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Molding Magic

Flex-Chrome Offers An Alternative To
Stainless And Chrome Trim

By Bob McClurg

Photography: Bob McClurg

The abbreviation N.O.S. is readily recognized by most car guys as standing for "new old stock," but what that usually means is "hard-to-find" and "overpriced." When it comes to chrome and stainless steel trim pieces for vintage cars, the aftermarket can sometimes help with new reproduction pieces. However, if you're not dealing with a mainstream car, like a '32 Ford or a '55 Chevy, you may be at the mercy of John Q. Swapmeet and friends for trim replacements, or you may simply have to do without. Of course, fiberglass cars present additional challenges for those desiring the visual appeal of bright trim.



Now there's an alternative: Flex-Chrome. Founded in 1989, Michigan's Auto-Tech Plastics has been engaged in the manufacture of OE-spec molded urethane extrusion replacement parts such as late-model truck bumper impact strips, side moldings, woodgrain moldings, bump-strips, and the like. However, it wasn't until owner Ron Schuman purchased a fiberglass '32 Ford three-window coupe a few years ago that he realized the hidden value of his products.

"The first thing I did was install a flexible, 1/2-inch round, self-adhesive molding to the windshield gasket area on the Deuce where the factory nickel-plated windshield trim would have normally been installed. It looked so authentic that my friends started asking me to do moldings for their cars," explains Ron.

Flex-Chrome is basically a plastic extrusion that can be readily shaped to fit practically any body contour or shape. Auto-Tech Plastics Flex-Chrome comes with a chrome Mylar base cover (woodgrain and OEM colors are also available) with a clear UV top cover layered over it. On the backside, you'll find OE-quality 3M application-specific double-stick tape backing, which, when installed properly, will last the life of the vehicle.

"We offer what we call 'profiles,'" says Schuman. "Flex-Chrome is available in different widths ranging from 0.270-inch to 0.940-inch and heights ranging from 0.135-inch to 0.300-inch, and many of these widths will match up with the original factory trim piece. This material can

be cut and shaped to fit nearly any vehicle using common handtools like a Sears Craftsman cutter and a belt sander," says Schuman. Since Flex-Chrome is pliable, it also resists bumping and (heaven forbid) dinging.

How easy is Flex-Chrome to install? "If you're just highlighting a bodyline or replacing an existing trim molding," Schuman explains, "there's usually a body crease or a reveal area. Flex-Chrome applies just like pinstriping tape. All you have to do is clean the surface with a commercial degreaser and apply the trim strip in a smooth manner. If you apply just enough pressure to lightly adhere the 3M backing material to the surface, you can move it around and align it to your satisfaction."

What if you don't have a bodyline or set pattern to follow? "We recommend that you use either a straightedge, a chalk line, or something like quarter-inch masking tape as a template," says Ron.

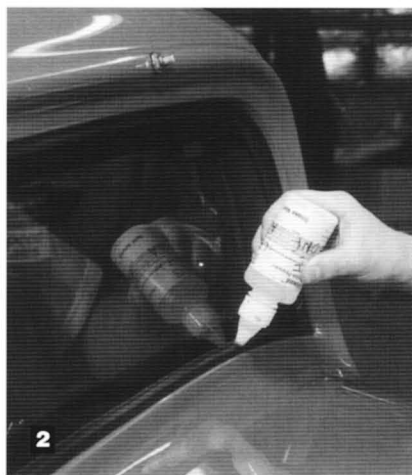
Flex-Chrome comes in 8- to 10-foot lengths and retails for approximately \$20 per length. An 18-piece sample pack is also available showing all sizes, colors, and woodgrain appliques of the product for \$20, and since Flex-Chrome moldings are pliable, they can be coiled up and shipped inexpensively via UPS.

Follow along as Schuman and Auto-Tech Plastics' technician Mike Morris install front window trim on John Vermeersch's chopped '32 three-window and experiment with the body side molding on George Sepulveda's partially completed '38 Ford cabriolet.

'32 Ford Coupe Windshield Molding



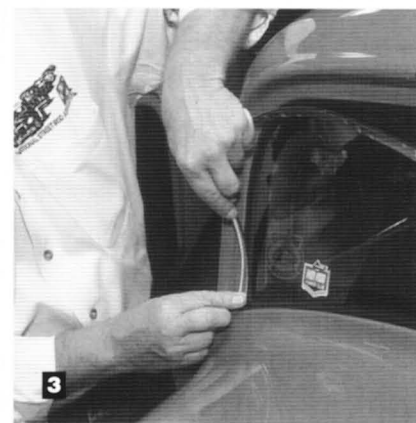
1. After taking a measurement from the lower corner of the window gasket on the passenger side, Morris uses a combination-square to make a 45-degree mark on the trim just prior to cutting it. This angled end will eventually mate with the lower trim piece.



