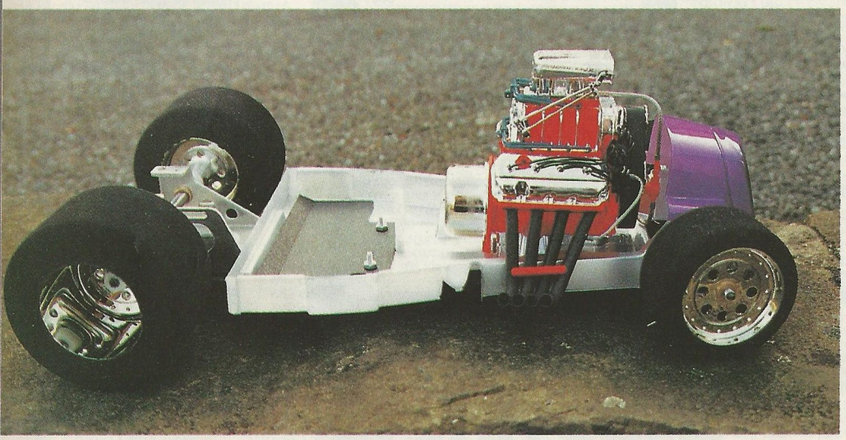
THE HOT ONE!

PARMA HEMI COUPE

Doug Passell, aided by Kevin Creaser, checks out a "fun" car.



Parma's Hemi Coupe is one of a variety of Radio Controlled car kits from the 'Good Times' range. They use the same basic chassis but ring the changes by using different body shells matched with a set of appropriate wheels and tyres. The chassis is a very simple flat fibreglass plate, with a folded alloy rear axle/motor mount and fibreglass beam front axle with independently sprung king pins. The Lexan chassis tray is moulded to represent the '32 Ford frame and provides plenty of space for mounting the buyers choice of radio gear, speed controller, motor and batteries.

The highlights of the kit are the 1/10th scale Plymouth Hemi engine and '32 Ford Coupe body with a 'chopped' top (chopped — a customising term for reducing the height of the roof). A strange concept to those not familiar with the American car culture.

How was this form arrived at?

A Brief History

Early hot rodders had to rely on a great deal of ingenuity to improve (hot-up) the performance of their four cylinder Model 'T' Fords. Roadsters (rods) were preferred for their lighter weight. Speed parts were few and far between so one of the simplest ways to increase speed and acceleration was to reduce the weight even further. Cars were stripped of all the non-essentials — wings, running boards, bonnets, front and rear bumpers and splash pans, headlights and the spare wheel. This left the radiator grill and bare body perched on top of the chassis rails, with the engine and all four wheels exposed.

This genre became known as the 'high boy'.

To further increase top end speed and stability the body was then channelled (lowered) over the frame, with the grille shell often being chopped (reduced in height) to match, for aesthetic reasons as much as anything else.

In this form the car is known as a 'low boy'.

In 1928 the Model 'A' came along and the hard top or coupe type body style became more prevalent. For those with closed cars the same mod's could be performed but the additional weight and height of the roof was a distinct disadvantage when trying to set speed records on the Salt Lakes of America. To reduce weight and wind resistance the tops were chopped (lowered), in extreme cases reducing the windows to mail box proportions.

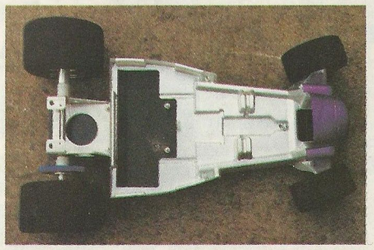
The next step in the evolution of the Hot Rod was the '32 Model 'B' Ford, which came equipped with the now classic Flathead V8, which found its way into many of the Salt Lakes cars. As with any form of motor racing, aficionados emulated the more distinctive modifications on their street-driven vehicles until, over the years, chopping and channelling have become accepted as an essential part of the make-up of a traditional Street Rod.

