

'Professor Peterbilt'

'The Paddy Wagon' carries on Tim Ludwig's love of large cars.

Bill Hudgins



"The Paddy Wagon" was designed to qualify as an RV, but its striking paint job and highly polished chrome convey good things about trucking.

If Tim Ludwig ever decides to get a Ph.D., the "P" will probably stand for "Peterbilt." A former trucker who today creates and markets elementary school science kits, Ludwig loves the red oval so much that he bought and customized a 359 as a kind of large-car RV. He has a room full of Peterbilt models and memorabilia, as well as trophies his truck has won.

Ludwig calls his Peterbilt "The Paddy Wagon" because it resembles that bygone style of police vehicle. More important, it's a vehicle to promote a better image of trucking and truckers within and outside of the industry. It's also a heck of a lot of fun, a big toy that he's wanted ever since he was a boy.

Large Car RV

"I wanted something functional, but preferably without the hassle of scales and fuel permits. In my years of Turbowing sales I became friends with Elwin Eash and Kenny Christner, founders of Indiana Custom Trucks, builders of the Sundowner Sleeper. I spent a lot of time at their facility, which was not far from my home.



Chromed-out "Corvette" dash and dark upholstery continue the eye-catching paint work and decor of The Paddy Wagon.

"After watching many sleepers being built, I came up with an idea: A Peterbilt that would be sleeper all the way to the back of the frame, that could be licensed as an RV, but keep the look of a large car. This would put me back in a truck and give me something functional I could take to truck shows as well as pull my boat 'a 27-foot Baja Shooter' or anything else I could hook to it. Basically, a very overgrown dually," Ludwig says.

Not just any truck would do, he says. "I wanted a 359 Pete, standard hood, to keep it proportional with the size of the sleeper; a 3406B Cat with Jake and a 9-speed transmission; dual breathers and stacks; air ride; A/C; and somewhere in the neighborhood of a 250-inch wheelbase. The rest I'd take care of myself."

After checking out some 45 vehicles, he settled on an old Werner Enterprises Pete that met his specs and had been well maintained. Then began the long process of stripping it down and customizing it. Belle Way Trucking in South Bend, Ind., moved the rear axle, cut the frame and installed 3.08 rears.

Indiana Custom built a 154-inch sleeper based on Ludwig's floor plan. "The sleeper had to be built precisely to my dimensions for the finished truck to be 10 feet 1 inch tall so it could fit in my 10-foot-2-inch shop door at home. It fits perfectly."

Abraham Custom Paint Studio in Valparaiso, Ind., did the graphic design and applied the black and white base colors as well as graphics, pinstripes, lettering and murals. Ludwig installed new door hardware, clearance lights, stacks, drop visor, tank straps and other bright metal items. He finished the job at 1 a.m. on the morning of his first truck show in March 1997 and the late night was worth it; he came home with a first-place trophy.

Promoting a Better Image

Since then, Ludwig has exhibited the truck in numerous shows. Usually, he's assisted by Jay Jachimiak, whom he met at that first show. "Jay's now in a wheelchair, but he used to drive a 379 Pete on the West Coast for a refrigerated foods company until he was injured in a non-trucking-related accident in 1990. He also has a passion for trucks and after swapping stories at that show, we became good friends," Ludwig says.

Now they travel to shows together, taking Jachimiak's '67 Firebird or '70 Chevelle whenever they can. One of their most memorable moments came at the America's Truck Wash show for the Make-a-Wish Foundation in West Virginia. "Jay's Chevelle won first place and I received two second-place trophies and the Judges' Choice award out of 126 beautiful trucks," Ludwig says. "What an honor!

"With Jay's help polishing and detailing, we've won a number of awards and met some great new friends," Ludwig adds. "We can't always compete with The Paddy Wagon at car shows, but they always let us put it on display. Our hope is that we can do our part in promoting a positive image of America's trucking industry in some of the more car-oriented shows where you don't normally see a large car."



Former trucker Tim Ludwig makes science kits for schools now, but his 359 Pete makes an arresting sight at car and truck shows, where it regularly collars prizes.