



ROD vs.

... by Brock Yates



RESTORE

RESTO RODDER CHIP FOOSE AND
AWARD-WINNING RESTORER PAUL RUSSELL
ARE ROCK STARS IN THEIR RESPECTIVE
TRADES, YET REPRESENT POLAR OPPOSITES
IN THE COLLECTOR CAR UNIVERSE.

OR DO THEY?

Y

ou've got to wonder. What is it about really interesting and valuable cars that makes us all wiggly and sometimes teary when one gets wrecked or hurt? After all, they're just hunks of metal, much like the current models, except for more primitive components.

Yes, they look different, especially now that designers have to deal with aerodynamics that make every model look like every other one, save for a bit of chrome here and there and some color swatches that supposedly make one swoopier than another. So why are we so hooked on these old crocks? Is it their beauty? Their uniqueness? Their efforts to be advanced in their day? Or all of the above?

Rod vs. restore: The debate over which man is dealing with the best art form is hardly the issue. Like most arguments regarding politics, life after death, the best wine and more, it will never be settled to universal satisfaction. It is mere fact that such arguments are developed among enthusiasts

that add to the power and interest of the sport. It would be wonderful if a lecture series involving men like Chip Foose and Paul Russell could be created to enhance and expand the issue of collector cars.

For most of you, Foose and Russell need no introduction. Foose is essentially a hot-rodder. He's a

Santa Barbara, California, kid who grew up with the notion of taking a normal automobile and making it faster and flashier both inside and out. A graduate of Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California, he worked for Stehrender Design and Baker Sportronics and then created show cars for a number of big-name Hollywood films, including *Blade Runner*, *RoboCop* and *Gone in 60 Seconds*.

In 1990, Foose became a protégé of the late Boyd Coddington, and eventually became president of Coddington's company, Hot Rods by Boyd. In 1998, Foose went on to form his own company, Foose Design, and has since become, arguably, the most celebrated man in the business. He's now the star of the hit TV show *Overhaulin'* on TLC.

Russell, meanwhile, is the consummate restorer. Based in Essex, Massachusetts, he has touched some of the world's most exclusive automobiles. A longtime specialist in Mercedes 300 SL Gullwing restorations, he has also worked on many rare Ferraris, Alfas and Bugattis. In his 30 years in the business, Russell has garnered numerous Best of Show awards at the crème of the concours, such as the Louis Vuitton Classic, Amelia Island, Palm Beach Cavallino Classic, Meadow Brook and Pebble Beach.

Although I had geared up for a certain amount of dissension between Foose and Russell's design differences, they both unquestionably believe that each other's contributions help keep automobile enthusiasm alive.

It took Foose, Doug Peterson and the Foose Design crew members six years to transform a 1935 Chevrolet Master Two-Door Sedan from a color study sketch to the award-winning "Grandmaster."



COURTESY OF FOOSE DESIGN



In a world in which differing philosophies often breed contempt and personal attacks, it was refreshing to interview two gentlemen who acknowledge their differences while showing respect and enthusiasm for the other's achievements.

DIFFERENT ERAS, DIFFERENT STYLES

Power and speed are basic elements of design within the exciting world of the Southern California hot rod scene. Many of the cars Foose plays with were built for "drag racing" and high-speed runs on Muroc and the Bonneville Salt Flats.

Foose Design does everything from traditional street rods to resto rods, customs and makeovers of many current models. It's based on what a customer wants — and is willing to pay for.

I asked Foose what attracts his customers. Was it an investment, like the stock market, or was it mad money that went for the car of their dreams? "An investment," he says. "But it's something they



sees the car they know whose it is. There's an identity to the vehicle."

In many ways Russell has a more difficult job than Foose, because he must, if possible, restore or recreate ancient bits for engines and chassis that have long since disappeared.

Russell began his career with a love of mechanical parts and repairs. While in college, he talked his

"In Chip's world, there are no constraints," Russell says. "You can use your imagination ... taking inspiration from previous designers into a more modern interpretation. In ours, creativity is more directed at problem solving."

For example, if the engine block of a rare Ferrari or Alfa is cracked, Russell must either repair it or find another, while

Foose is open to planting another fresh crate motor in the bay of a hot rod. On the other hand, Russell's customers are probably not going to use the car for competition or high speeds other than an occasional historic rally, while Foose's want to tear up the track as soon as the project is finished.

While Foose has a clean slate and can do whatever he wants with a car, Russell's efforts are much more tightly defined. As an example, Russell recently restored a rare and highly valuable Alfa Romeo 8C2900, a mid-1930s sports car that ran in the famed Mille Miglia around Italy in 1938 immediately after it had been produced. This machine is one of a handful of competition 2900 Alfas on earth and had to be reproduced as authentically as possible, as opposed to creating a "hot-rodded" version.

"The changes to the car started when it was only a few months old," Russell says. "But our view is that there is a certain point in time when the car shined most brightly. We did our sort of research and we came up with photographs of the day the car arrived before the Mille Miglia."

Russell's pursuit of historical accuracy is legendary and his attention to detail is spot on. When you think about his effort with the aforementioned Alfa Romeo, it is truly amazing that a car survived, not only the war surplus period, but also the postwar period, when every man and woman wanted a new car and thousands of classics were dumped into the

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are passionate about. People come in who loved cars in high school and maybe they had a dream car back then, but they let that dream go to pursue a career. Now they have a successful business and want to pursue their other [dream]. Lots of times they will tell me about a car they really wanted to have and I'll expand on that.

"The way I look at it is, I don't want to spend my time and efforts building something you can get in a magazine. I want to do something that is unique and personalized to an owner, so if someone

went into a job as a mechanic trainee at a small independent repair shop. In 1978, after several other stops along the way, he purchased the restoration division of an independent Mercedes operation under the name of Gullwing Service Company.

He followed his instincts, worked with automobiles and fine-tuned his skills, focusing on high-quality restoration, while attracting clients like Ralph Lauren. While he views himself as a purist, he applauds automotive recreation as well. In fact, he sees "creativity in both endeavors."



Russell performed a complete restoration on this one-of-a-kind 1930 Mercedes Benz SSK. Known as the "Count Trossi" car, it's taken Best of Show honors at the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance.

market and ultimately crushed. But we then must wonder how the great machine was hidden from the surplus metal searchers and was able to be refurbished and restored under the master hands of Russell.

THE NOBLER PURSUIT?

In examining these two men and their automotive philosophies it's easy to ask who is right or wrong, whose pursuit is nobler. The answer is: Neither. They're each brilliant, like a master impressionist

painter and a master portrait artist. Skill is skill, no matter how it is applied. It's like comparing a professional quarterback to a 20-game-winning major league pitcher. Who's better? There's no way to tell.

The same is true with Russell and Foose. If you want a perfect restoration, think about Russell. If you're in play for a hot rod, Foose is your man. There is no way to compare them, save for their ability to deal with the tools of their trade.

The excitement and energy each brings to restoring or creating an automobile can be matched only by those who embrace the car's history and push the limits of technology and engineering. Whether you're a historical purist or a devout re-creationist, have fun with a collector car, but never forget the names "Foose" and "Russell."

Modify or restore: What's your opinion? E-mail your thoughts to ideas@hagerty.com.

*Black
Chrome*



**CHROME
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Gold



2466 American Ave. Hayward, CA 94545
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