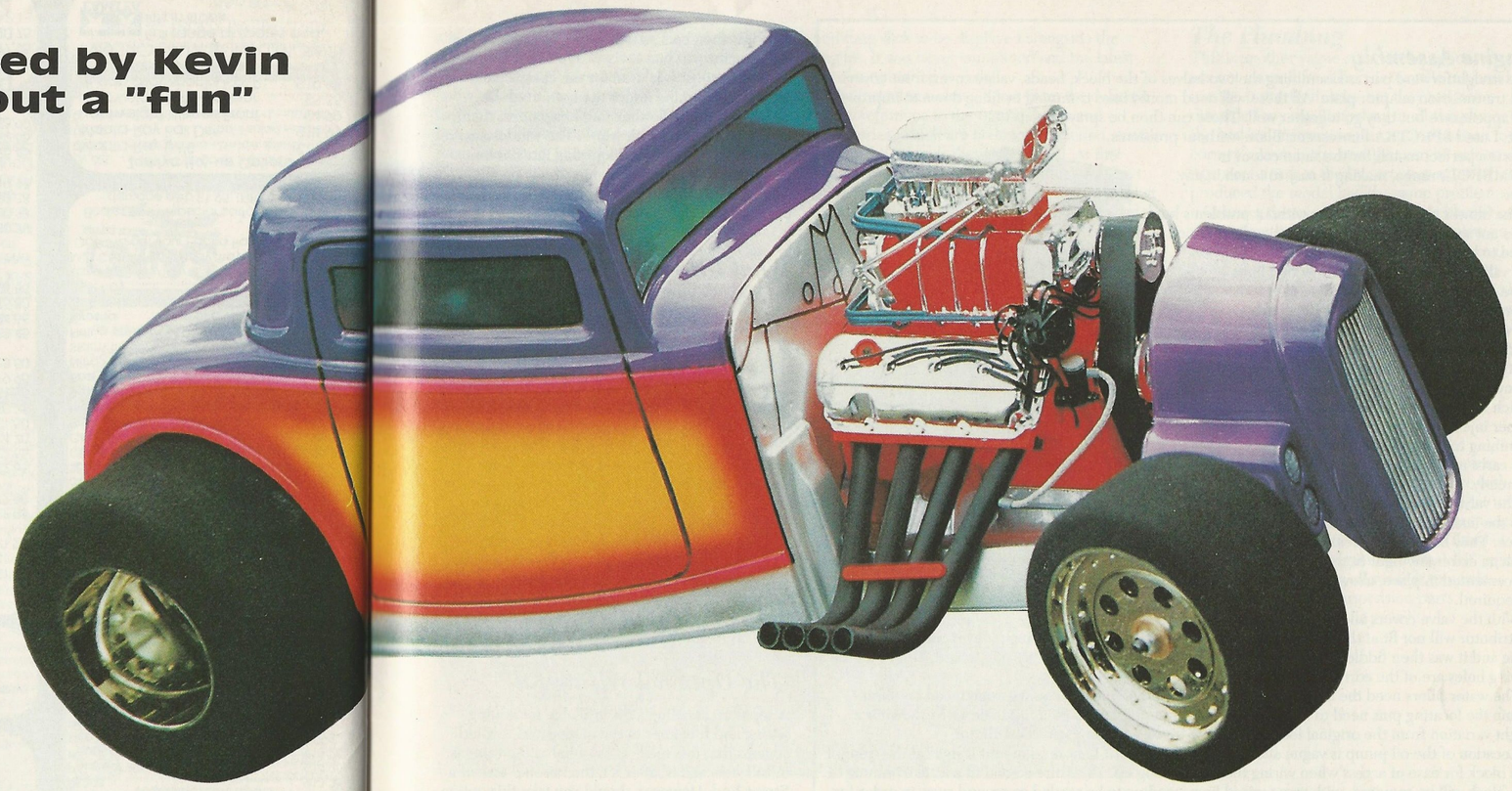
Through a process of evolution the format has gradually been carried to the extreme. With original steel bodies becoming harder to find, fibreglass replicas arrived on the scene. With these ultra-lightweight bodies and ever more powerful engines the rear tyres have had to increase in size in order to cope with the power.

To match this 'Go' a Street Rod needs plenty of 'Show', hence the extensive use of chrome, polished alloy, or anodising on the exposed engines and eye-catching paint jobs for the bodywork and voila, we have arrived at the type of car represented by the PARMA Hemi Coupe!.

The Kit

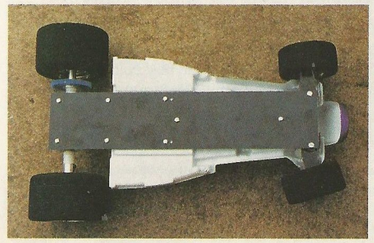
The external packaging of the kit is excellent, really eyecatching and covered with photos of completed cars, which are essential reference, as we will see as we proceed with construction.

