

Grand Slam

The *Overhulin'* A-Team hit another one out of the park for the baseball-crazed owner of this once-neglected '66 LeMans ragtop.

Text and photography by Richard Truesdell



Admit it: you've dreamed of having your wife, husband, son, daughter, girlfriend, boyfriend, friend, or some significant other submit your car to the producers at *Overhaulin'*, and of having your car make the cut. After all, who wouldn't unknowingly get pranked if it meant ending up with a Chip Foose signature creation gracing your garage a week later.

For Tony Todd, the dream became a reality when two of his long-time friends engineered the Chip Foose restoration of his 1966 Pontiac LeMans convertible during season four of the popular show that airs on The Learning Channel.

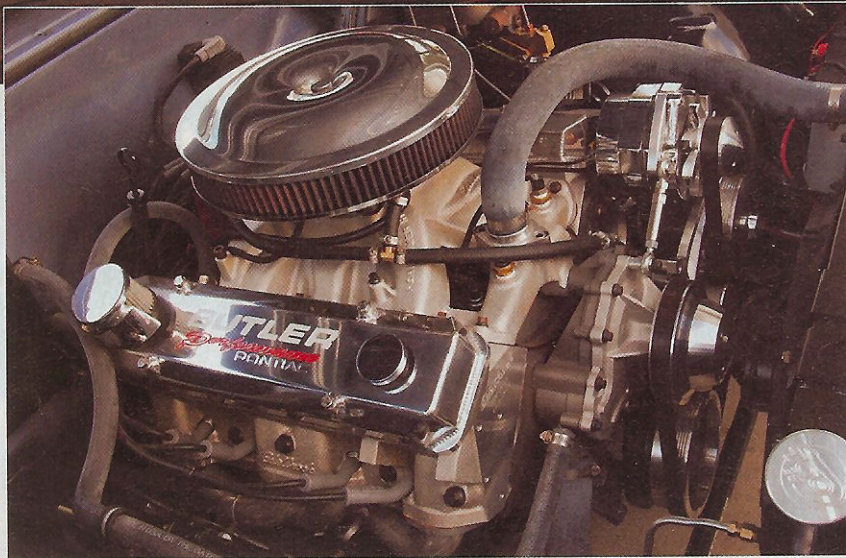
Tony, who grew up in affluent Santa Monica, where he was raised by his single mom, Beverly, didn't have a

lot of material things as a kid. But one of his childhood dreams came true when he bought the LeMans, nearly 10 years ago.

"I've had the car for a long time ... since 1997," relates Tony. "The odometer read 87,000 miles. The condition was good — not great — but it was all original and everything was there. I

bought it at a dealer and that was what I could afford at the time. I know back in 1966, the GTO was a really popular car, but people who couldn't afford a GTO would buy a LeMans, because the main difference from a GTO was the power of the engine."

Flash back to Tony's sophomore year at Santa Monica High School: While



playing baseball on the school team, he became best friends with teammate and actor Charlie Sheen, whom Tony believes could have been a pro ball player had he not had the advantage of the "Sheen" last name.

While Tony pursued his baseball passion and played college baseball for three years at the University of New Mexico, Charlie, of course, went on to star in countless movies, including a memorable role in the big screen film *Major League*, as Rick "Wild Thing" Vaughn, keeping his own baseball passion alive. The two remained best friends, and, in fact, Tony served as Best Man at both of Sheen's marriages.

When a career in baseball didn't go as hoped, Tony found himself bitten by the acting bug, too. Later, while film-

ing a commercial for Jack In The Box restaurants, Tony met Rob Goldenberg, an advertising copywriter. Goldenberg noticed Tony spinning a football on his finger during a break in the shooting and commended him on his ball handling talents. The two began talking, quickly discovered a mutual interest in baseball, and before they knew it, they were the best of friends, too, catching all the Dodgers games that their busy, burgeoning careers would allow.

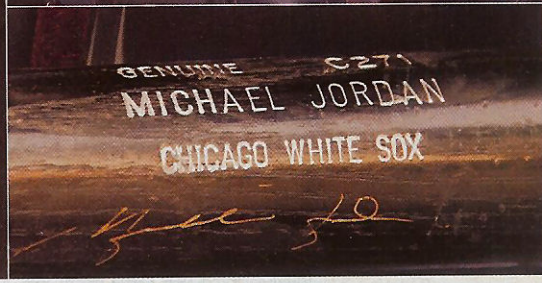
Meeting Tony Todd for the first time, one can't help but be taken in by his infectious smile and athletic build, especially when he's wearing the throwback jersey of Dodger legend Jackie Robinson, who Tony portrayed on TV's *Cold Case*. In addition to his credits portraying the Dodger icon, you

may have seen Tony in HBO's *Arliss*, commercials for DHL, Ocean Spray juices and Pizza Hut, as well as with Jerry Seinfeld in a recent HP plug. On the big screen, Tony appeared in *Little Big League* after crashing the audition and making quite an impression on director Andy Scheinman.

