

A New Era of Mini-Truckin'?

Article by: J.R. Janicek

President John F. Kennedy once said: "When written in Chinese the word 'crisis' is composed of two characters... one represents danger and the other represents opportunity." With oil costs well over \$50 a barrel, thus causing a constant increase in the per gallon cost of fuel, this is the beginning of a possible "crisis" that could turn into an "opportunity". So, what is the opportunity? A new era of mini-truckin'. Now, let me explain my philosophy.

In the early and late 1970s, the United States faced an energy crisis. Many of the warning signs that existed before the energy crises of that era also exist today, such as: political turmoil, U.S. policy in the Middle East, high dependency on oil imports, and the declining production of oil in the U.S. Given this information, it makes sense that the current auto trend of "bigger is better" will start to steadily decline unless fuel prices lower significantly.

Though technology has enabled auto manufacturers to squeeze as much mileage as possible out of a gallon of gas in full-sized vehicles, it will not be enough. So, how will this affect the custom auto industry, specifically in full-size vehicles? I believe that the trend, especially in the SUV/truck market, will be to down size. I believe this will put the mini-trucks back on top of the world again as was the case throughout the mid-1980's and early 1990's. Not that mini-trucks are rare, that is not the case by any means, what I am talking about is the overall picture of the auto market... specifically the custom type!

It is always nice to see a resurgence of old trends and though we are teetering on the edge of an energy crisis, it will be the mini-truckers who can keep "this thing of ours" moving forward. Some say compact cars are also in the same category and therefore will carry the trend as well. I agree compacts have their place, but statistics tell us otherwise! Mini-trucks have been popular long before the compact car scene became popular here in the states. Also, the fact that the majority of the custom scene is composed primarily of SUVs/trucks to begin with also supports the idea that mini-truckin' is beginning to climb to the top once again.

While growing up in the late 1980's and early 1990's, I remember a lot of my friends had lowered mini-trucks. The Nissan Hardbody was a favorite along with the Chevy S-10 and GMC Sonoma. I even had a friend that built a Datsun pickup, which has now become a dinosaur! America is proud of their trucks and it makes total sense the custom enthusiast market will continue to be carried by the truck side of the market, in spite of rising fuel costs. What the truck enthusiast market will do is simply rethink the whole idea of "bigger is better". To even think custom truck enthusiasts would ever turn to a car in the face of higher fuel costs would be somewhat naive.

A final thought: A lot of what I see at auto shows are a mixture of daily driver customs and show piece customs. I have also noticed mini-trucks are a large part of the custom auto scene and I believe it will expand further, specifically within the daily driver category. This in turn could cause a new opportunity... a new era of mini-truckin'.

Until next time... keep it legal and keep it safe.