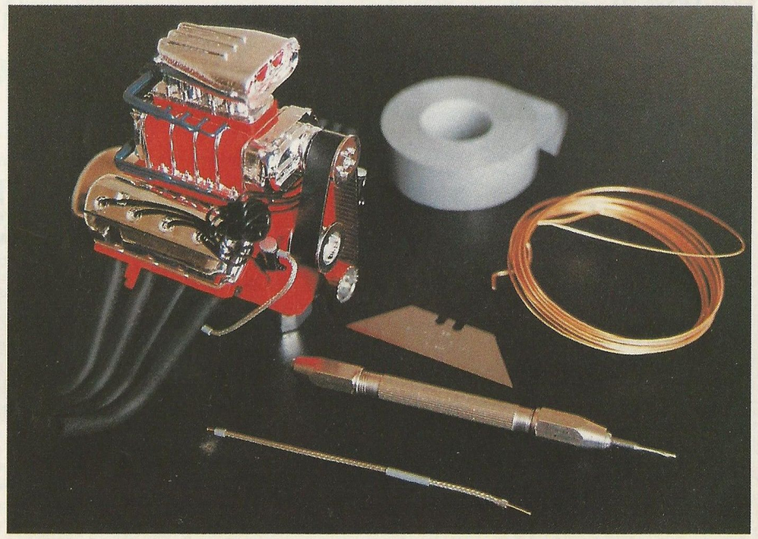




On opening the package one is faced with three plastic bags of parts, A, B and C, which are called off in that order in the assembly instructions. There are also a number of loose items including the body and wheels, which should be checked against the inventory provided, before commencing construction.

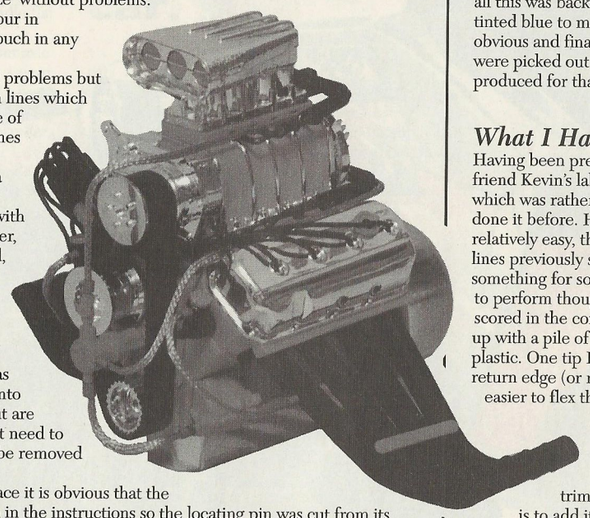
In addition it is wise to check the section entitled 'BEFORE YOU START'. Amongst other things, a set of Allen keys are required, an essential item and one which I'm sure could have been provided.





Engine Assembly

The straightforward part is assembling the two halves of the block, heads, valley cover, front cover and transmission adaptor plate. All these will need mould lines trimming or filing down to improve the appearance but they go together well. These can then be sprayed as a unit. I used SPECTRA fluorescent 'Blaze' without problems. This is a perfect match for the same colour in HUMBROL's range, making it easy to touch in any flaws.



The blower also goes together without problems but does not seat well over the fuel injection lines which need to be ground flush with the surface of the valley cover. Both sets of injection lines were painted TAMIYA clear blue to represent anodised alloy items. The area between the ribs of the blower could be painted flat aluminium, or overpainted with matt varnish for the same effect. However, many engines also have this area painted, which was the way I chose to go. The upper injection lines also need a little trimming to allow the adaptor plate for the carbs and injector scoop to fit correctly.

The valve covers should be pre-wired as per the instructions before being fitted into place. They hide a great deal of detail but are such an extremely tight fit that they don't need to be cemented in place, allowing them to be removed if required.

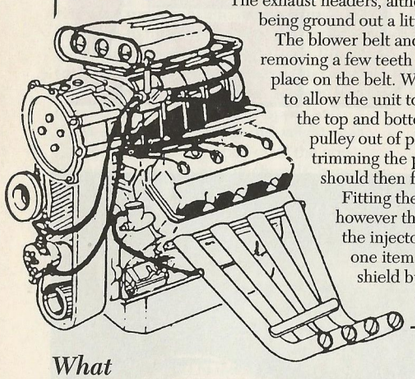
With the valve covers and blower in place it is obvious that the distributor will not fit at the angle shown in the instructions so the locating pin was cut from its base and it was then fiddled into the best position possible. (As previously mentioned, ensure all the wiring holes are of the correct size first).