The Jackie Robinson role remains his favorite, which should come as no surprise, given Tony's baseball-filled past.

While Tony focused on his acting career — and developed connections with several of Hollywood's elite — the LeMans' restoration was an on-again, off-again affair that ultimately turned into a nightmare.

This is where Charlie stepped up to the plate and filled out the *Overhaul-in'* application for his long-time friend's LeMans. "Then Charlie called the show and, through my friend Rob Goldenberg, my car was selected. I had no idea that I had been Overhauled. Actually, I was about to sell the car, which ultimately played into the prank: The 'cops' thought it was part of an insurance scam. Little did I know that my Mom was in on the prank." (A phone call from "Detective Chris Jacobs" was one of the highlights of the show; Chris, with Charlie sitting by his side, really got Tony going. That and a second prank segment at the crime scene, with dialog right out of *My Cousin Vinny*, had Tony convinced the car had been stolen.)



"Charlie is the most loyal and generous friend I could have," says Tony. "I've traveled the world and had so many great experiences because of Charlie. But nothing prepared me for the *Overhaulin'* gig."

"And Rob and his whole family treat me like family — my name might as well be 'Tony Goldbenberg'," Tony said of buddy, Rob. "I can't thank him enough."

If the car has two signature elements, beyond its Foose connection, it's the drivetrain and the paint. For the drivetrain, the A-Team immediately tossed the stock 326. For its replacement, Foose turned to the Pontiac specialists at Butler Performance (butlerperformance.com) in Leoma, Tennessee — a long way from the Huntington Beach, California set of *Overhaulin'*.

Now, when you lift the hood, you find a 455 punched out to 462 cubic inches. Butler Performance balanced and blueprinted the engine before capping it with a set of their ported and machined Edelbrock Performer RPM Heads. The rest of the build included a port-matched Edelbrock Performer RPM intake, and Comp Cams XE268 hydraulic cam with matching valve train. The internals include Ross pistons and Eagle rods, while air and fuel is mixed by a Holley 770 Street Avenger Carburetor and spark is provided by an MSD ignition.

Butler Performance's David Butler

gives some insight on its output: "This engine makes approximately 500-horsepower and 550 pounds-feet of torque. It has a 9.9:1 compression ratio and runs on 91-octane pump gas. This was the third engine Butler Performance has done for *Overhaulin'*. Chip wanted an engine that made great power, while at the same time being mild and durable for the street, so the big 455 was a natural choice."

"We assembled and shipped the engine to *Overhaulin'*, and along with my brother Rodney, we flew out for the install. We helped with the final assembly of the car and stayed to meet Tony when the car was given back. Chip added the finishing touch to the engine, by hand-painting our logo on the valve covers."

The Butler-built big block is matched up to a heavy-duty Turbo Hydramatic 400 three-speed from Bowler Performance. The combination is a bullet-proof drivetrain that is certainly up to nearly any task that Tony's right foot can dish out.

Tony is quick to point out that the exterior of the car is the first thing that people see: "People go crazy over the paint job." That's the work of Mitch Lanzini, of Lanzini Body Works, in Huntington Beach, which is literally right down the street from the Foose shop. Mitch, who has participated in many *Overhaulin'* builds, is well-known in the South-

ern California car scene, as many of his project vehicles have been featured in various magazine write-ups.

According to Mitch, "Chip wanted a cool silver blue with contrasting graphite rally stripes. To get the exact colors we wanted, we worked with the BASF ColorMax system. It gave us a very large pallet of colors to work with — more than 3,000 in total. What makes the system unique is that each color chip is spray painted, thus is a perfect rendition of how the final color will look on the car." (The complete bodywork and paint process is well-documented on the Lanzini Body Works website at lanzinibodyworks.com.)

Standing back from the car, especially at sunset, two words come immediately to mind: understated and classy. Sitting on the 18-inch Foose Wheels shod with BF Goodrich 225ZR-18 G-Force rubber, the car has the signature Foose stance.

Tony certainly enjoys driving his LeMans and the experience is further enhanced by its relatively modest, yet high-performance Boston Acoustics audio system. From the AM/FM/CD head unit concealed within the glove compartment, the audio signal is routed to the trunk where you'll find a Boston Acoustics amplifier mounted on the right side in a custom enclosure fabricated by J and G Customs, plus a pair of 10-inch subwoofers in a second enclosure on the left side. The full-range por-

tion of the system is provided by a pair of 6.5-inch speakers mounted in custom-fabricated kick panels up front. The result is more than enough sound for cruising down Santa Monica Boulevard — even with the top down.

