

Tom Daniel

by TERRY JESSEE



IF YOU WERE an avid model car builder in the 1960s and '70s, names like Budd Anderson, George Barris, Ed "Big Daddy" Roth, Don Emmons, and Tom Daniel are familiar to you. All of these men were important figures in the hobby. Barris and Roth were full-size custom car builders who worked as consultants for the model companies. Budd Anderson, the "Kat from AMT," worked on kit development and promotion at AMT before he moved to IMC and later MPC. Don Emmons was the writer and model builder who taught many of us how to model.

Tom Daniel was the artist. He came up with wild concept designs for the "real car" magazines like *Hot Rod*, *Car Craft*, and *Rod & Custom*. His ideas showed up on several 1:1 custom show cars like the Barris Surf Woody, and TV cars like the Munsters' Coach and Dragula, and more than 70 model kits.

THE EARLY YEARS. Tom started drawing early. His exposure to the Southern California car culture in the 1940s and '50s was a constant source of inspiration. "I was always that

Sales of the Tom Daniel-designed Red Baron kit were so good that Monogram presented Tom with a gold-plated version of the model in 1972. Here's Tom with Monogram founder Robert Reder after the presentation. Photo courtesy Tom Daniel.

Would you let your kid play cars with this guy? Tom laughs about this 1973 publicity still and says, "Everybody in California looked like that then!" This shot features several of his designs including the Red Baron, Unreal Roller, Honest Engine, and Groovy Grader. Photo courtesy Tom Daniel.

Tom Daniel was featured prominently in Monogram's advertising. In this 1970 publicity still, he's shown with several of the new Snap Dragins models. Photo courtesy Tom Daniel.



kid who got in trouble for drawing cars in class when I should have been doing school-work," Tom says.

An enlightened high school art teacher encouraged Tom, and arranged for a field trip during Tom's junior year to the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, Calif., the premier school for automotive designers.

"I was just blown away by the work I saw there," Daniel recalls. "I



Tom Daniel first came to national attention when he introduced the "sketchpad" concept in Rod & Custom magazine. Daniel's art was also featured on R&C covers. The June '65 issue showcased a series of hot rod and custom ideas for the Ford Model A, including a futuristic woody.

thought it would be so neat to design cars for General Motors, so I really started working on building a portfolio. When I graduated, I applied for admission."

At the time, the Art Center required two years of junior college for admission. Fresh out of high school, Tom didn't have much hope of getting in, but he was invited to apply and was accepted after instructors at the school reviewed his work and saw his talent.

In 1958, Tom was finishing his studies when Lynn Wineland, then editor of *Rod & Custom*, contacted him about doing custom car concept sketches for the magazine.

"Lynn Wineland actually came up with the 'Sketchpad' idea," Daniel said, "and did some of the first sketchpad articles himself." Together they worked up concept ideas and Tom submitted drawings. The idea was an immediate success, and Tom began doing work for other Petersen magazines as well. "I got 50 bucks a page," Tom laughs. "It doesn't seem like much, but it sure helped with school expenses."

Following graduation, Tom realized his big dream when he was recruited to work in General Motors' design department. He



worked there for several years, designing components and doing concept drawings for future products. "I didn't know too many people who designed a whole car. Mostly, we did pieces, like a grille or a door handle. My biggest project was designing the hood for the 1961-'65 Chevy and GMC trucks."

In 1965, Tom moved back to California to open his own design studio. "My wife just hated Detroit," he says. "She was really unhappy there, so we moved back to Los Angeles." After they returned, Tom went to work for North American Aviation where he designed components for the space program.

"A lot of people don't know about that," Daniel says, "But I worked on the Apollo space capsule and did several component designs for that program."

MAKING OF A MODEL DESIGNER.

Soon, Petersen beckoned once again. "I kind of picked up where I'd left off with them, doing 'Sketchpad' columns for *Rod & Custom* and drawings for the other magazines." One of his assignments was to review new model kits and use them as the subjects of his sketchpad drawings. His "Off the

Model Sketchpad" columns for *Rod & Custom Models* caught the eye of Roger Harney, the model shop supervisor at Monogram Models in Morton Grove, Ill.

