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PRIMEDIA

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Sling Blade



Behind the scenes of the aftermarket industry's single largest annual media event, the SEMA convention, lies a dark, mysterious, and often misunderstood world of vehicle customization. Very few people are privy to the hysteria that sets in upon shop owners, fabricators, body shops, and every other type of truck builder once summer has ended. The madness of preparing demo vehicles for the SEMA show hits dizzying levels during the month of October as shops frantically try to keep pace with the unending requests for work to be completed before Halloween. SEMA usually takes place during the first week of November, and if you are top of the game, you've already built your demo vehicle before then. Of course, the best of intentions don't always get a truck together without divine intervention. Such is the case with Sling Blade, John Tondro's '02 Chevy 2500HD Crew Cab pickup. Remarkably, John didn't even start wrenching on this truck until four weeks prior to the 2002 SEMA convention. Although he decided at the last possible moment, with his truck 90 percent completed, to not cut any corners and pass up the opportunity to display his creation at SEMA, what he accomplished can still be considered a small miracle.

From Stock to Not in Four Short Weeks

**COVER
TRUCK**
OFF-ROAD

Sling Blade



▲ John also built the upper shock hoops for the front suspension from chromoly tubing. The hoops provide mounting points for up to two shocks and currently house Fox 2.0 reservoir dampers.



John carefully planned out all of the upgrades and modifications he envisioned for his truck and then commissioned Rick Vandervort to render a drawing of the finished product. With drawing in hand, John dropped his HD off at CST Performance Suspensions. Using John's truck as its canvas, the crew from CST prototyped an IFS that would lift his truck 9 inches through the use of drop-down bracketry. An additional 4 inches of vertical height adjustment was gained after CST installed its 4-inch lift spindles, and re-indexing the torsion bars adjusters provided 3 more inches of altitude. In total, the modifications gave John's truck 16 inches of lift and did so with super-durable uniballs mounted to custom upper control arms and John's own shock hoops, which made a home for Fox 2.0 reservoir dampers.

At this point, you might guess the next order of business would have been to tackle the rear suspension upgrades. In a perfect world, that would have been true, but the rush to beat the SEMA clock meant John would have to get the truck painted next. And so he left his truck in the capable hands of Doug Starbuck, owner of Starside Design in Riverside, California. Doug was given two weeks to work his paint and body magic and came through with flying colors. Chevy's HD-Series

specifications

Owner/transporter	: John Tandy/Corona, California
Vehicle	: '02 Chevrolet 2500 Heavy Duty 2WD Crew Cab
Suspension	: CST Performance Suspension 1.6-inch IFS lift kit; two Fox 2.0 reservoir dampers on JT Advanced Suspension custom shock hoops; (rear) JT Advanced Suspension custom wishbone rear suspension with Fox 2.5-inch coilover dampers
Transmission/transfer case	: GM4L80E
Axles	: GM Corporate 14-bolt rear end with 4.10 gears
Wheels	: 20x9.5-inch Weld Evo Velocity
Tires	: 365/80R20 Michelin X
Engine	: 6.0L Vortec V-8
Other modifications	: DJ Motorsports grille; APC Euro lighting; Empire Motorsports billet side steps and interior accessories; Line X bedliner

trucks look aggressive and refined right from the factory, so slicing into the body of John's truck wasn't necessary. Instead, Doug chose to shave the stake pocket holes in the bed and concentrate on laying down the flawless black, metallic silver, and Victory Red hues. Once Doug was finished spraying the new paintjob, Rick Vandervort was tapped to pinstripe the new paintjob. Three weeks into October, John took back his possession and wasted no time in getting to work.

Back inside the confines of his shop, JT Advanced Suspensions, John disassembled the bottom half of the truck so the chassis could be painted. The CST IFS lift kit was sent out to be powerdercoated silver.



▲ When was the last time you saw a set of 20s stuffed into a set of knobblies under a lifted truck? The super-strong, forged, Weld Evo Velocity rims have no problem keeping the Michelin tires in check during off-road flagging.



▲ John designed and fabricated the beautiful wishbone upper link and the lower ladder bars. The wishbone pivots on chromoly rod ends while the ladder bars swing on Delrin bushings.



▲ The majority of front-end lift can be credited to the CST 9-inch drop-down cradle. This beauty lays both the upper and lower control arms well beneath the fenderails, and the strut bars keep the cradle held firmly in place.



▲ To handle whatever abuse he felt like dishing out, John trussed the GM corporate 14-bolt rearend with 1-5/8-inch chromoly tubing and then added custom mounts for 2.5-inch Fox dual-rate coilovers.



In the meantime, John set about fabricating the rear suspension. The easiest route to SEMA would've meant retaining the factory leaf spring suspension that located the rearend under the truck. Easy, yes, but not trick enough for John's tastes. The next 20 hours out of John's life were spent fabricating a wishbone-type link system made from 1-5/8-inch chromoly tubing. Another set of custom link bars was then mated to the rearend, but not before John spent a fair amount of time trussing it for lateral strengths. To suspend the rear of the truck and damp the

suspension, John once again went with Fox shocks, this time using a 2.5-inch-diameter, 16-inch travel coilover duo mounted outside of the fenderails.

With SEMA looming large on the horizon, John crossed off several more days from the calendar and realized there was only a week left until the convention. There was nothing left to do but lock himself and his friends inside the shop and get busy. For five straight days the crew wrenched on the mighty HD, re-installing the freshly painted suspension pieces and a huge set of 20-inch Weld Evo Velocity rims and a huge set of 365/80R20 Michelin X tires. The suspension and paintjob were dialed-in, but as we all know, you can't just bring a half-built truck to SEMA. With the clock ticking, the crew removed the bed from the chassis and covered the inside and bottom with Line X spray-in bedliner. The stock grille was replaced with a DJ Motorsports Blade grille and APC provided Euro lighting fixtures at all corners of the truck. Empire Motorsports provided billet HD emblems and a Chevy Bow Tie emblem as well as a host of billet dash accessories. When the shop door reopened, the calendar gave notice that SEMA was the following day. John knew he was close to having the truck finished, but rather than bring out his rig in anything less than a finished state, he wisely told everyone to go home and get some much-deserved sleep. After all, there was always next year, and that would give a guy like him enough time to build at least 11 more awesome trucks. **CR**