



# Colby man crazy about Mercurys

By Tisha Cox  
*Colby Free Press*

Most cars on the road these days were built on an assembly line. But Ross Rodenbeck of Colby is taking a classic car and making it a work of art.

Rodenbeck, 74, is rebuilding a 1950 Mercury to his own taste. “It’s a lifetime project,” he said. “We drove the car originally.”

He bought the car in 1984, and has sporadically worked on it since. “This is a winter project,” Rodenbeck said.

He chopped the car twice, meaning taking off some of the height. He started taking off metal on the top and bottom to get the body low. Though it has been chopped, the body is in proportion.

Rodenbeck explained he sat in the driver’s seat, and had someone else keep putting tape on the windshield to see how far they could chop the car and still be able to see. Though it was chopped, he still wanted to keep it like a Mercury. “I want to do this myself,” he said.

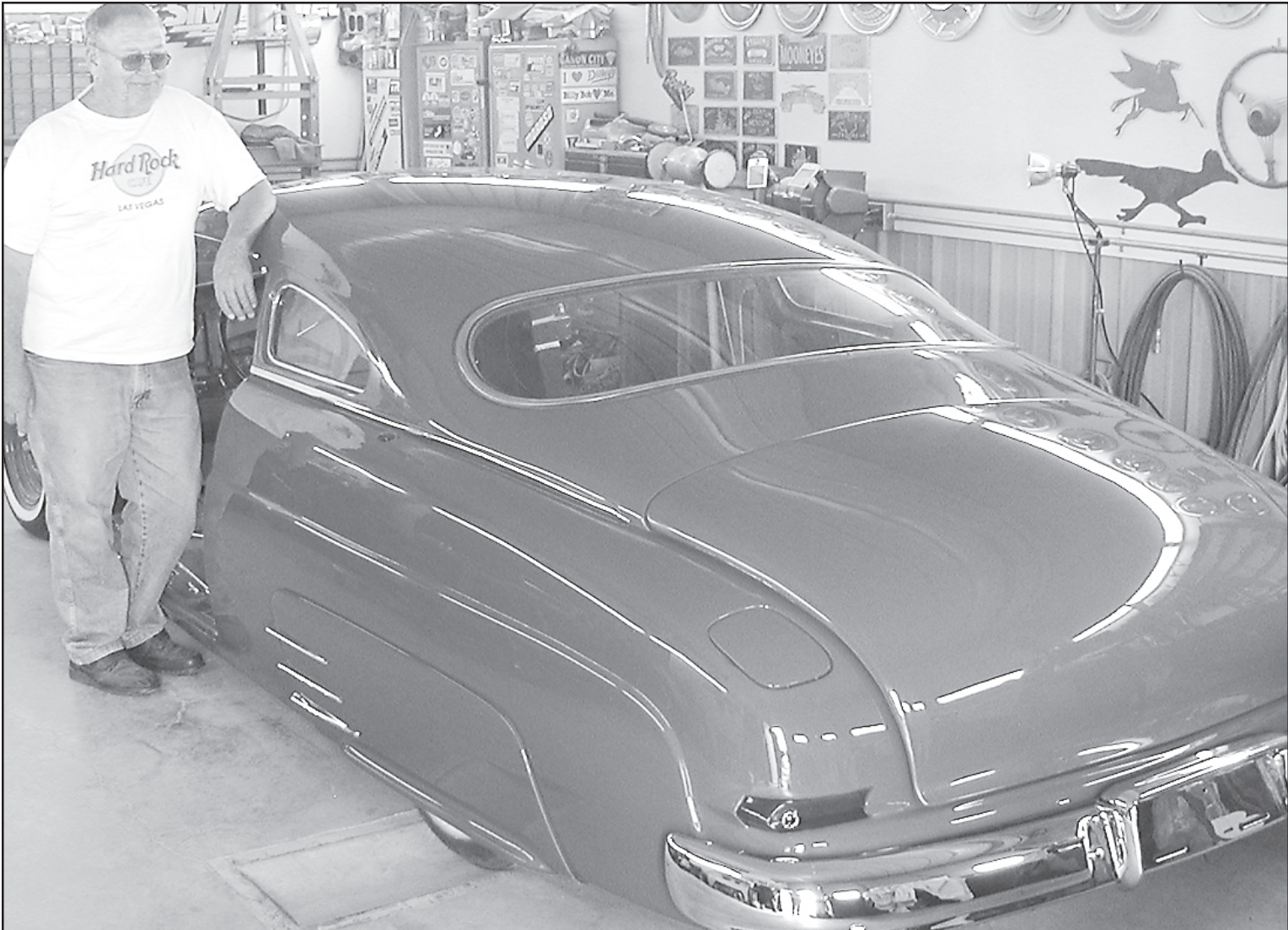
He completed most of the body work, but is leaving the mechanical work and upholstery to others.