"We had this idea for a hot rod beer wagon kit based on a Mack truck," Harney says. "I knew about Tom Daniel from the car magazines, so I approached Robert Reder with the idea of having Tom develop the concept." Reder, one of Monogram's founders, gave the go-ahead.

Daniel laughs when he thinks about that Mack. "I looked it over and I realized that the model was going to be huge, and told them about it. They said, 'Well, scale it down a little.' I worked on the idea, sent in the drawings, and they went for it."

Daniel's first design for Monogram, the "Beer Wagon," was a big hit, so Monogram called Tom about other designs. "I didn't really have any hard-and-fast rules," he says. "I just came up with ideas I thought they'd like. Sometimes they'd have a theme in mind, but mostly I came up with cars on my own."

His second idea for Monogram turned into a sales monster. "The surfers were all wearing these chrome-plated German helmets," he

Tom produced more than 70 models for Monogram between 1968 and '75. He restyled the company's existing '55 Chevy kit into the Bad Man, but the Red Baron show rod was his own design. Photo by Jim Forbes.

recalls. "I just thought that one of those helmets would look cool on a T-bucket. I started doing some sketches and came up with the Red Baron."

Tom Daniel's Red Baron was a T-bucket rod powered by a Mercedes aircraft engine and equipped with a pair of Spandau machine guns. "The name came from a song about Snoopy and the Red Baron. With that German helmet, it was just a natural."

Sales of the kit took off. By 1972, the kit had sold so well that Monogram brought Daniel back to Morton Grove where Reder presented him with a gold-plated Red Baron. "I think by that time, it had sold about two million kits," Daniel says. "They were really happy with it."

The model was so popular that Bob Larivee of Show Promotions, Inc. obtained the rights to produce a full-size version of

the car for the show circuit. Chuck Miller, a Detroit customizer, was commissioned to build the car. "He had the same problems with it I did," Daniel remembers. "The Mercedes aircraft engine was just enormous, aside from the fact that it was so rare. So they used an overhead-cam Pontiac six-cylinder engine in the car."

The helmet was another problem. "Nobody could chrome anything that big at the time. They had to settle for bright silver paint."

Tom Daniel eventually produced more than 70 designs for Monogram between 1968 and '75 (see accompanying chart). Most of the designs were original, but he occasionally redid existing kits. The Monogram Blue Beetle '29 Ford pickup became the Boss A Bone, and Monogram's '55 Chevy was restyled into the Bad Man.

"I didn't design everything, though," Tom says. "Monogram's engineers did the details,

the engines, that sort of thing. They did a super job, too. Those were great kits."

According to Monogram's design director Roger Harney, Monogram kit designer Ken Merker did most of the final design work. "Tom would send us great drawings, including section drawings. But once we got those, Ken was responsible for the final forms."

"In addition to putting them into 3-D, he also had to come up with engines and suspension parts to put under the models" Harney says. "Most of the drawings didn't show those parts, so Ken had to develop those on his own. Ken's work on those kits was pretty special. They were easy to build. He did good, well-thought-out designs."

Kit builders agreed. "When I was kid, those were the neat ones to me," says collector Curtis Hutton. "They were so different from what the other companies were doing. The box art was great, too. I built every one

I could. They were molded in colors, so all you had to do was paint the details. When you're 12, that's important. Those kits just went together so well."

Phil Davis, who started the Tom Daniel Fan Club, was another avid customer. "I was a kid building models in the '70s. Tom's theme cars were so exciting. I really think he started the whole weird show-car movement in that era."

"And Monogram's kits were just great to build. You didn't have to fit the parts or trim anything. They just fell together," Phil says. "I tried to collect all of them. I remember that I could hardly wait to go to the hobby shop and see what was new."

"We always had good luck with those concept and show cars," says Roger Harney. "They sold well for us."

In addition to his work with Monogram, Daniel worked as a designer in many other arenas. One of the more intriguing concepts was the Rocketman. "That was a car I designed for Gary Gabelich," Daniel says.

