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Wet Dream

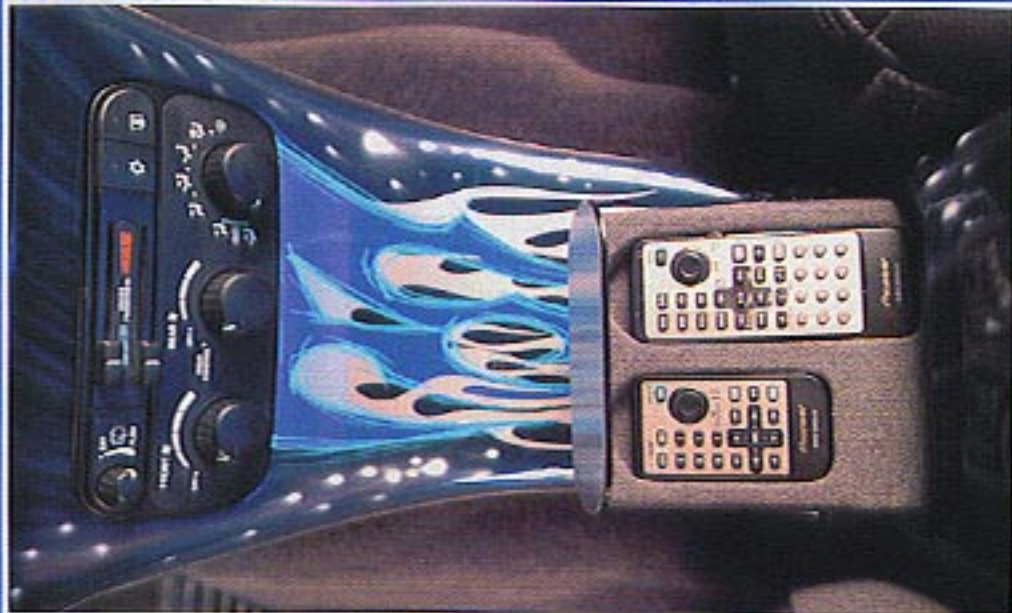
SEAN PHILLIPS WANTED HIS 2001 DODGE DURANGO R/T TO MAKE A BIG SPLASH. WE THINK THIS WET AND WILD SYSTEM FITS THE BILL.