2. Since this is rubber, Morris applies an adhesion promoter to the window gasket itself.



4. Morris pays special attention to the radius at the top of the passenger side of the windshield gasket. This is the area that will catch wind and debris, so it's essential that optimum surface adhesion is achieved.



3. Morris begins to lay down the Flex-Chrome by placing the 45-degree end in the lower corner of the passenger side of the windshield. The backing has been peeled up to the point where his right hand is guiding the trim. Special precaution is taken to insure an optimum bond (at the joint) with the rubber gasket.

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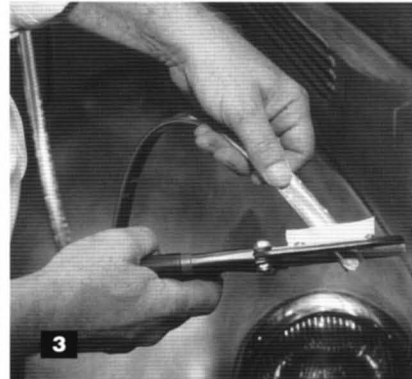
'38 Ford Cabriolet Side Trim Molding



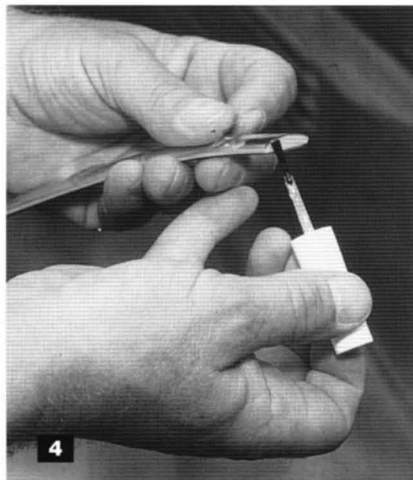
1. This '38 Ford is a perfect example of the sort of car that once had lots of brightwork that is now lost or mangled and very difficult or expensive to replace. Rather than welding up all the holes, owner George Sepulveda opted to have Auto-Tech Plastics trim it out in Flex-Chrome. Although the car is currently in bare steel, the procedure would be the same if it were painted. Mike Morris begins by degreasing the surface.



2. For this application, Ron Schuman selected Flex-Chrome's HR047C body side molding. The driver side has already been done, and you can see how closely the Flex-Chrome resembles the dimensions of the original Ford trim, which is part of the grille emblem. Morris tapes the end of the Flex-Chrome in position so that it can be marked with the proper angle to mate with the grille emblem.



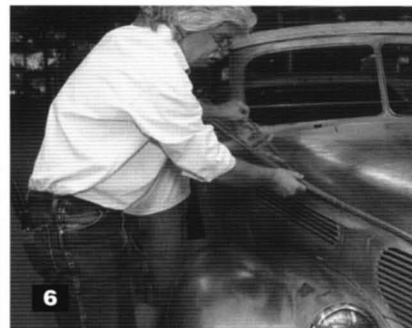
3. After making his marks, a Sears Craftsman cutter is used to trim the top of the molding at approximately 30 degrees.



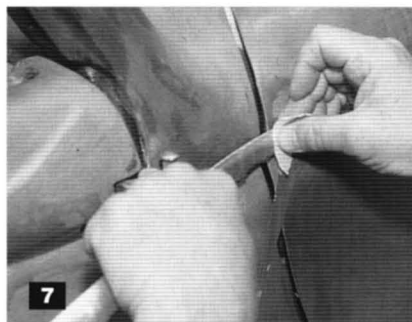
4. At this point, Schuman demonstrates one of his tricks for a successful installation by applying clear nail polish to the trimmed tip to seal it from moisture and dirt.



5. The piece is again test-fitted to the tip of the hood, and then the application process begins as the backing is peeled off and the trim fastened in place.