Inside, Bill Dunn Upholstery replaced the original white vinyl with black leather, accented with baseball-style stitching, befitting Tony's hobbies. Carrying the baseball theme even further: in the trunk, you'll find a Louisville Slugger autographed by basketball great Michael Jordan, who you might recall had a brief career in major league baseball after his first retirement from the hard court. The final accent, for future road trips, is a set of Rawlings luggage, covered in supple baseball glove-style hides.

Whenever one gets up close and personal with an *Overhauled*' creation, one can't help but be amazed that the projects come out as flawlessly as they do



Fast Friends

Over the course of a season of *Overhauled*', Chip Foose, along with co-hosts Chris Jacobs, and Adrienne Janic, are involved in as many as 20 individual builds. Foose describes each one as being special: "Not only do we build great cars, but we build relationships. They become like family. We always say they've joined the *Overhauled*' family."

Overhauled' Tony's LeMans was a bit extra-special for Foose, though. "I actually got to help steal Tony's car," Foose explained. "I don't often get to do that."

In fact, Foose further explained that he helped mastermind the prank: "When we got to his Mom's house, I noticed that the gate was loose. We thought we were going to have to break it. But I realized it was just gravity keeping it in place. We

— even with all the effort from Chip, the A-Team, the numerous sponsors, and, of course, those sneaky insiders.

And Tony, through the efforts of

Charlie, Rob, his Mom, plus the entire cast of *Overhauled*' has a one-of-a-kind LeMans in which he can enjoy time off between acting gigs.

Specifications

VEHICLE: 1966 Pontiac LeMans Convertible

OWNER: Tony Todd

ENGINE: Butler Performance 462 ci. Pontiac, 500hp; Edelbrock Performer RPM heads & intake; Holley 770 Street Avenger Carb; Comp Cams XE268 camshaft & valvetrain; Ross Pistons; Eagle Connecting Rods; MSD Ignition

TRANSMISSION: Bowler Performance TH400 3-speed auto

SUSPENSION: Hotchkis Performance

BRAKES: Baer Brakes

BODY PANELS: Original Parts Group (OPG)

PAINT: BASF

BODYWORK: Lanzini Body Works

WHEELS: Foose Design 18-inch

TIRES: BF Goodrich G-Force, 225ZR-18

UPHOLSTERY: Bill Dunn Upholstery

SOUNDPROOFING: Dynamat

STEREO: Boston Acoustics installed by J&G Customs

BATTERY: Optima Batteries

LUBRICANTS: Royal Purple

EXHAUST: Performance Stainless Steel

MISC: Summit Racing

Chip Foose (left) with Tony Todd at Chip's drawing table.

wound up working that into the prank, but with Chris (the host) taking it off the hinges and jumping on it."

Tony's build-up was a bit unusual, too, in that it wasn't family members that initiated the *Overhauled*'. In Tony's case, his friends Rob Goldenberg and Charlie Sheen conspired to make it all possible, and that caught Foose's attention, too.

"Having both Rob and Charlie involved as the insiders made this really special," Foose told *Pontiac Enthusiast*. "Tony's a great friend to them, and this was their way of saying thanks."

As for the car, when we asked Foose how he thought Tony's LeMans turned out, he was emphatic: "The only problem with this car is that it's not mine. And I love that it's a convertible. I really love convertibles." Foose then laughed and added, "And I just love the unicorn in the trunk! That makes the car for me."

But Foose's interest goes way beyond the LeMans' retractable top: "Pontiac's styling always seems to be a bit better than Chevy's. They're just beautiful cars. I guess I'm really a Pontiac guy at heart." Perhaps that explains why seven

Overhauled' cars have been Pontiacs — three GTO's ('67, '69 and '70), two Firebirds ('68 and '69), and two LeManses (Tony's '66 and a '68) — and why Foose was able to readily recount stories of them.

Perhaps most importantly, to Foose, though, is the new friend he's made in Tony Todd. "Tony has become a great friend and has helped out with several *Overhauled*' builds, now. He even played a 'producer' on an upcoming show, helping with one of the pranks."

In fact, we caught up with Tony and Foose as they clowned around together on the *Overhauled*' set while filming the show's third "live" build at the annual SEMA show in Las Vegas. Tony entertained the crowd and gave away prizes to those who could correctly answer *Overhauled*' trivia questions, while Foose signed countless autographs for the fans who hung out until the wee hours to watch the build and witness the car being revealed to its owner.

Of course, when two Pontiac enthusiasts meet, it's hard to imagine how they wouldn't become fast friends. ■