

High Yellow '56

VETERANS OF CHEVY MONTAGE SEMA BUILD EMBARK ON A PROJECT OF THEIR OWN

By Joe Sage with Shawnda Williams and Carly Austin

Carly is originally from Pratt, Kansas, home of the Miss Kansas Pageant, about 45 minutes west of Wichita, but the family moved to Tucson when she was five. Carly is a histotech in pathology—working with the cellular structure of organs and tissues—at St Joseph's Hospital and has also worked in tissue recovery for the Donor Network of Arizona. "I've always liked taking things apart," she jokes. "First, it was bodies; and now it's cars!"

Shawnda's first car was a two-door '87 Chevy Blazer—chosen by her dad for its steel strength and because if anything happened, he could bang it out in the garage. Her current daily driver is a Lexus RX 350 F Sport. Her dream car is a '69 Dodge Charger—"I love the old trucks, but really, really

love muscle cars a lot."

Carly's first car was a Chevy Cavalier hatchback, and her first new car a Ford Probe (which goes against the grain of her Chevy family, but her uncle owned a Ford dealership). She recently parted with a Scion FR-S and now drives a Jeep Wrangler Unlimited Smoky Mountain Edition. "I'm really a Jeep girl," she says. "I've had multiple Jeep Wranglers. My dad started it. When he was 15, he went out on harvest and found a '49 Willys sitting in the field and brought it home." Her "newest dream car, this month, is a '57 Chevy Bel Air four-door. My great-grandmother had one. My entire family are car people—they always have been—and my dad told me how she used to drive it at 90 down the farm roads with all the kids standing up in the back seat. I think it's neat that she was the one driving like that, though her husband bought one of the first 1920s Harleys, even though he lived out on a farm, so he could say he had the fastest horse in the county." Her dad and brothers all race two-door '56 and '57 Chevys in Tucson—"disgusting on the outside, but open up the hood and you could eat off them."

Their influences and skills are clear.

Last year, dozens of women from all over the country spent many hours over many months in the shop at Bogi's Garage in Phoenix—run by Sarah "Bogi" Lateiner, owner of 180 Degrees Automotive and co-host of *All Girls Garage* on Velocity TV—building the Chevy Montage, a highly customized 1957 Chevrolet pickup equipped with a BMW M5 engine and a very special coat of teal paint, for last November's SEMA Show in Las Vegas.

Now, two of them are building another truck—this time a 1956 Chevy pickup known as High Yellow '56, a name steeped in both purposeful ambiguity and elevation of concept.

MEET THE BUILDERS

High Yellow's masterminds and head wrenches are Shawnda Williams and Carly Austin.

Shawnda is senior manager of the User Experience Design team at General Dynamics—"kind of a mad scientist cross between being a traditional web designer and psychology, with a little bit of development knowledge. Ultimately, we advocate on behalf of users, to optimize their digital or hardware experiences, making sure their expectations align with business goals and ultimately a product that's safe and usable by the consumer."

Coming from an Air Force family, she went to college in Tennessee, grad school in North Carolina and has lived in Arizona for 13 years.

Carly Austin and Shawnda Williams



Inspirations ranged from a vintage toy truck bought by Shawnda years earlier, to last year's Chevy Montage effort (here at SEMA with Bogi Lateiner and "Barbie the Welder" Parsons). Below, Bogi grinding and Briana Loverude ready to weld on High Yellow.



MEET THE TRUCK

The High Yellow donor truck belonged to Carly's dad, but Shawnda had her eye on it from day one. Carly's enthusiast family "frequently buy and sell different '50s-era Chevy cars and trucks," says Williams. "Mr. Austin purchased the truck in 2016, and from the second he bought it, I laid claim."

The prior owner had had the truck for over 20 years, and it had long since stopped running, but Carly's dad and brother fixed it in an afternoon.

Besides the Chevy's inherent charms, Shawnda had another spark of inspiration. "Weirdly or cosmically, maybe about seven years prior, well before meeting Carly, I had picked up an old knick-knack vintage-look toy truck that I had kept as decoration on my nightstand. You would assume I bought it because it looked like High Yellow, but in actuality the toy manifested the real truck. It is of a similar era; both share the side-mounted spare tire; and both were distressed yellow. So naturally, when I saw her dad's truck and the apparent similarities I was immediately in love with it."

She persisted in offering to buy it, and one evening last November, after they had attended a car show, he finally conceded. "I wasted no time," she says, "and graciously accepted his offer of sale."

The truck had its original 283 stock V8 under the hood, but as part of the deal, Carly's dad threw in an engine swap to a 350 small block, which he assisted with in Tucson. They brought the truck to Phoenix in late February of this year. "It was still drivable," says Shawnda, "although it wasn't terribly safe, as it did not have power steering, ABS or any other comforts we take for granted in modern cars. The truck then hung out at Bogi's Garage for a few months while we figured out what we wanted to do, driving it occasionally to putt around on surface streets and not much more."

"It was drivable," she adds, "until I got the wild idea to restore it (hahaha)." By the time we first saw it, it had already been completely disassembled and restoration steps were well underway.