by DOUG NEWCOMB • photos by MARIAN KRAUSS

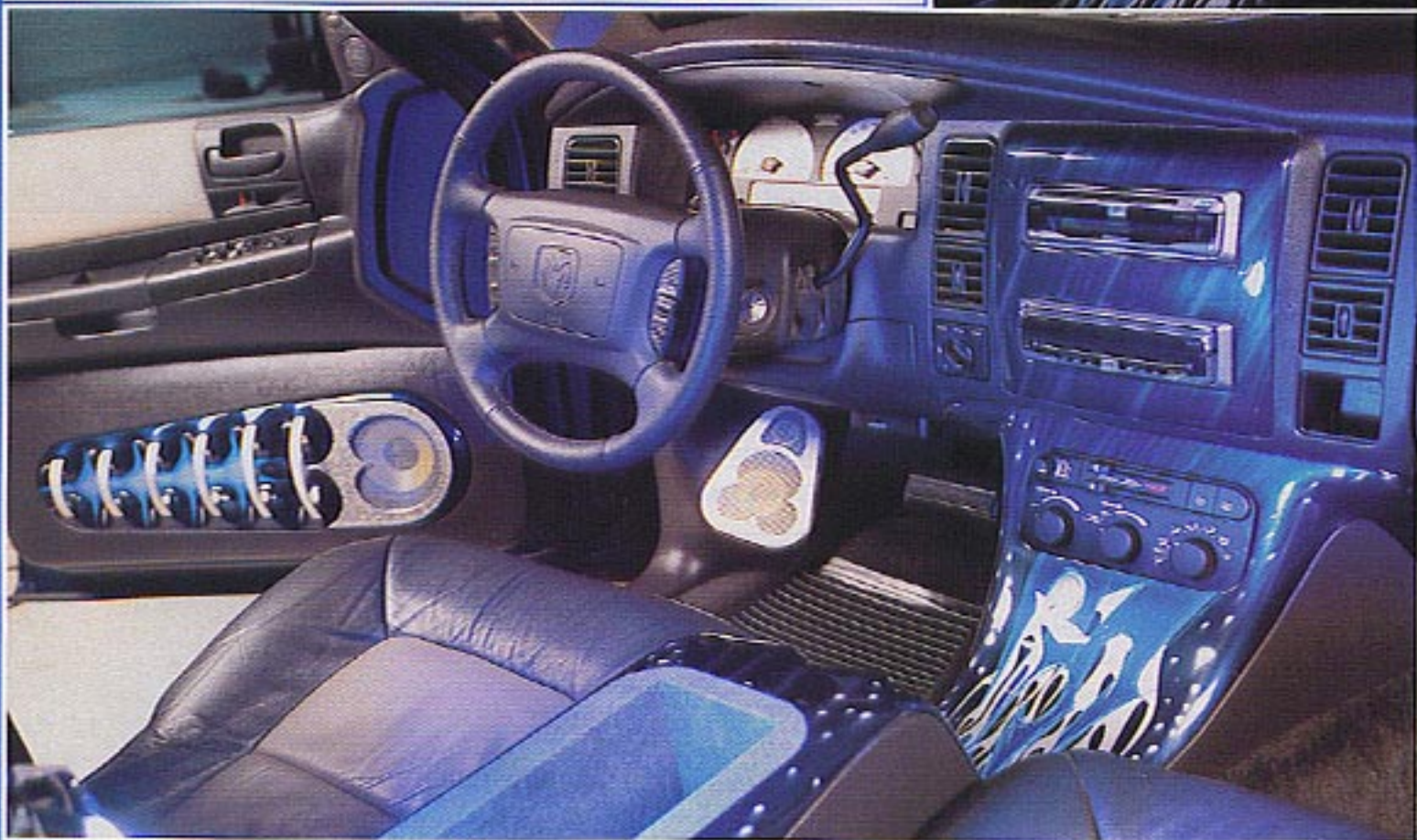
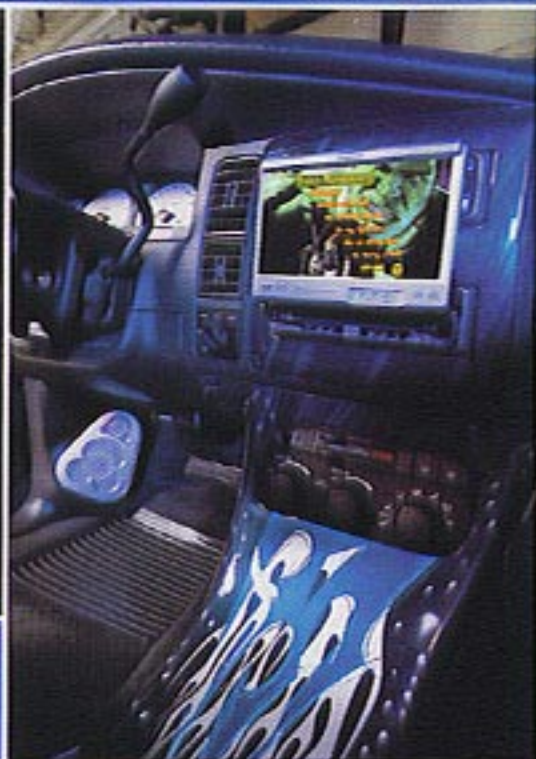
GIVE ME SOMETHING WILD. Those were the marching orders that Sean Phillips handed to his installer re: the system for his 2001 Dodge Durango R/T. Phillips, a 30-year-old manager for a Chicagoland grocery chain, had elaborate systems installed in two other vehicles over the course of about 6 years, but he ultimately

FIRE & WATER: The rear of the Durango features flame-painted sub boxes, a lighted amp "bridge," and a waterfall (just out of view above).





BLUE FLAME: The flame motif licks at the dash (below), which houses a Pioneer DVD nav system above a DVD player with a foldout 7-inch screen (right); their remotes are tucked in a drawer that slides out of the center console (above).

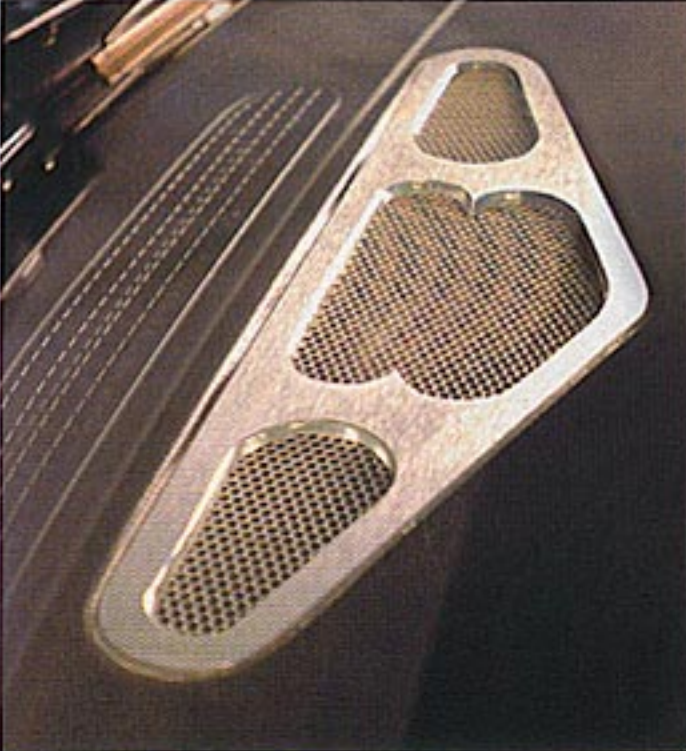


wasn't satisfied with any of them. Besides, he says, "I want to outdo myself each time."