Rodenbeck used to paint his cars, but does not anymore “because it is a long, involved process.”

The car is now a vibrant shade of red.

He said the color was the hardest decision to make. He didn’t want black, and finally settled on red, but may add flames in a year or two. “Picking a color was terrible,” he said.

The engine is a Ford Windsor 351, and runs on regular gas. He plans on putting in air conditioning, manual windows and seats. Rodenbeck does not want electric windows or seats because it means more wiring.



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

Ross Rodenbeck of Colby looked over his 1950 Mercury, which he has owned for more than 20 years. The car is a work in progress

he hopes to finish by next year. He has chopped down the car’s height, and lowered it, making other changes on his own car.

Another change is the back seat. Though the finished car will have one, it will not have enough room to sit.

“It’s very small inside,” he said.

Because the car is now a proverbial low rider, it has a skid plate under the engine and transmission.

Many of the car parts he built himself.

Part of the process in building a car he said is “planning and doing, and hoping it all turns out right.”

Engines are an exact science, but the rest is an art.

For example, he built the rear skirts using the skirts from a 1951 model. He lengthened the skirts and added 1956 Mercury front fender bars.

His interest in cars came about after he saw an issue of one of the first ever hot rodding magazines. Rodenbeck started working on cars while he was in school, taking a job in a body shop doing whatever he could — sweeping the floor, working after school or on weekends.

He worked for Lyle Gillespie at his body shop, which was once in

the building now housing Service Oil. Rodenbeck grew up in the early 1950s, when the hot rod trend started.

“Our cars were, and still are, the thing,” he said.

His first car was a 1947 Ford coupe, which he later chopped off the roof.

That life-long interest has lead to

many friendships.

He served in the Marine Corps during the Korean Conflict, but kept alive his passion for cars. After the service, he married his wife, Anna Dean, and the first car they bought in 1953 was a 1950 Mercury. They have been married 53 years and have three children and six grandchildren.

Rodenbeck said they have owned many cars over the years, but the only cars he counted were the Mercurys. He has had at least a half-dozen of the cars.

“We drive the wheels off them,” he said.

Rodenbeck has not yet made a decision on taking the red car to the Colby Rod Run this weekend. He currently drives a 1950 black, four-door Mercury. It was finished in 1981, and has been to several rod runs.

His 1950 winter project car is the latest.

“There isn’t another one like this,” Rodenbeck said.

The 1932 Ford has become a popular model to restore or rebuild. But he had his own ideas.

“I wanted to build a real radical Mercury,” he said. “I can walk in, almost any time, and I’ll stop and look at the car,” he said. “I enjoy it that much.”

Making the car his own was what he had planned.

“That’s the whole idea,” he said.

It has kept him busy, but he likes it being a work in progress.

“If this was done I’d just have to work on another one,” he said.

“These cars are very important to us.”

His wife, Anna Dean, has been an important part of the work. She helps in her own way. If she likes his work, and will ride in the car, he has done his job.

“She gives me her opinion,” Rodenbeck said.

## Truck stop back on agenda

By Patty Decker  
*Free Press Editor*

The Colby City Council will review a preliminary layout for Bosselman Travel Center when it meets at 7:30 p.m., Tuesday, at city hall, 585 N. Franklin Ave.

“Officials with the Bosselman project will be at the meeting to discuss the extension of water and sewer services,” said Carolyn Armstrong, city manager.

No estimates for the extension will be available from the city until it’s clear where Bosselman’s wants the lines.

“We have a 16” water main on the north side of Willow by the substation and the sewer is on the east side of County Club Drive,” she said.

When completed, the travel center will be located in Stephens Industrial Park near exit 54 on Interstate 70.

In other council business:

- Leilani Thomas with the Colby Convention and Visitor’s Bureau will present the 2006 activity report and proposed 2008 budget.
- The council will consider extending the ground lease with American Tower for an additional four 5-year renewals.
- Mike Albers, technology director, will be available to answer any questions regarding the lease fee and tower.
- Chris Bieker, public utilities director, is back on the agenda to talk about whether or not it would be beneficial to improve Country Club Drive-Brookside Avenue since sewer main work is not scheduled for completion in that same area until next year.
- Recreation Director Ryan Sturdy’s last day was May 31. Armstrong said Sturdy is the new softball coach at Colby Community

College. Until a new director is hired, Katessa Smith, assistant recreation director, agreed to fill in on an intern basis.