The water fillers need the attention of a file as the mould lines are quite pronounced on them. Again the locating pins need to be cut off and the mounting faces filed flat in order to allow for a slight variation from the original locating point to give clearance to the Distributor.

Location of the oil pump is vague and varies on the box art. I chose to mount it right at the front of the block for ease of access when wiring the whole thing up. To ensure a good fit a little trimming of the block will be required, with some raised lines needing to be sanded or ground away in order for the pump to seat properly. I made good use of the Titan mini drill here. Before cementing the pump in place a suitable hole was drilled to accept the alloy wire, as described earlier.

Having got all these in place, the location of the coil is narrowed down to the lower left of the front of the block. Before fixing in place drill a hole and install the high tension wire which will go th the distributor, knotting the wire as per the instruction for the valve covers.

The exhaust headers, although moulded with open ends will benefit from being ground out a little further.



The blower belt and pulleys can be assembled as a unit after first removing a few teeth from the upper pulley to allow it to fit snugly into place on the belt. When set, the locating pins will need to be trimmed to allow the unit to sit level on the front face of the engine block, with the top and bottom pulleys vertically in line. This throws the third pulley out of place with its mounting hole, hence the reason for trimming the pins. However. If done carefully, the fuel pump should then fit in exactly the right place.

Fitting the blower linkage is a matter of trial and error, however the other linkage to the butterflies (circular flaps in the injector scoop) is unnecessary and can be discarded. The one item which defeated me was the blower belt safety shield but I didn't feel too bad about this as it is not shown on the reference photo either.

What To Do — If You're Doing it Yourself

Kevin Creaser, a real bodyshell expert, took over this aspect of the build whilst I watched and took notes.

Opinions vary as to whether the body should be trimmed to shape before or after painting, however, the processes required are the same, so it comes down to personal preference.

The shell needs to be washed with warm water and washing up liquid to remove any contamination, finger prints and body oils. When thoroughly dried, mask it up from the inside, bearing in mind that the first mask on is the last off, so the windows are covered first.

Make sure you use paint for Lexan or Polycarbonate plastics, otherwise the body will curl up or the paint itself flake off once dry.

In this case the upper body section was sprayed Candy Purple, a transparent paint which achieves its final effect from the backing colour sprayed over it. Normally Candies are used with metallic paint, in this case silver, to produce deep, rich metallic colours. A gold undercoat will produce a different effect, or layers of different Candy colours can be built up to come up with new colours.

The fluorescent pink swage lines, or body mouldings were sprayed next, followed by the fluorescent orange. This remained unmasked on the inner edge to allow a fogged, or graduated, change between it and the final colour, yellow. This was then backed with white to add vibrance and opacity.

Metallic silver was used for the chassis pan, frame rails running under the bottom of the doors, and the grille shell and headlamps. Again all this was backed with white. The windows were tinted blue to make the lack of an interior less obvious and finally the 'opening' body panels were picked out with a PARMA pen especially produced for that purpose.

What I Had To Do

Having been presented with the results of my friend Kevin's labours, I was left to trim the body, which was rather nerve wracking, not having done it before. However, it turned out to be relatively easy, the body cracking apart along any lines previously scribed with a sharp knife - not something for someone of a nervous disposition to perform though. Obviously the lines must be scored in the correct place, otherwise you'll end up with a pile of colourful but useless scrap plastic. One tip I found useful was to remove the return edge (or rim) first, which made it a lot easier to flex the plastic in order to get it to crack along the scored line.

Nevertheless, if you are unsure of this operation, err on the generous side. It's easier to trim a little more plastic away than it is to add it back on!

The Optional Wiring Kit

A separate detailing kit is available for adding wiring and fuel lines to the engine and I would suggest that this really is essential as the thing is in full view and is, after all, the raison d'etre of a Street Rod. However, should you take this option preparation will make the task a lot easier.

First check over the engine parts to ensure that all the holes for the wiring are free of flash and of the correct size. I found a number of them needed drilling out.