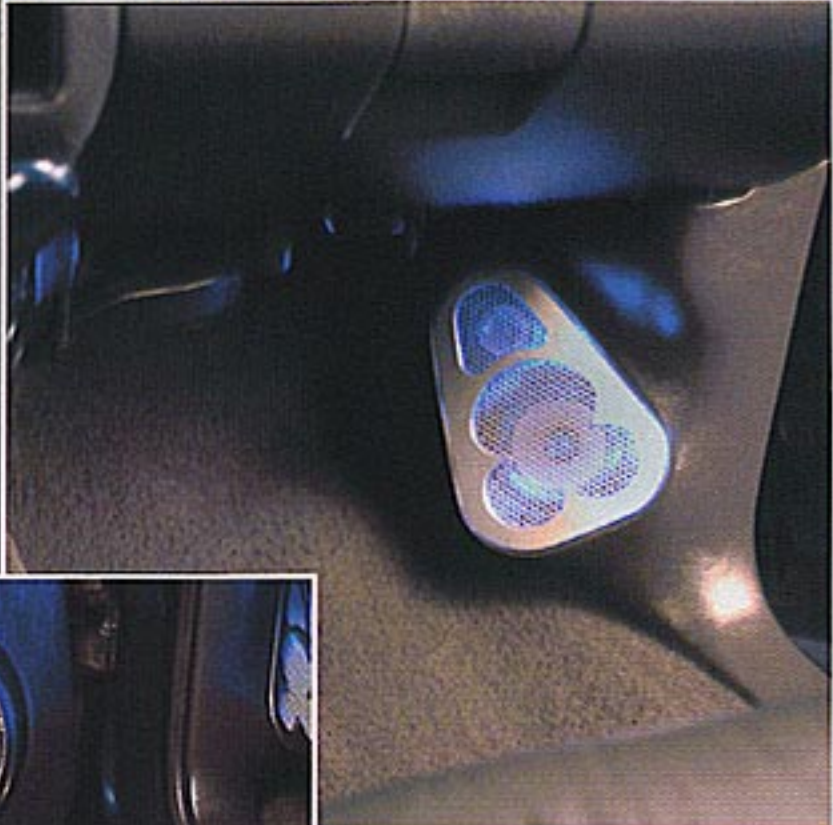
The main motivation for Phillips to go all out with the Durango install was that his life was about to change. He was get-

ting married, and this would be his last chance to sow his wild oats (so to speak). So when he brought the Durango to Sean "Crackie" Young, co-owner of Sound Decision in Aurora, Illinois, his vision for the

system was clear. "I just gave Sean the truck and said, 'Give me something wild,'" Phillips affirms. "You know what I've done before. I want something completely different this time."



METAL WORKS: The center channel (left) and kickpanels (below) sport brushed-aluminum grilles; the door speakers are armored with Plexi, perfed metal, aluminum ribs, and blue neon (below left).



"Sean told me, 'I want the thing to be so intense that it makes people fall over,'" Young recalls. "And he kind of left it at that. He figured that this may be his only chance to do it." Along with his partner Brian Mobley, and with assistance from Sound Decision installers Steve Ritcher and Brian Victorine, Young set out to design and install a system for the Durango that would blow people away. *Something wild*, in other words. So consider yourself forewarned: You might want to make sure you're sitting down—and have a towel handy—before reading any further.

WATER WORKS

While Young came up with several cool designs for the Durango—including an almost 8-foot-long custom center console/amp rack that stretches nearly the length of the interior—what sets the system apart is a fully functioning waterfall in the rear cargo area. "Sean didn't even know we were putting the waterfall in the truck," Young reveals. "I surprised him by having it in the Durango and up and running when he stopped by the shop one day."

"I didn't find out about it until about 3 weeks prior to the system being finished,"

corroborates Phillips. "I go to a lot of big car-stereo shows, so I know what some of the best installers are capable of. But this just blew me away. It was like, 'Holy cow!' And once it was done, I thought, 'Wait a minute—this is my vehicle!'"

The waterfall consists of staggered pieces of 1-inch Plexiglas at the front end of the cargo area. Once water flows down the front, it continues streaming toward the back of the vehicle via a channel made of ¼-inch Plexiglas. An aquarium pump forces distilled water from a 4-gallon Plexiglas reservoir hidden underneath the cargo area up through the waterfall. Once the water courses down the foot-and-a-half-long channel, it dumps into a 2-gallon Plexi catch basin, and then goes through plastic tubing back into the reservoir. "The catch basin is there in case the water backs up for some reason," Mobley explains. "And we have a filter in the catch basin and in the reservoir, as well as perforated metal underneath the waterfall, in case someone throws coins or something in there at

WET DREAM

shows." (Make a wish!) The clear Plexiglas channel that the water flows down is bent at a 45-degree angle at each edge, and visible through it is the system's power and signal wire, which rests on perforated metal. "It looks like the water is running over the wires," Young observes. "All the materials are sandwiched together." Underneath the perforated metal is 3/4-inch frosted Plexiglas, and below that is yellow neon that causes the whole thing to glow.

