

Thinking It Through

Success lies in defining the look before you begin

BY JEFFREY ALLEN

You are what you drive. And that's why the lure of a personalized four-wheeled statement has never faded. The good news is that creating that statement has never been easier. The automotive aftermarket is overflowing with quality accessories that add performance and visual snap to even the most basic vehicle.

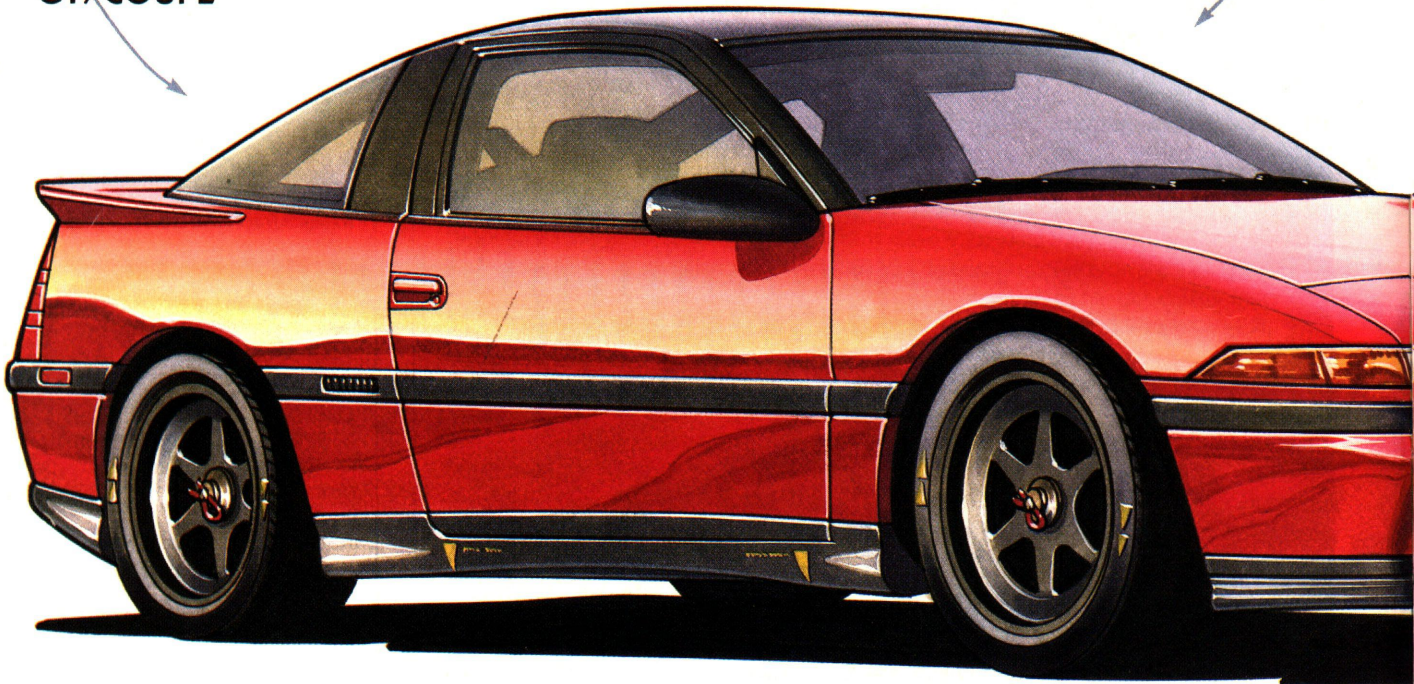
And speaking of basic, that's the place to start. Approach your vehicle as a blank canvas. But before you spend even one dime on parts and accessories, decide on the whole look you're after. That way the parts you buy will all work together to convey the look you want.

Sure, we know you're too cool to buy a small, racing-style steering wheel and pair it with a fully carpeted dashboard—unless your goal is a total funmobile. But there are more subtle choices to be made among wheels, spoilers, lights and all the other tempting add-on parts. By keeping in mind the total look, your choices will be more likely to come together correctly.

The lean, low attitude of an endurance racer was our goal when we created our designs for a GT/Coupe and GT/Sporttruck of the '90s. For the GT/Coupe, we started with a base model of one of today's hot-selling sport coupes from Diamond-Star, available as a Plymouth Laser, Eagle Talon or a Mitsubishi Eclipse. For the GT/Sporttruck, we started with a Chevrolet S-10, but the look would suit any of the current crop of popular compact trucks.

DIAMOND-STAR
GT/COUPE

Go for the highest tech: audio system with digital sound processing and—reminiscent of a race driver's radio—a hands-free cellular phone



Clearly indicated jacking points are a must for a hustling pit crew



Painted-on tire rotation arrows look like you just pitted for fresh rubber

The first step was to upgrade the suspension. We added stiffer springs, beefier anti-sway bars and plus-1 wheel and tire combinations. The package lowered our duo slightly and improved their handling and looks. We made sure our suspension choices were appropriate to each vehicle to avoid handling and clearance problems.