6. From there, Schuman simply follows the '38's beltline, carefully guiding the molding to keep it straight and tight.

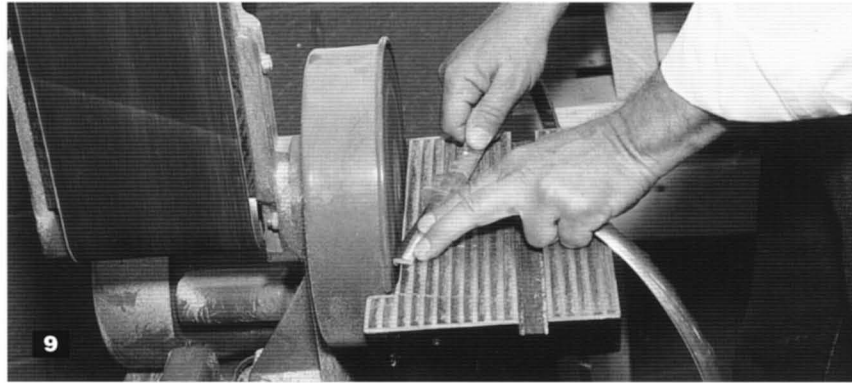


7. Once the hood/cowl separation is reached, the trim is again marked for the desired angle, this time to match the end of the hood, and then it will be clipped and sealed with more clear nail polish.

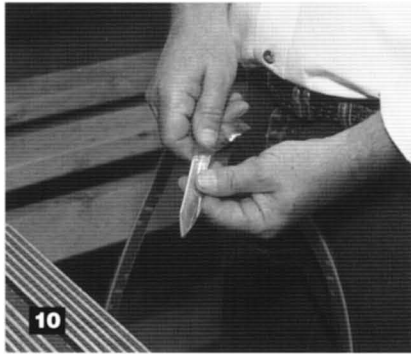


8. The process continues, using the same methods to trim the cowl and door, but once the rear quarter was reached, it was determined that there was no body features to cleanly terminate the molding, so Schuman decides to create a speared end for the quarter molding. First he measures out a section to the approximate length.

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9. Next, the molding is taken to a sander and carefully ground to a point. It's important to place the trim against the sander; this way, the grit rotates against the face so that it doesn't create a rough edge on the shiny side.



10. The piece is test-fitted and modified until the desired effect is achieved. Once satisfied with the results, the end is sealed with clear nail polish prior to installation.



11. The modified piece of molding is installed on the quarter-panel following the bodyline and terminating with a factory-looking spearhead. Once the protective plastic covering is pulled, it's a done deal.



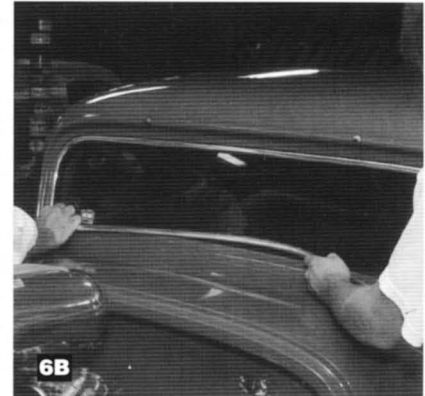
12. As this photo illustrates, with a creative mind and some patience, all sorts of trim can be created using the Flex-Chrome; the possibilities are up to you.

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5. Arriving at the junction of the driver side of the Deuce's front window gasket, another 45-degree mark is made on a piece of tape, and the trim is cut accordingly using Craftsman clippers. The remainder of the backing is peeled away and the trim is secured to the windshield gasket.



6. Now another piece of Flex-Chrome is marked and cut at a 45-degree angle to butt against the piece already in place (A). Again, the backing is peeled away as the trim is pressed in place. A helper works from the opposite side to ensure that the trim is kept taut while being applied (B).

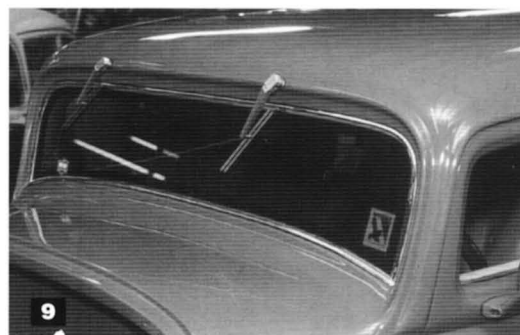


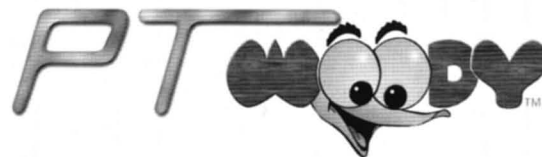
7. After reaching the driver side, the end of the trim is marked at an angle to mate with the upper trim. The cut is made, and the lower trim is fastened with its end butted tightly against the end of the upper trim.



8. Once all of the trim is securely adhered in the correct locations, the protective plastic covering is pulled from the face of the Flex-Chrome.

9. With all of the protective covering removed and the wipers back in position, the Flex-Chrome trim is hard to discern from actual chrome or stainless molding.





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