TOUCHING INSTALL

Flanking the waterfall are ported enclosures containing four Kicker Solo-Baric S10L7 10-inch subwoofers, two per side. The subs are paired in 2.5-cubic-foot enclosures built out of 3/4-inch medium-density fiberboard (MDF). The MDF was then covered with Fishman Audio Fish Fabric and coated

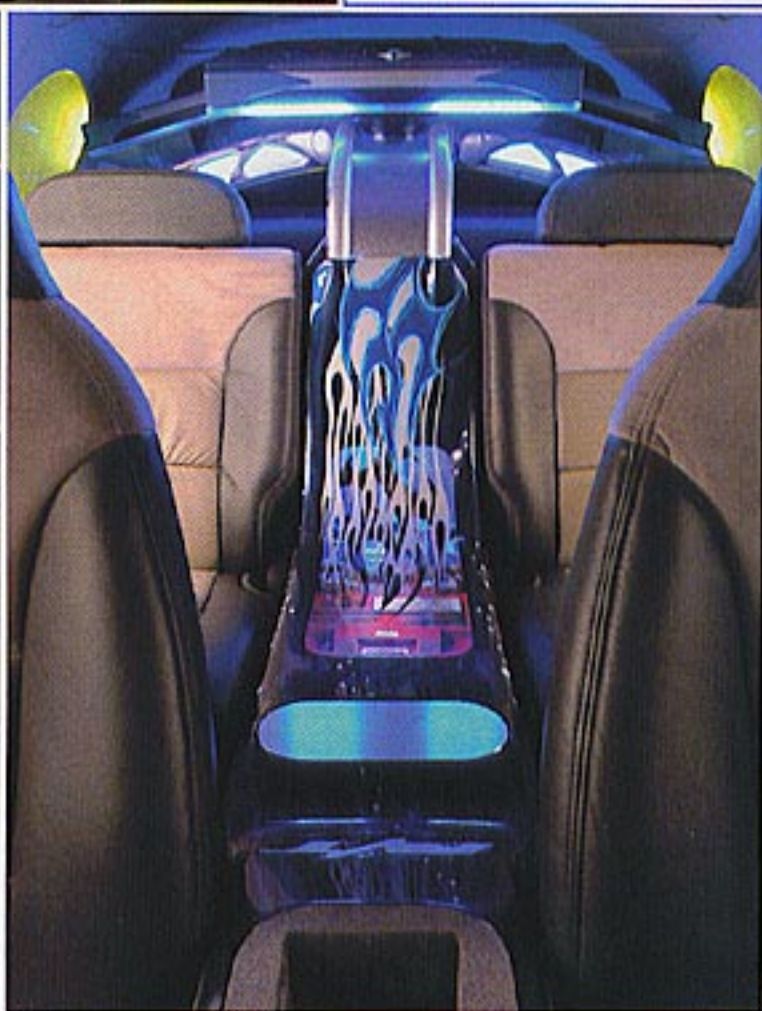


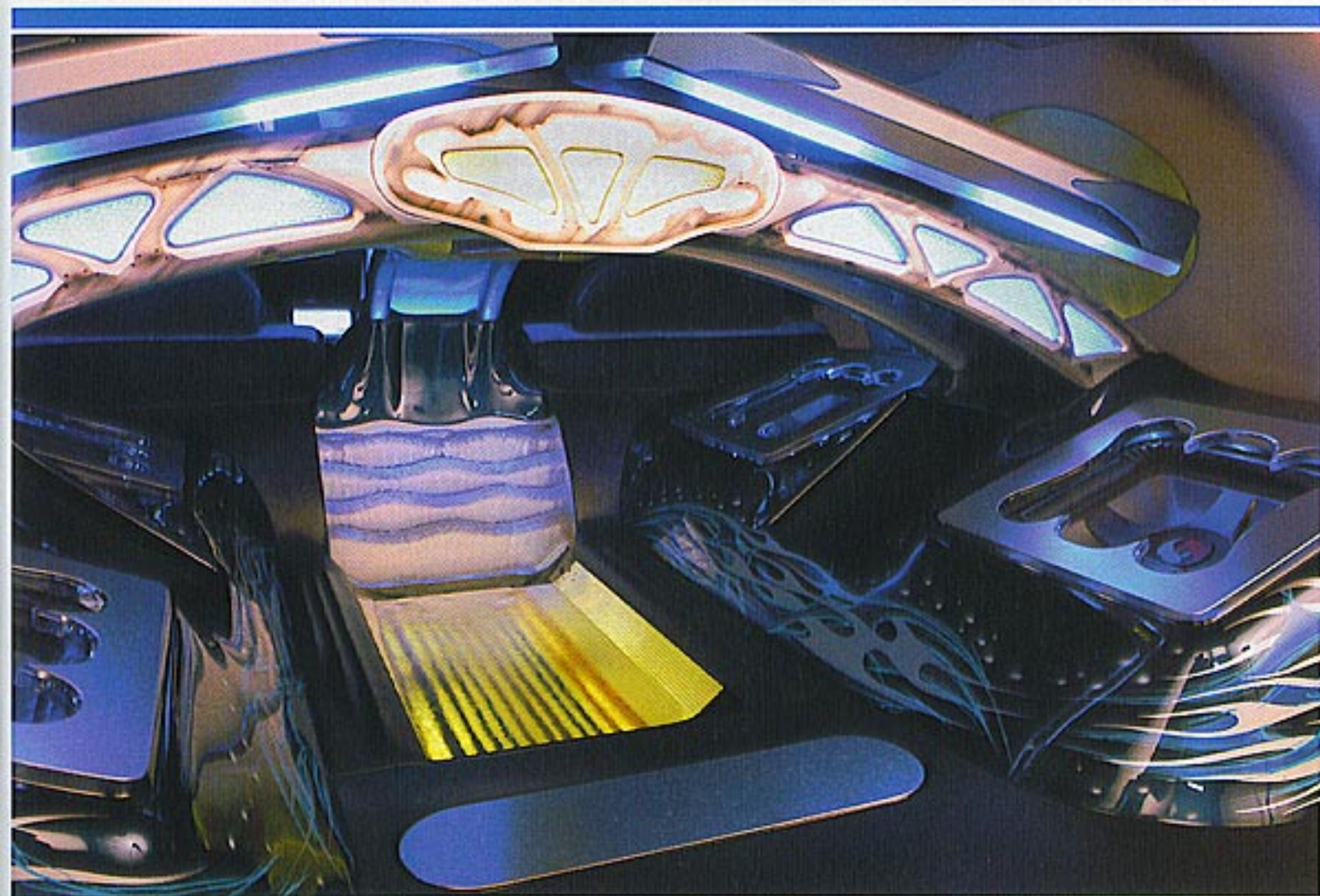
with fiberglass resin. Auto-body filler was used to smooth out any rough spots, and the enclosures were then sanded before being painted with a flame motif that laps at the entire install courtesy of Brian Caldwell of Creative Signs of Big Rock, Illinois. Brushed aluminum laminated into 1/2-inch clear Plexiglas tops each subwoofer to serve as a grille, and blue LEDs embedded into each sub's baffle glow behind the grille.

Between each pair of subs near the port opening is where the elaborate amp rack/center console attaches to the sub boxes. "One of the install's themes is that every-

BABY GOT BACKLIGHTING:

The center console (left) runs through the rear seat into the rear cargo area (below right); gear is on display under flame-painted clear Plexi (below left).





thing is touching," Young notes. "The center console starts at the dash and goes all the way back and turns into the amp rack. And then two arches come out from the side of the amp rack and mold into the sub box." Constructed out of 1/2-inch MDF and 1/2-inch bendable plywood, the amp rack holds three Kicker amplifiers: two SX-1250.1 mono amps and one 4-channel SX-700.4. (An Xtant A2002 2-channel amp hidden under the rear passenger's-side seat runs the system's center-channel speaker.) The top sides of the rack where the amps attach are clad with brushed aluminum, while the sides of the rack are covered with MDF trim pieces laced with intricate paint work and studded with frosted Plexiglas. The Plexi allows the blue and yellow neon lighting inside to shine through.

DOUBLE BUBBLE

Bordering the amp rack are two "bubble walls" made out of 3/4-inch Plexiglas that

RIVER RUNS THROUGH IT: A working waterfall running down the center of the Durango's rear cargo area is flanked by a pair of subwoofer boxes, each of them containing two Kicker Solo-Baric S10L7 10-inch subwoofers (above); extending off of the sub boxes are arches that hold the Kicker amplifiers (below).

