TAKE A RARE TWO-DOOR CHEVELLE WAGON AND INFUSE IT WITH THE SPIRIT OF THE TIKI GODS. FASHION A FEW ACCESSORIES FROM A REAL SURFBOARD AND TOSS IN A CORVETTE ENGINE. WRITER CARMEN MADRID GOT THE LOWDOWN ON THIS 1965 BEACH CRUISER FROM RETIRED-COP-TURNED-CLASSIC-CHEVY-BUILDER DARRYL NANCE, WHILE RICH TRUESDELL ENDURED AN AFTERNOON AT THE BEACH TO TAKE THE PHOTOGRAPHS.
Why, a Tiki Wagon, of course.

Defined as “a wooden or stone image of a Polynesian god,” the word Tiki elicits images of torches and fire, carved masks and beach parties. At least it does for me – and, apparently, for Darryl Nance, too.

When Nance found this classic 300-series Chevelle wagon for sale in the Recycler Classifieds back in the ‘90s, he half expected the guy who placed the ad to tell him it was a typo. Surely, the car was really a four-door. “The two-door wagons are hard to find,” Nance says.

And in what condition was this rare gem when he drove out to northern Los Angeles County for a look? “The car had been stored for a few years,” says Nance. “The owner bought it as a rebuild but had put it in storage and left it there. It was in decent shape.”

The 1965 wagon had no engine and no seats. Nance scooped it up at the bargain price of $3,500 and promptly proceeded – you guessed it – to put the car in storage.

Although he had a plan in his head of what he wanted to do with this Chevy classic, Nance left the 300-series wagon to wait its turn.

And wait it did, for about six years. D&P Classic Chevy in Huntington Beach, California, is a busy place and so is owner Darryl Nance. With his own cavalcade of 22 cars, Nance has plenty to do when he’s not at work. For relaxation, he buys cars and rebuilds them.

“I look for cars with good bones,” he says. “I envision what I want them to look like, then I work on them as my hobby.” Hmm … It seems the line between his job and his pastime is a bit foggy. Maybe it’s the sea air.

A retired police sergeant, Nance was forced into early retirement after a driver running a red light broadsided his patrol car. The doctor told him his body had taken enough beatings. His back and neck were definitely showing the wear and tear of almost 20 years as an Orange County police officer. One more mishap, and he’d end up in a wheelchair.

That’s when Nance and his wife Peggy decided to turn the mail-order, rare-Chevy-parts business they ran out of their home into a full-fledged, brick-and-mortar enterprise. They went from part-time, home-based venture to two large buildings with a third in the works. Still family-owned and operated, D&P is celebrating more than 30 years of success.

After all this time, Nance’s police-force buddies haven’t forgotten him: “We have a huge following from law enforcement officers, judges and lawyers who know me – and know we run our business with honesty and integrity.”

The inspiration for the Tiki Wagon was not hard to find, Nance explains: “We live at the beach. The Polynesian influence is all around in Huntington Beach. A beach/Tiki motif seemed natural.”

Besides being comfortably close to the Pacific Ocean, D&P is located near downtown Huntington Beach – officially nicknamed Surf City, U.S.A. And Darryl and Peggy
Nance grew up in Los Angeles’ South Bay: he in Torrance, she in Hawthorne, childhood home of the Beach Boys. Back then, Brian Wilson and Co. were known as “the guys with a band who live a couple streets over.” *Come on and safari with me...*

Nance knew House of Kolor was the only choice for the car’s exterior. The Tiki graphic was the brainchild of Steve Van Demon, whom Nance calls “one of the best in the business.” Taking the tribal flames from fender to fender and using actual wood for part of the inlay was masterful. Continuing the Polynesian god design under the hood was a stroke of genius.

Speaking of clever... whose idea was it to take wood from an authentic long board and use it to fashion the car’s console? “That was my idea,” admits Nance, “but it was made for me by Scott at Ocean Addiction Board Co.”

The console runs from the dash to the back seat, accurately depicting a surfboard, although not to scale. The intricate inlay makes this surfboard-styled middle strip truly unique. How do we know it’s not precisely sized? Nance says you have to put down the rear window to fit a real long board into the Tiki Wagon if you’re off to catch a wave.

I asked if his sons Nick and Pat surf. Nance deadpanned: “They’re ‘bench surfers.’ We live by the coast but our primary hobbies are hot rods, and they don’t do well in the surf.”

The ’65 Chevelle wagon was actually built on *Chop, Cut, Rebuild* on the Speed Channel with some tight deadlines. But the process was no problem for the D&P professionals. And you can be certain no corners were cut. The high-tech beach cruiser was built with state-of-the-art products....
from top automotive aftermarket manufacturers, including a GM Computer/Engine Management System, a Street & Performance serpentine engine-pulley kit and computer harness, and a Griffin heavy-duty aluminum radiator, to name a few.

Nance approaches each build with the same commitment to quality he shows his own projects. Customers will come in, pointing to a photo in a magazine, and ask him, “Did you build this car?” When he tells them yes, they share their dream-car idea with him and ask if he can build it. Nance tells them: “If you can dream it, we can build it. But it’s not cheap.” With clients in Hawaii, Las Vegas, Phoenix and other far-flung locations, D&P Classic Chevy shows no signs of slowing down.

Already looking forward to his next build, Nance has the Tiki Wagon for sale: “It’s just time, I don’t drive it enough. And I build real-world cars – they’re meant to be driven.”

The Tiki Wagon is listed with K&S Cars in Brea, California – price available upon request. A mutual client introduced Nance to Bob Koontz. “I sold a classic Chevelle for one of Darryl’s customers,” Koontz told me over the phone from

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sunny SoCal. “What makes this car so special is that nothing on the wagon is old. It is completely customized.”

Not just the look, but the ride. “We drove the Tiki Wagon to a car show in Del Mar last April, and it ran smoothly at 80 miles per hour down Interstate 5,” says Koontz. Thanks in part, no doubt, to the new GM Performance Parts fuel-injected, LS1 Corvette crate engine and the Global West tubular front-control arms, sway bars and performance front and rear suspension.

With a GM 4L60E electronic four-speed automatic overdrive transmission (built by Art Carr), MHT Foose Nitrous II wheels, one-off cowl induction hood, all new smoke-gray glass, Lexus power bucket seats and rear bucket seats ... and a polished Magnuson LS1 supercharger, this two-door wonder wagon is not your mom’s grocery getter.

The talented staff at D&P Classic Chevy paid close attention to every detail on the Tiki Wagon, from the dual batteries – one for engine management and one for the stereo and electronics – to custom faux-bamboo valve covers. And check out the rearview mirror. Surf’s up!

Nance would like to see the Tiki Wagon hit the open road more often. Its multiple video screens, high-end stereo system with MA amps and speakers, custom tailgate and Vintage A/C certainly make for a comfortable ride.

Nance enjoys hearing about the cars he builds and where they’ve been: “I have one customer who drives the length of old Route 66 two or three times a year as a vacation – just for the drive.”

So, if you see a Galaxy Grey and Ocean Blue, yellow-flamed, wood-inlaid two-door wagon cruising up behind you someday, smile – the Tiki gods are watching.

**SOURCES**

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