Next, we carefully selected aerodynamic bits such as spoilers, rocker extensions and wake modifiers to extend the racing look. Taking advantage of the styling freedom paint and decals offer, we borrowed key design elements from our favorite race cars and reproduced jacking points and tire rotation marks on the sports coupe. Even though some of these elements serve no mechanical function—such as the spring clips drilled through the non-functional center cap on the wheel—their presence adds to the total package and lends an air of style and authenticity.

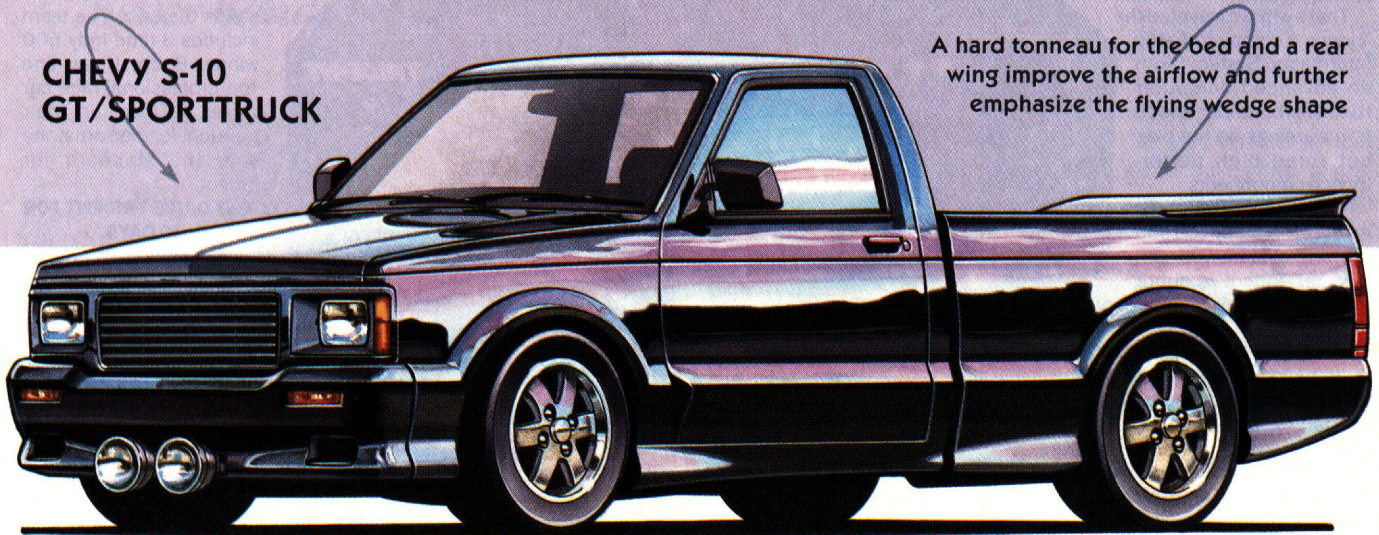
Borrowing from another styling trend, we removed all the badges

and brightwork. This isn't an original idea, but in this case it furthers the fiercely economical racing image, in which function is emphasized over decoration. Both our vehicles benefited from this simple trick.

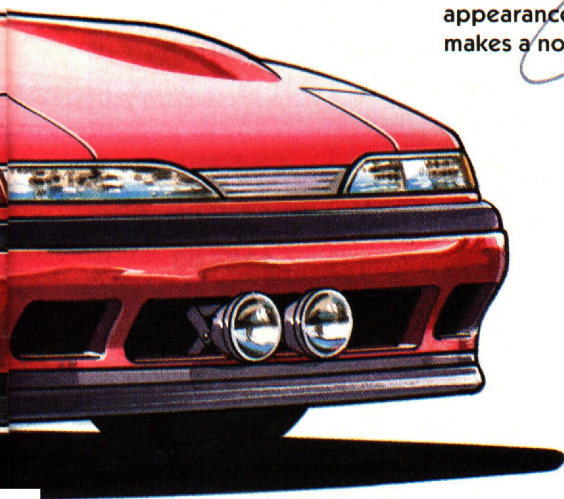
And since the exhaust note is truly the signature of a sporting vehicle, we added a free-flow muffler. A good system can help the most docile motor have a more aggressive sound. Many tuned mufflers have larger diameter outlets with dual tailpipes, adding another assertive element.

Other elements indicated below helped build our contemporary street racer look. By carefully selecting the pieces to reinforce the image, we converted a base-model sports coupe and a light-duty truck into lean, low street-hip cruisers all set to take on the '90s. Your heart may be set on a different look, but the principle never changes: Design the entire package before you start, so all your pieces work together. ●

**CHEVY S-10
GT/SPORTTRUCK**



A hard tonneau for the bed and a rear wing improve the airflow and further emphasize the flying wedge shape



The dechromed, debadged, monochrome appearance cleans up the lines and makes a no-nonsense statement

The lowered suspension work drops the nose more than the tail, giving the truck a racing rake, rather than the stance of a low-riding cruiser

Classic, round driving lamps are real, ready to illuminate the Mulsanne Straight at night