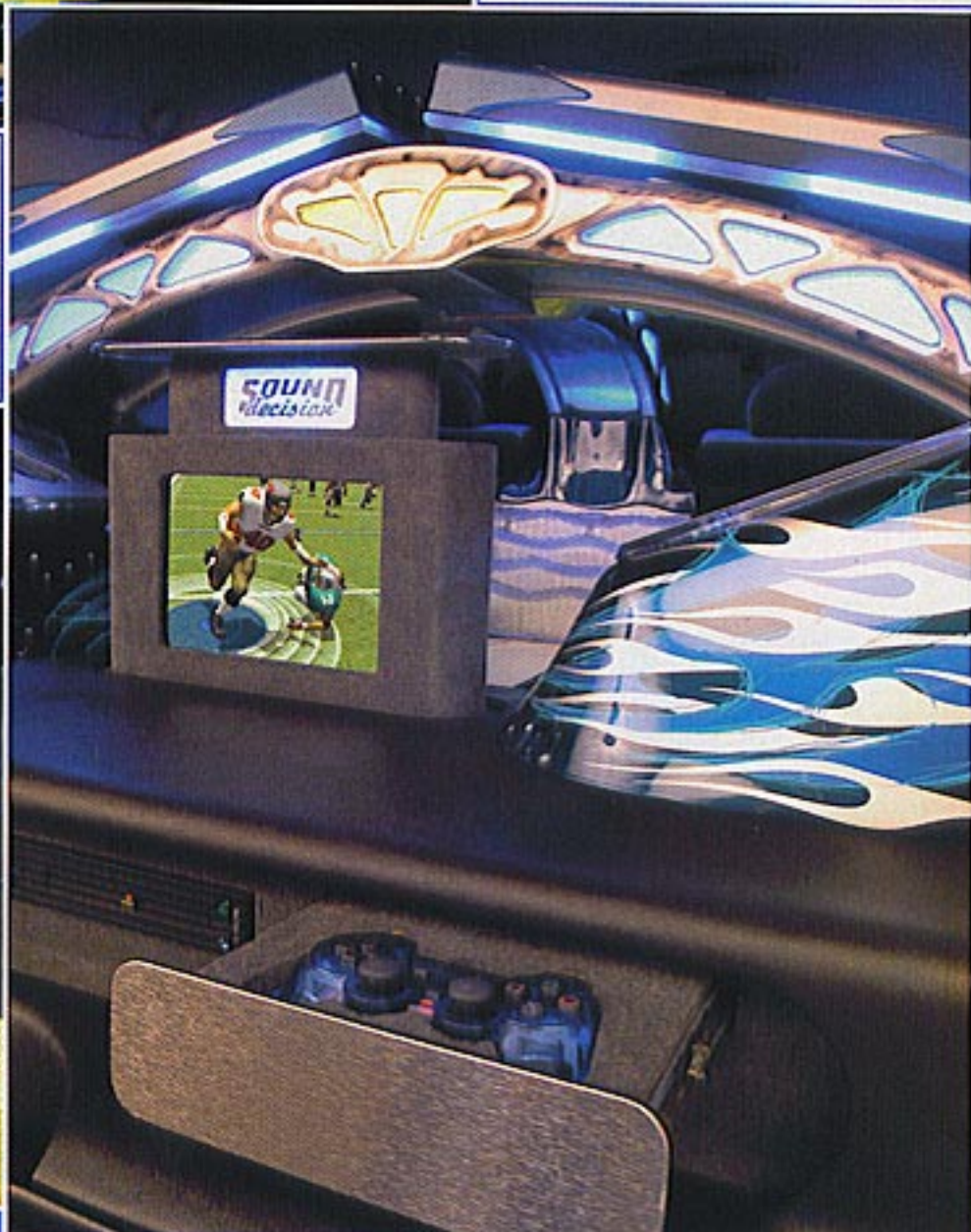
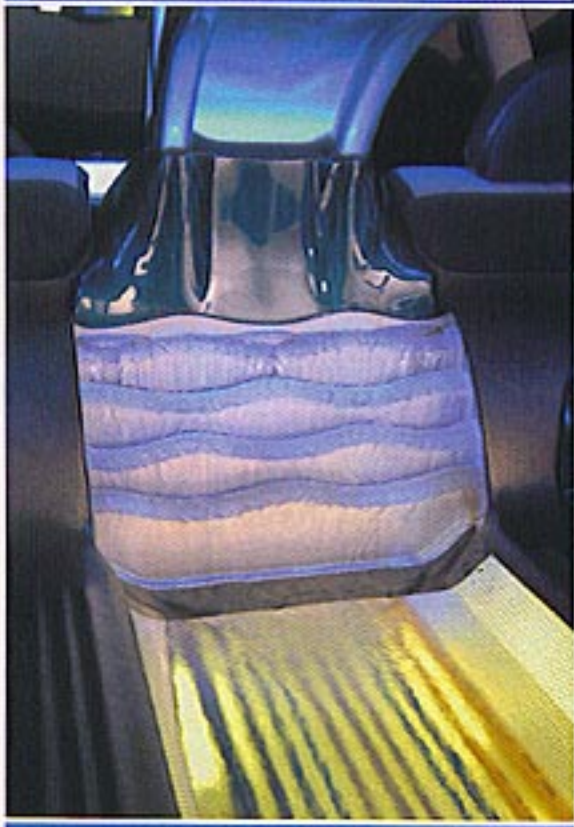




are supplied with water from the reservoir below the cargo floor. "We used a windshield-washer pump," Young details, "and it pulls water out of the reservoir to fill up the bubble walls." The Sound Decision crew fashioned the trim panels surrounding the bubble walls in the cargo-area side walls by adding 1/2-inch MDF and fiberglass to the stock trim panels and wrapping them in tan vinyl.

