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THE QUICK AND THE BED

Dak owner gets "clubbed," wakes up at the track.

By Al Dente

Photos by TheDentist

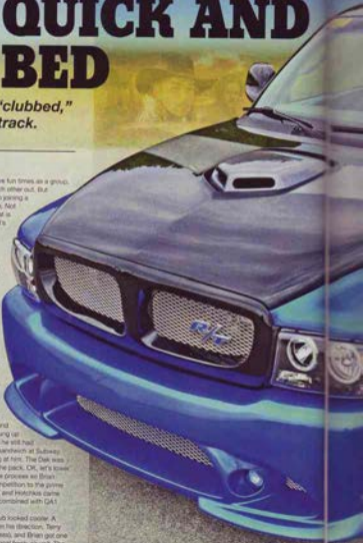
Mopar clubs are great. You have fun times as a group, exchange ideas and help each other out. But there's a more sinister side to joining a club. It's called peer pressure. Not everyone is infected. If you're the type that is satisfied with your ride regardless of what is going on around you, fine. But if seeing Joe Schmo showing up with a new set of custom wheels makes you suddenly feel inadequate, you've got the bug. The treatment can be expensive—constantly adding stuff to your Mopar to keep it competitive in the attention-getting dept.

That's sorta what happened to Brian Akers. Trucker down to the local Dodge dealership with his dad who was picking up a used Dakota, Brian saw a blue Dak R/T that was calling to him "Buy Me." Whether the dealer had a knobby speaker hidden in the truck that played that phrase to prospective customers or it was just in Brian's head, we don't know. What matters is that he ended up buying the truck, and he loved it—stock.

Then Brian joined the Dakota R/T Club. Mac, there were some cool trucks with all kinds of tricks. Suddenly "stock" just seemed old. OK, let's pick up the performance a bit to stay ahead of other stock trucks in the club. A cold air intake and shorty headers were the first items to be rung up on Brian's Gold Card. Not a bad start, and he will had some bucks left for an occasional lettuce sandwich at Subway.

But the peer pressure bug was growing at him. The Dak was peppy but it really didn't stand out from the pack. OK, let's lower the acker, and upgrade the handling in the process so Brian would have a good shot at beating the competition to the prime showfield spots. A DUM kit dropped him 2" and Hitches came through with springs and swaybars. That, combined with QA1 shocks, sharpened handling considerably.

Not bad, but some of the Daks in the club looked cooler. A '70s-style "Cuda shaker would turn heads in his direction. Terry DeLong made one they no longer in business, and Brian got one before Terry folded up his tent. It's a functional fresh-air unit. The Dak served a Brian's daily driver until 2004. That's when he really went nuts pulling the truck completely apart, powder coating the





2001 Dakota is custom painted in original color. Brian designed the graphics that were executed by his father-in-law, who shot the 3-stage paint with 4 coats of clear. Shaker hood was made by Terry DeLong while Sniper supplied the grille and bumper. (Below) Set up for track duty, Brian clocked off a 12.1 ET @ 113 MPH on his second time out. Traction problems slowed him down.



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THE QUICK AND THE BED



Dak rolls on custom one-off 15" Bogart wheels wrapped with Mickey Thompson skins.

chassis and having his father-in-law repaint the truck in its original color but with a PPG 3-stage paint, sanding each of the 4 coats of clear. That process, says Brian, took a year as it was a one-man job (guess the guy took a lot of breaks).

Looking around at some of the other trucks in the club, Brian decided his Dak Needed "a little more." So he spruced up the front end a bit with a Snoper grille and bumper and GSM side skirts. He shaved the tailgate and flipped it around so the handle was on the inside, and while he had his Gillette auto razor out, he shaved the antenna. He musta run outa blades before he got to the door handles.

Turning to the interior, Brian sprung for custom Katkon leather covered Gen 2 Viper seats (made from real katz). He cobbed up a custom console and dash cover. The dash and A-pillar sport ProParts and Blackcat gauges so Brian can monitor much more information than he really needs to know. "Course other club members now feel gauge-challenged, but that's their problem.

Well, Brian's Dak now seemed like a pretty complete package—maybe to you Road Runner fans out there, but you don't think like a Dakhead. Inkwit, it was a pretty complete package—visually and handling



Clean rear shows tailgate reversed so handle is on the inside and shaved of extraneous emblems.

wise, but it lacked just one more little detail. It wasn't quick enough. That detail was handled by Southeast Performance in Tampa, Florida, for a complete 408 stroker long block. The engine builders used all the good stuff—MP forged crank, 10-1 Diamond pistons, Eagle H-beam rods, ARP studs. Up top in ported and polished Dak heads, the valvetrain is motivated by a Comp Cam pumpstick. Inside the feedbag are an M1 4-8oz intake and 58mm throttle body. Injectors are 34 lb/hr Ford racing units. Needing a "little extra" on occasion, Brian went for a 150 HP NCO nitrous shot with NK solenoids.

Beefing the stock 4-speed automatic equipped with a 2800-stall converter and shift kit essentially was running diesel-duty components such as Kevlar clutch bands. A trans cooler keeps temps in line. Brian figured the current setup should be good for turning some good times at the track. So far he's had it out twice, with his best chugging up



408 stroker was built by Southeast Performance in Tampa, FL. The 10-1 motor puts out a dyno'd 415 HP to the wheels plus another 150 ponies from squeeze. Intake is a 4-8oz M-1 with SGM throttle body. Ignition is MSD 6AL Digital. Exhaust is GSM headers and Spintech mufflers with cats deleted.