Secondly, wherever pins are provided for mounting the braided fuel and oil lines, remove them and drill holes instead. Inevitably these plastic pins will break off when trying to install the braid so it is better to replace them with metal.

The braid itself can be improved in appearance, as it arrives flat and should of course, be round. This can be done by gently squeezing it back to shape between the jaws of pliers and then inserting some alloy wire down the hollow centre to help retain the shape. (I found mine at a local florists shop). This has the added advantage of allowing the 'hose' to retain it's shape when bent to follow a particular path between the various connections. The wire can also be allowed to protrude from either end of the hose so it can be superglued into the previously drilled holes.

Hose fittings can be simulated by wrapping grey insulating tape around it, which is then trimmed down to form collars about 1/8th of an inch long. This also prevents the braid unravelling.

2) The Power Plant

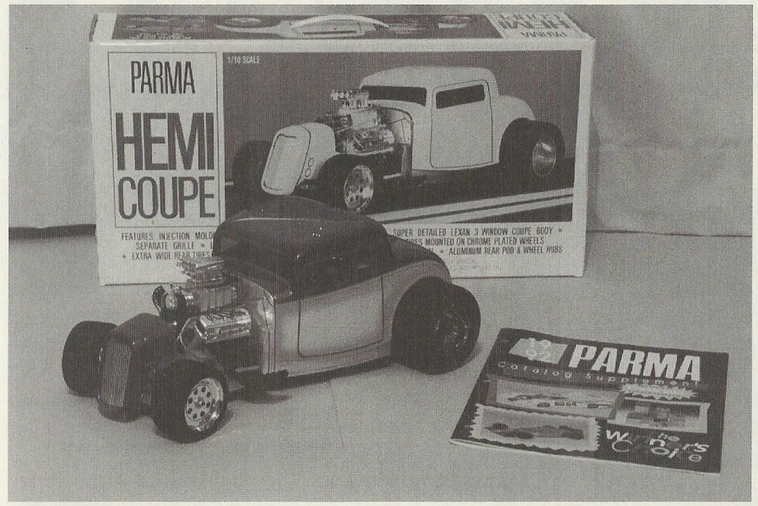
The bodywork needed to be complimented by the engine so to select the best colour for it, the body, wheels and grille were propped in place and different spray can lids were tried in the engine bay. Purple looked lost, yellow looked feeble but the fluorescent red looked great.

Now this is where the fun began.

The 1/10th scale Hemi motor started life as an MPC model almost 22 years ago. Originally it was a part of the 'Racer and Racing Engine Series', which featured three engines and drivers from different areas of American Motor Sport. Those I know of were Don Garlitts, with the Dodge Hemi from his 'Swamp Rat' Top Fuel Dragster, Richard Petty and the Dodge Wedge from his NASCAR racer and finally Shirley Muldowney with the Plymouth Hemi from her Bounty Huntress Funny Car.

Each kit contained a caricature of the driver, along with a separate helmet and accessory of some sort. I still have Muldowney's Funny Car engine, which contained a massive alloy wheel and drag slick to be displayed alongside the engine. It was never completed and the latest version reminded me why.

The instruction sheet, apart from the deletion of any reference to the figure, decals and accessories, which are no longer included, remain exactly the same as they did in 1970. At first glance they appear well detailed but are in fact quite vague. Optional parts are not mentioned at all and the location of others is arbitrary to say the least. Fortunately there are plenty of photos on the box, however, these compound the problem by differing in the location of parts too!



The Plumbing

This is another vague area, as the options used are not catered for. There is insufficient braid to use the butterfly linkage but that had been discarded anyway. Referring to all the photos on the box and instructions, an approximation to the correct system is the best that can be achieved. Again referring to the box art shows that whoever produced the model had the same problem.

Connect the two fuel logs (square blocks) on the injector lines to the top and side inlets on the fuel pump. The bottom outlet should go to the fuel tank but a bit of artistic licence shows it connected to the oil pump. Not very realistic but I followed suit. Finally the two water inlets are connected to the front down pipe of each bank of headers. The inlets should also be connected to the radiator but that is replaced by a servo in this case.

Final Assembly

The body is easily mounted using the velcro provided, the motor being stuck in place with servo tape. However, I used velcro for that too as it is nice to be able to remove the engine to check out the detail. The grille shell can be fitted closer to the motor by cutting an additional 1/2" square from the back corners, allowing it to nestle around the moulded suspension parts.

Now where's that Radio gear?