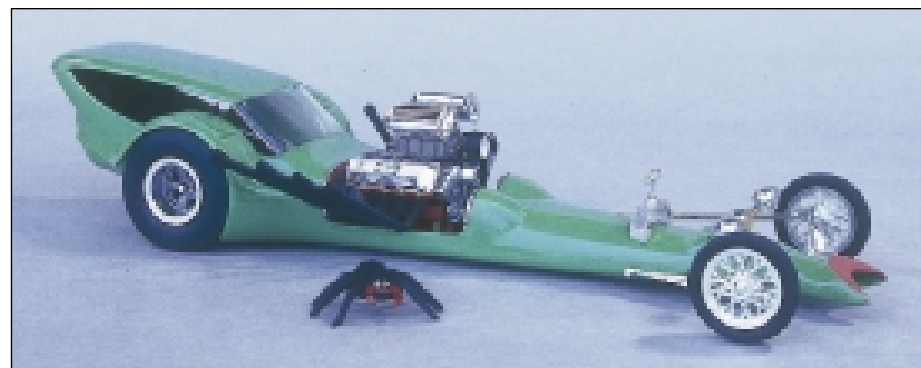
At the time, Gabelich held the land speed record. He drove more than 630 miles per hour in the Blue Flame rocket car in 1970. Gabelich felt it was possible to break the sound barrier in a car.

"We were working on it and had gotten to the point of detailed drawings," Daniel says. "Then Gary got killed on his motorcycle, and

Among Tom Daniel's many theme cars was the T'rantula, a wild fuel coupe. The kit included a plastic spider which could be mounted as a pin. "I liked spiders," he says. "It just seemed like a cool idea."

The Mean Maverick was a 1/12 scale Funny Car design with battery-powered features, including a tilt-up body, spinning rear tires, and a revving engine. Photo courtesy Tom Daniel.

Although custom car builder George Barris is often credited with designing the Munsters' Coach and Dragula, the cars were actually created by Tom Daniel from specifications given to him by Barris in 1964.



the project died with him." (Gabelich was killed in 1984 while riding his motorcycle in Los Angeles traffic.)

"I've done a lot of different designs since," Daniel says. A series of model-railroad scenery backdrops was among them. Daniel, an avid model railroader, designed those for his own company, HO West. Model railroad giant Wm. K. Walther later purchased those designs, and continues to produce them under the Instant Horizons name. Daniel also designed HO scale buildings for Model Expo, and did some design work for Bburago.

CREDIT DUE. One of Daniel's most recognizable designs, the Munsters' Coach, is often mistakenly credited to another designer.

"George Barris called one Friday evening," Daniel recalls. "We were about to leave the house to go to dinner. George told me that he needed some drawings for some cars that

were going to be on a TV show, and said that he needed them right away."

Daniel did his sketches overnight and delivered them in the morning. "He really didn't change much from the original sketches," he says. "Some minor details, but mostly the cars were built pretty much like I drew them."

Daniel is annoyed that he never received public credit for his work on the Munsters cars, but says, "The people in the industry knew who did those cars. I guess that's enough."

WHERE IS HE TODAY? Today, Tom Daniel continues to engage in design and concept work for customers on a freelance basis. "I even did some work for Peterbilt," he says. "If you see any of their droop-snoot trucks, I'm in there somewhere."

In 1997, Playing Mantis produced a num-



The box art for Revell's 1957 Chevy Bel Air hardtop kit was Tom's first work for a model company. Produced in '62, this artwork appeared only on the original release of the kit.

ber of Tom's original Monogram designs in its Johnny Lightning diecast series. Many of his most popular cars were reproduced as Hot Wheels-sized toys. In each case, Daniel did all-new artwork for the packaging.