A 10.4-inch NEC monitor motorizes out of the floor of the cargo area near the tailgate via a Fishman Audio Fishdrive motor. When the monitor housing is fully extended, a second stage of motorization exposes a panel emblazoned with the Sound Decision logo. Two drawers at the back edge of the cargo area motorize out for access to

GO WITH THE FLOW: Water rolls down a channel made out of clear Plexiglas lit with neon (below); the back of the Durango (above) sports a 10-inch monitor that rises out of the cargo floor and drawers that house controllers for a Sony PS2 (right).



videogame controllers at the same time that the monitor appears, and between them is a Sony PlayStation 2 console. "When the tailgate is closed, the motorization shuts off so you can't accidentally motorize the drawers and have them hit the tailgate," assures Young. Framing for the monitor housing and the drawers consists of tubular steel that was covered with 1/4-inch MDF and finished with flocking material, while the face of each controller drawer is 1/4-inch black Plexiglas topped with brushed aluminum. Bringing up the rear is a neon-lit R/T logo that Young formed from a piece of 1/2-inch Plexiglas and molded into the back bumper.

CONSOLE CURVE

The center console sweeps down from the amp rack and continues through to the

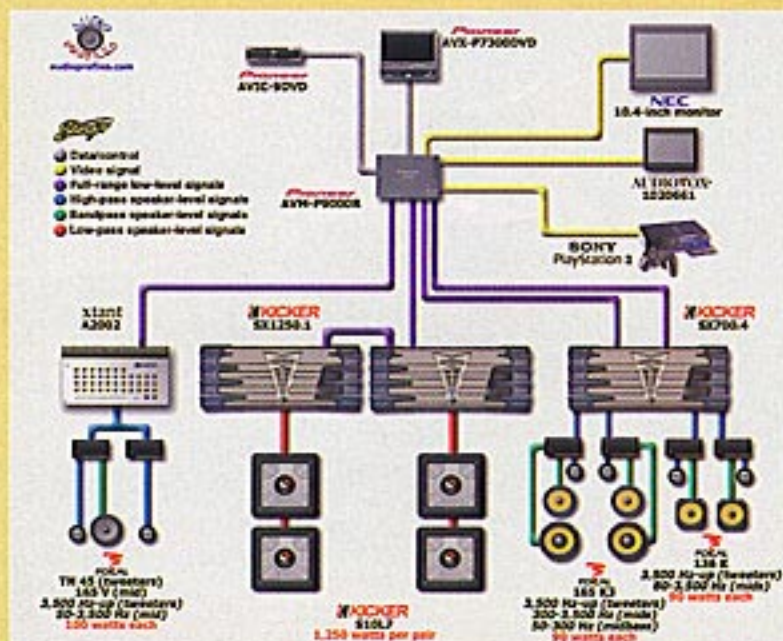


ABOUT FACE: The front of the daunting Durango was upgraded with a Reflections cowl-induction hood and a Stillen front bumper and grille.

THE SIGNAL PATH

The audio signal in Sean Phillips' 2001 Dodge Durango R/T starts at either the Pioneer AVX-P7300DVD DVD player, the AM/FM tuner in the hideaway Pioneer AVM-P9000R A/V receiver (tucked below the rear cargo area), or the Sony PlayStation 2 console. All of the signals then converge at and flow from the AVM-P9000R to the various amplifiers. The Kicker SX700.4 (90 watts x 4 into 4 ohms) drives all of the mids and highs except for the center channel. It sends 90 watts to each of the speakers in the Focal 165 K3 three-way component set: the 6 1/2-inch midbass in each front door and the 4-inch midrange and 1 3/4-inch tweeter in each kickpanel. An equal amount of power goes to the Focal 136 K two-way components—a 5 1/4-inch midrange and 1 3/4-inch tweeter—in each rear door. The amp's built-in crossover sends a signal of 50 Hz and up to the 165 K3's passive crossovers, which further split the signal at 300 Hz and down for the 6 1/2-inchers, 300 Hz to 3,500 Hz for the 4-inchers, and 3,500 Hz and up to the tweeters, while the 136 K's crossovers get 80 Hz and up from the amp and send 3,500 Hz and up to the mids and 3,500 Hz and up to the tweeters. The Xtant A2002 amplifier (50 watts x 2 into 4 ohms) is bridged to power the center-channel speakers—a Focal 165 V 6 1/2-inch midrange and two Focal TN 45 1 3/4-inch tweeters—with 100 watts each. The A2002 amp's crossover sends out 50 Hz and up, and a pair of passive crossovers from a Focal 136 K set are used; one filters the signal for the mid and one of the tweeters, while the second handles the other tweet. The two Kicker SX1250.1 amps (each 1,250 watts x 1 into 1 ohm) power four Kicker Solo-Baric S10L7 10-inch subwoofers, one amp per pair of subs. Each sub's dual 4-ohm voice coils are wired in paral-

lel, and then each pair is paralleled to achieve a 1-ohm load at the amp, which produces about 1,250 watts per pair of 10s. The low-pass output on the Pioneer AVX-P7300DVD head unit sends a signal of 80 Hz and down to the subs. All of the video sources—the AVX-P7300DVD DVD player, the AVIC-9DVD nav system (which can also play DVD movies), and the PS2—also converge at the AVM-P9000R, and the video signals are directed to the AVX-P7300DVD's built-in 7-inch screen, the Audiovox 1020661 6.4-inch monitor, and the NEC 10.4-inch monitor. All wiring in the system is from Stinger.