- No bids for the city’s tree-trimming project were received after bids were sent out. The council will be looking at another way to approach the situation.
- The council is expected to approve street closings for the “Cruise to the Past” Rod Run at Franklin Avenue from Fourth Street to Eighth Street and from Eighth Street to Court Avenue to Fike Park. The road closing will also effect Fike Park Road from west of the Senior Progress Center to Franklin Avenue, but leaving 20’ fire lanes open on all closed streets. The streets will close from 6 a.m. to 4 p.m., Saturday.

All meetings are open to the public. For an agenda or questions, call 460-4410.

## Greensburg trees need replaced

GREENSBURG (AP) — When last month’s tornadoes ripped up Greensburg and other parts of Kansas, the deadly storms also destroyed hundreds of trees, or shelterbelts, that had been planted during the Dust Bowl years to help control wind and erosion.

Local and state officials estimate more than 200 shelterbelts were affected, with more than 10 to 50 miles of trees destroyed in the May storms that destroyed the town of Greensburg and left 13 people dead.

“If they are not replaced you run the risk, particularly in the western part of the state where there is the sandier soils, to once again have the wind erosion,” said Roger Masenthin, Sunflower Resource Conservation and Development coordinator.

But many of the shelterbelts, huge mile-long tree lines, were so old, they don’t qualify for federal programs to replace them.

As the storm cleanup continues, those trees may be last on the list, said Rick Snell, Barton County Extension Agent.

“It takes a lot of labor and money to restore those shelterbelts,” Snell said. “More immediate concerns are getting crops planted, harvested, taking care of livestock and buildings ... It takes a lifetime to establish those trees.”

In the 1920s and 1930s, rural America was in the midst of an economic depression.

The came the years of drought and wind.

To combat the effects of the storms, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt initiated a tree-planting program that could reduce wind erosion on the Great Plains.

Shelterbelts were periodically planted to check the prevailing south and north winds. Trees such as Osage orange, Russian mulberry and hackberry, as well as yellow pine, red cedar and cottonwoods dominated many of the tree lines.

All told, more than 10 million acres of trees were planted in Kansas shelterbelts by the end of the 1930s.

“These trees were primary to settling the ground down in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s,” Masenthin said. “They were established by people’s grandparents and great-grandparents. And, they were established well.”

Kiowa County had more than 15 miles of shelterbelts destroyed by the storms in early May that left 13 people dead, said Jamie Holopirek, the county’s Natural Resources Conservation Service director.

In some places, where the tornadoes were more than 1-miles wide, there is little hope of replacing the trees.

In those places, nothing remains but shards of tree trunks.

The same holds true for Edwards, Stafford and Barton counties.

“We are going to have to wait and see how much some of them will come back,” Holopirek said.

“Some of them were destroyed so bad, they will have to be pushed out. There is so much debris in them, metal and tin from farmsteads. They are completely gone.”

## Summer has arrived!



JOHN VAN NOSTRAND/Colby Free Press

Garrett Kraft, 11, dived into Colby’s swimming pool Friday afternoon, the opening day for the pool. Despite temperatures below 80 degrees, pool staff had 76 people, more than they were expecting.

## Picnic in the Park starts Wednesday

Bring your food and somebody who else will bring the fun.

Picnic in the Park, an annual event showcasing local talent, will begin at noon, Wednesday, in Fike Park. The Wagoner family will perform this week.

Those interested are asked to bring their own lunch.

Picnic in the Park is sponsored by the Colby Free Press, Colby/Thomas County Chamber of Commerce and Colby Convention and Visitors Bureau.

In case of inclement weather on Wednesdays, Colby radio stations KXXX, 790 AM and KQLS, 100.3 FM, will air if Picnic in the Park will be held.

The list of entertainment for this summer include:

- June 13, Larry Booth;
- June 20, Bill Summers and Friends;

- June 27, McLemore family;
- July 4, no picnic in the park;
- July 11, Shannon Myers;
- July 18, Sappa Strings (Wayne and Mille Lauritsen);
- July 25, April McAdams.

For more information contact any of the sponsors: Colby Free Press, 462-3963; Colby/Thomas County Chamber of Commerce, 460-3401; and Colby Convention and Visitors Bureau, 460-7643.