

**COLLEGE
GUIDE '07**

25 HOT SCHOOLS
(AND HOW YOU CAN GET IN)

SPECIAL DOUBLE ISSUE

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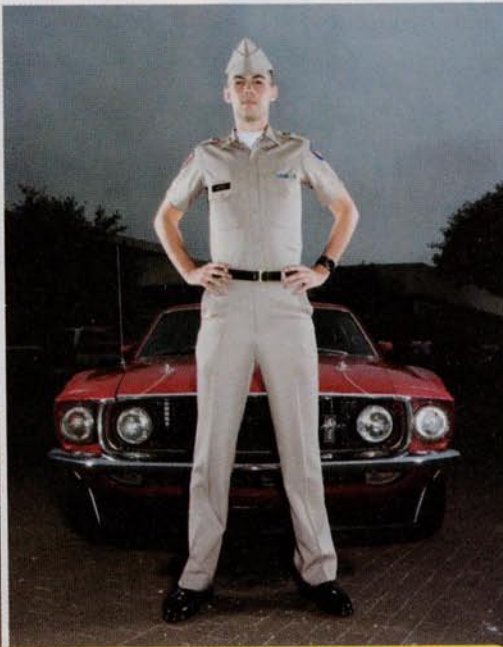
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PHOTOGRAPH BY EDMOND TERAKOPIAN—POLARIS



A U.S.-bound flight
takes off from
Heathrow Airport,
Aug. 10, 2006

newsweek.msnbc.com



PIMP THESE RIDES: Sam Craven polishes his Nissan (left), while Austin Bittle guards his beloved Mustang

Scion tC, Acura RSX, Mazda3, Volkswagen GTI and Hyundai Tiburon. The common characteristic: all these models are easy to modify. California Polytechnic engineering student Erick Li spent \$4,000 customizing his black Scion tC by lowering it, beefing up the suspension and adding red “underglow” interior lights and high-intensity headlights for carving turns in the California hills. “A lot of cars can outpower me,” he says, “but I can outmaneuver them.”

When it comes to modifying cars, though, college kids are all over the map. There’s the boy (and girl) racer crowd that favors revved-up pocket rockets, like the Subaru WRX, that they’ve driven in videogames. Then there are the blinged-out Escalades and Range Rovers they’ve seen on “MTV Cribs.” The latest craze is for “donks”—

grandpa cars like Oldsmobiles and Buicks from the ’70s jacked up on huge 28-inch wheels, once known as donkey tires. Still others go for “rat rods,” well-worn hot rods with distressed paint jobs (including faux rust) that share an esthetic with pretorn jeans.

For some campus car nuts, their hobby becomes their career. A&M’s Hodges has already lined up a sales job with one of the nation’s top automotive-retailing chains once he graduates. Luke Starnier, a junior at Ohio University, couldn’t wait until he graduated to get his automotive career rolling. He’s formed Amped Imports, a customizing business in his hometown of Amanda, Ohio. “We help people with ideas,” he says, “and help them tune their cars.” His own heavily modified ’99 Civic has earned him plenty of street cred with other guys into customizing. But unlike Hodges’s Firebird, Starnier’s ride is no chick magnet. “People say you can meet girls because of your car, but I haven’t,” he says. “Maybe I don’t have a cool enough car.” Or maybe he just doesn’t get his head out from under the hood enough.

With PATRICK CROWLEY and TRACI CARPENTER

HOT WHEELS

College kids are spending billions of dollars to customize their cars. Can you say ‘road trip’?

BY KEITH NAUGHTON

IT’S THE WEEK BEFORE FINALS AT Texas A&M University, and cramming for exams is in high gear. But just outside the student center, a half-dozen cars are parked in a row beneath the shade trees surrounding A&M’s iconic Rudder Fountain. The cars are tricked out with hot paint jobs and cool wheels, but this isn’t some car company’s slick marketing display. This car show—the fifth on campus this semester—is the handiwork of A&M’s burgeoning Sports Car Club. And it’s putting a crimp in the studying as students slow down to check out the hot rides. The star of the show is a silver ’75 Firebird with black racing stripes owned by club president Benton Hodges, a senior communications major. His car is such a head turner, several female students have even—he says—offered him some back-seat action in exchange for a ride. “I tell them, ‘No, thank you, I have a girlfriend,’” he says.

There are still plenty of college kids who are happy to drive a junkmobile. And at city schools, students rely on bikes or even—gasp!—the subway to get to class. But on many campuses today, college kids

want the wicked whips they’ve seen in popular movies like “The Fast and the Furious: Tokyo Drift” and hit shows like MTV’s “Pimp My Ride.” Nearly nine out of 10 college students today own a car, according to a survey by Harris Interactive. They’ve become a \$15 billion auto market and now purchase nearly one in 10 new cars, according to automotive researcher J.D. Power and Associates. And many aren’t satisfied with stock. They’re spending \$4.2 billion a year customizing their cars, according to the Specialty Equipment Manufacturers Association. They’re outfitting their rides with ground-shaking sound systems, nitrous-injected engines and 20-inch rims (called dubs in street parlance). “Just like their ringtones, their clothes and their dorm rooms,” says SEMA’s Peter MacGillivray, “their vehicles reflect their personalities.”

That’s why there is no single “look” that dominates campuses now. Back in the ’90s, Civics were so prevalent that student parking lots looked like Honda dealerships. Now the Civic isn’t even in the top 10. Instead, college-age kids are going for a mix of mostly Asian models. The top five, according to J.D. Power, are the