THE MONTAGE VILLAGE

As with last year's Montage project, many others are participating as often as they want.

"Chevy Montage established a 'village' of women who are similarly interested," says Williams. "Some are experienced and some are new. Once we did Montage, all were inspired. We were inspired to buy a truck and do a build. Others were inspired to start businesses, to take chances in their career, to move in new directions they hadn't thought were possible for them. The new build has become a platform for us to solidify this village we know via Montage and call in their expertise to help us out, to intern and to give them business."

"Our painter, Dez Ferrell with Nussy's Kustoms, is starting her own paint and restoration shop, and our truck will be the first end-to-end project completed by her shop. We could pick any painter, but would rather help someone from the village make those steps forward and establish themselves."

"We've come across quite a few other people who've been able to come in or to help us. Briana Loverude is a welder, so I reached out to her and didn't even have to finish a question—she said, 'I will be there; I will help you guys.' It's like an Old World village of people, but all over the USA."

Michelle Davis, off-roader, principal with Sugar High Motorsports in Montana and Montage veter-



KEEP RIGHT >>

The original chassis will be kept as fitment reference while being replaced with a modern unit. The old chassis is intact and in good shape, so once they're done with it, it will find a new home. Shawnda Williams shows off the sandblasted cab and tailgate. Metal fabrication and body repair are well underway, as Heather Herr grinds out a trouble spot.

an, will be helping. "She was also similarly a newbie in the restoration world," says Shawnda, "but since doing Montage is now doing welding on her own. She had such an awesome time, she's spending her own money coming here to help Dez with the body and paint portion. It's this cool, almost-like-a-living-entity of people helping each other, building each other up in a constructive way.

"Where I might not have a ton of automotive experience, I have a ton of business and marketing experience, so I'm able to help Dez, who's starting a new business, in ways a peer might not be able to. It's not just 'you can help me paint this thing'; it's mutually reciprocal in how we've been able to work with one another and help each other.

"It's really turned into something bigger, where we've been able to continue with the momentum that Bogi established on Montage, in a constructive way, so that wasn't a one-and-done thing.

"I was completely shocked by the support we've gotten from people of all works of life, who have heard about what we're doing. People I thought would be more skeptical have just been overwhelmingly supportive of what we're doing. I don't have 20 years in the game, but I'm getting hands-on experience on every part, from the deconstruction all the way through. I've come to realize that if you do it, you become the expert." As High Yellow gets underway, Shawnda has simultaneously taken body repair workshops at Bogi's Garage, so "while I'm not working on panels for my own truck yet, per se, I'm learning the steps it takes to do that, so when we get to doing the bodywork portion, I'll be decent enough to say I helped do that."

Carly's three younger brothers and dad are all tinkerers, mechanics and drag racers, "but I never necessarily thought I'd be working on it all," she says. But now, "I'm going to go from handing my brothers and my dad tools in the garage, to 'you give me the tool, and I'll go ahead and replace the valves and the engine. That's the coolest part for me.'" She used to think something might be "kind of hard and I don't know how to do it, but that's the other thing that Chevy Montage did. Sure it's daunting, and I don't know how every single part works, but it's not that scary when you know there's 1800 people you could ask, who say we'll show you how this works and figure it out together."

"We have people we've worked with who have done maybe 20 or 30 vehicles," Shawnda says, "but they still have areas where they haven't done everything and are also still learning."



THE PROJECT UNDERWAY

Deconstruction started in May, with sandblasting, metal fabrication and other strip-down and reconstruction steps interwoven through the summer.

"The inevitability after sandblasting," Shawnda tells us, "is that you'll have some rust spots that get completely blown out, so you have to cut away the bad and tack up either replacement pieces or take pieces of sheet metal and do metal repair."

It's a remarkably straight and solid 63-year-old truck, and "we want to keep as much of the original as we can," says Williams, as she points out a small gash that will be welded, minor dents to grind out, and other such details. Any filler is absolutely minimal (no more than a new vehicle may have, in fact, she points out).

The new chassis arrived in late August. Next steps are sandblasting, powder-coating, hookup of bolt-on components including suspension, getting it to a rolling chassis state. They have the old chassis on hand "for fitment purposes," says Shawnda, "just to make sure all the mounting points are the same."

Bodywork continues through the fall, with Dez Ferrell at Nessy's Kustoms performing any dent repair and prepping for new yellow paint, expected in December.

Moving into next year, they will transition into reassembly, fitment, wiring, internal component elements and deciding about upholstery—on which Shawnda is researching, gathering samples and creating Photoshop mockups of potential patterns, some incorporating cues from that era, but all of them new interpretations.

A 63-year-old truck can provide the occasional surprise, but their ultimate timeframe stays the same, with early spring completion, about March or so. "Everything's subject to change, but that's kind of my aggressive, heart of hearts goal, to have it done in time for Goodguys," says Williams—the Goodguys Rod & Custom Association's 10th Spring Nationals, at WestWorld in Scottsdale in March 2019.

Stay tuned! ■