Tom Daniel Kit List

Name/ Number/ Description

Bad Medicine	2746	Ford C-cab rail	Mojave Mule	2213	Chevy pickup
Badman	PC-229, 6747	1955 Chevy drag car	Mountain Mover	5692	Custom dump truck, SnapTite
Baja Bandito	6759	Custom VW van	Muscle Bug	7543	Custom VW, 1/16 scale
Baja Beast	7527	Volkswagen van	Outcast	8284	1957 Chevy Funny Car
Beer Wagon	2732	Mack C-cab show rod	Paddy Wagon	2733	Ford C-cab show rod
Boss A Bone	6755	Ford Model A roadster pickup	Pie Wagon	PC-192	Ford C-cab show rod
Boss Bulldozer	5690	Custom bulldozer	Poison Pinto	6654	Ford Pinto Funny Car
Boss Mustang	6786	Mustang fastback, SnapTite	Popper Chopper	7534	Chopper-style minibike, 1/8 scale
California Street 'Vette	7504	Custom Corvette	Quicksilver	2202	Chevy sedan delivery
Cherry Bomb	6761	Custom, includes motorcycle and trailer	Rat Vega	6655	Chevy Vega panel van
Cop Out	7500	Plymouth Police Funny Car	Rattler	2210	Show rod
Dog Catcher	5986	Show rod	Red Baron	2704	T-bucket show rod
Draggin' Fly	n/a	Three-wheel chopper with aircraft engines	Red Baron	PC-219	T-bucket show rod, 1/12 scale
Dragon Wagon	PC-228, 6746	Custom	Rip Off	8277	Plymouth Duster Funny Car, SnapTite
Dune Rat	6784	Dune buggy, SnapTite	Roar-'N-Peace	n/a	Chopper
Earthquake	7571	Chevy Vega Funny Car, SnapTite	Rommel's Rod	PC-225	German Staff car, with skeleton figures
Extreme Shovel	5691	Custom steam shovel, SnapTite	S'Cool Bus	8290	School bus funny car
Fast Buck	7533	Armored car	Sand Crab	PC-231	Show rod
Fiend	n/a	Dodge Charger Funny Car, SnapTite	Sand Shark	2207	Show rod
Fire Iron	7530	Custom show rod	Screamin' Skipshovel	5693	Custom front-end loader
Firecracker	5985	Ford/Mack custom fire truck	Screamin' Vette	6785	Custom Corvette
Flap Jack	7503	Custom fighter plane, SnapTite, motorized	Shut Out	7572	Ford Pinto Funny Car, SnapTite
Ford Fake Out	8275	Mustang Mach 1 Funny Car, SnapTite	Smug Bug	6659	VW, 1/16 scale
Garbage Truck	PC-206, 6793	Custom garbage truck, Includes figures	Son of Ford	6754	Deuce roadster
Ghost of the Red Baron	6742	Red Baron bust	Stampede	7574	Ford Mustang II Funny Car, SnapTite
Grim Reaper	7541	Harley-Davidson chopper, 1/12 scale	Street Fighter	6752	Chevy station wagon delivery
Groovy Grader	5697	Show car	Super Digger	5991	Dragster, 1/12 scale, motorized
GRRemlin	n/a	AMC Gremlin Funny Car, SnapTite	Super Taxi	6896	Chevy Nova taxi, SnapTite
Hangman	2208	Chevy tow truck	Sweet "T"	6756	1923 T-bucket with blown Chevy engine
Hemi-Semi	6895	COE truck with van box, SnapTite	T'rantula	2744	Dragster
Honest Engine	6656	Custom	Thunderbug	6783	Custom VW
Horn Toad	5967	Show rod	Top-Chop	6660	Hemi-powered three-wheeled chopper
Ice "T"	6757	Custom	Trick "T"	6054	Show rod
Jinx Express	6899	Armored car with working combination lock	Troublemaker	8283	Chevy El Camino Funny Car
King Chopper	PC-224	Motorcycle, 1/8 scale	Unreal Roller	5698	Show rod
L'il Van	7532	Dune buggy	Vampire	7545	Custom chopper, 1/12 scale
Leap Hog	6652	ATV-style three-wheeler, SnapTite	Vandal	6657	Custom van, includes minibike
Mean Maverick	6775	Maverick funny car, 1/12 scale, motorized	Whiplash	8276	Chevy Camaro Funny Car, SnapTite