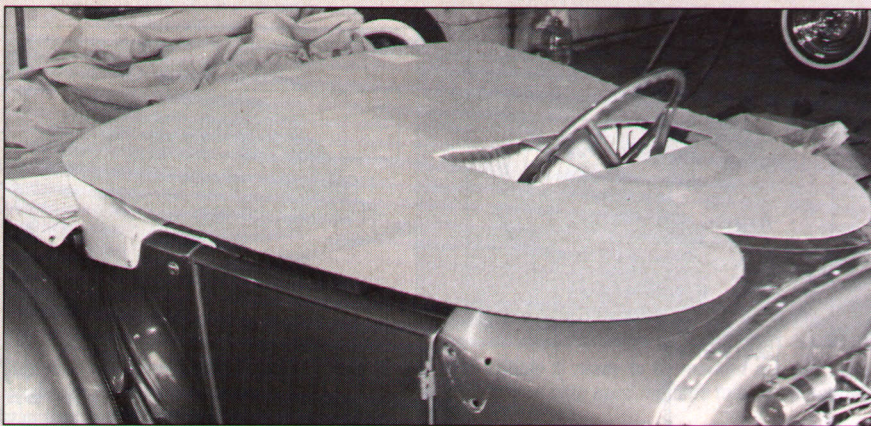


cut out, leaving a hole the shape desired. A support box was then constructed some 4-inches higher than the profile the finished top would be. To create a full windshield effect, and a double-bubble at the rear, I cut another piece of 3/4-inch plywood with the exact profile I wanted the bubble to have (in the rear) after it is formed, leaving a jump-off area up front where the windshield shape could be free-blown (without a central indentation). This plywood was placed on end in the center of the base plywood and boxed in as well. To further understand this procedure, please refer to the photos and illustrations provided.

Now, a little theory of how all of the proceeding actually goes into creating a bubble-top. The plastic must first be heated evenly to a pliable condition. It is then clamped around the edges of an airtight table under the aforementioned box (that contains both the horizontal and vertical shapes desired), with an air hole in the middle that is used to apply air pressure under the hot plastic until it blows up like a balloon, reaching the height desired. As an example: If you had a 12-inch round hole, and blew in air until the plastic was 6-inches high, you'd have a perfect 1/2-ball shape. This plastic ball would have near perfect optics, as the expanding plastic would have touched nothing. Now, if you put a small restrictor in the middle of the circle, the plastic would hit the center before it reached its full 6-inches of height, creating a double-bubble effect. And the lower you make this restrictor, the more double-bubbled effect you create.

The more I make my profile restriction fastback in shape, the more I'm creating a fast-back look to the top. The other determining factor, of course, is the shape of the cockpit itself. The wider it is in front, and the narrower it is at the rear, the more fastback your profile will become too. Never blow a bubble over half the height of its widest point, or it will over-blow, making the sides bulge outward, taking on an undesirable shape. If you fully understand and study this theory, you can come up with just the right look for a bubble-top on your next project.

When you send your plywood lower ring and vertical restrictor to a plastic company (I now use Plastic Fabricators, Inc., 8822 E. Admiral Pl., Dept. CRM, Tulsa, OK, (918) 836-6611) they, in turn, build a box around them. This is not only used to finish and strengthen your tool for blowing, but serves as a crate to ship back your finished bubble in as



*The first step in creating a bubbletop is to determine its shape in cardboard. Back in the Big Deuce/Big T-era, a customer came to me with a finished '27 T roadster, wanting a bubbletop. As you can see, a lot of bodywork would have been ahead to create a body contour-matching hinged ring. Even though the bubble was blown and Monogram was in the process of tooling up to make a scale model, the owner got cold feet, and the projects (both full-sized and scale) went no further. One thing's for sure, it would have been a first for a street rod!*



*The next step is to transfer your pattern to a sheet of 3/4-inch thick plywood and cut it out. (Note: remember to save this cutout piece.) You'll also need to determine the height of your bubble and cut the profile shape as well. By creating both horizontal and vertical profiles of your top, you've effectively created the tooling required by those who will actually blow your bubble. I call this my Predicta-style top, because it's a full bubble in the windshield area, going into a double-bubble at the rear. The vertically-mounted piece of plywood limits the expansion of the heated plastic when being blown, creating a central seam approximately half way that stops the plastic's expansion. The plastic is blown higher on either side creating the desired double-bubble effect. The 90-degree step is for the front, which unlike the rear, isn't meant to have a crease, but rather to be free-blown for an unobstructed, optically correct windshield area.*

