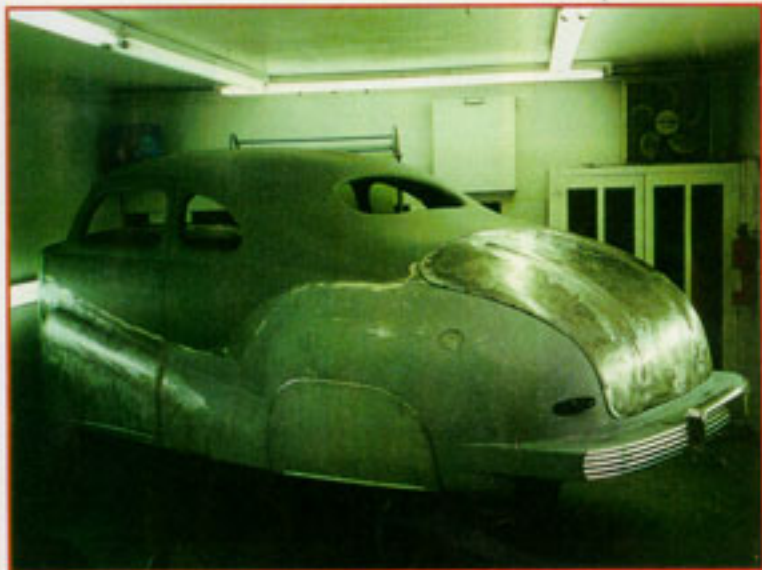
Photo 10 shows the relief cuts that were necessary to replace the window assembly, in the rear, and to give the contour we needed to finish our panel fitting. The piece you see clamped and spot welded is part of the rear section I cut off. It had the right compound curves. Note: Save all pieces, large or small—you may need them later.

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Prior to the final metal finishing we moved the '41 outside so we could stand back and check the panels for flow and the correct contour. It looked great! The final shot is two months into the project. Sanding and priming have been almost completed, and you can see by my smiling face I am really happy with the results. I've added one last photo to show you what we've done to



Photo 11 displays the many small pieces and the amount of welds that it takes to complete the rear roof section. Take your time and fit the pieces carefully. Keep warpage to a minimum, and you would only have to use a small amount of filler to make your top chop the best it can be!



the lower doors, quarters, and rear fenders. The deck and rear pan also have been modified extensively. A how-to will be in NRM's special how-to edition in June. **Larry**

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