THROWING SIGNS: An R/T logo was added to each side skirt and the rear bumper (above); the Durango rolls on 20-inch Sinister Rebel wheels wrapped with Toyo Proxes tires (right).



SOUNDCHECK & VIDEOCHECK

I first scoped Sean Phillips' 2001 Dodge Durango R/T when it debuted at the World of Wheels car show in Chicago in January 2003. It was definitely impressive eye candy. I then had the opportunity to find out if my ears would enjoy it as much as my eyes did when I hooked up with Sean at another show in the Chicago area later in the year. I kicked things off with Chesky's *Ultimate Demonstration Disc* and went straight to "If I Could Sing Your Blues" by Sara K. The disc's liner notes explain that this particular recording is used to evaluate depth of stage, and the Durango was certainly up for this challenge, as the trumpet seemed to be well behind and to the right of the solo female vocal, which itself seemed to be a little wide and unfocused in the center of the stage. Next, I went to Livingston Taylor's "Grandma's Hands." The midrange reproduction of the vocals was good, but, again, image focus was a little fuzzy. Another revealing aspect of this track is whether a system can reproduce the subtle low-frequency foot taps without making them sound like foot stomps; the Durango did this quite well. Next, I cued up Monty Alexander's "Sweet Georgia Brown." On this track, there are two separate drum sets that have distinctly different sonic characteristics; one on the left and one on the right. "Georgia" also features two separate string-bass instruments—an upright bass on the left and a bass guitar on the right—and the remaining instrumentation includes a piano at front left and the wind section in the center. I noticed that I could easily distinguish between the two drum sets and the two string basses. However, when the bass guitar was playing, the image really tried to pull to the rear of the vehi-



FIFTH WHEEL: IT'S QUITE ELEMENTARY

cle, although this didn't happen with the upright bass; it stayed up front and to the left of center where it belonged. Lastly, I let this system stretch its legs a little with Fleetwood Mac's *The Dance* (Reprise). Mick Fleetwood's kick drum and John McVie's basslines were tight and powerful, with excellent focus. The vocals had good location on the stage, but again the images were just a little wide.

(By the way, this disc was more fun to listen to the louder it was played.)

Finally, it was time for the VideoCheck. I chose *The Fifth Element* DVD (Columbia TriStar) and punched up Chapter 20, where Korben Dallas (Bruce Willis) meets up with Ruby Rhod (Chris Tucker). The music portion of the DVD soundtrack is very strong and the Durango seemed to be in its, um, element. The rear-channel information in *The Fifth Element* is quite distinct and defined, and the Durango took it on without a hitch. The spaciousness was there when it was supposed to be, such as when Dallas answered one of Rhod's questions. I could even hear the crickets in the background during the brief pause before the answer came.

My conclusion about Phillips' system was that it was designed to be fun to listen to while played loud or while showing a DVD, which it did quite well. However, when asked to be subtle and precise with certain styles of music, a few of the weaknesses began to show. Nevertheless, my ears were just as happy as my eyes with the Durango.

—Bob Johann

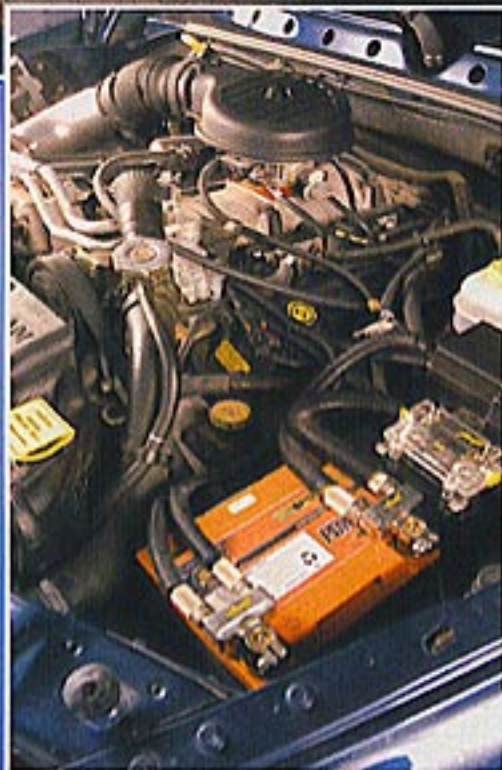
Bob Johann is a veteran sound-off competition judge who lives in East Peoria, Illinois.

rear seating area. Between the rear seats in an area covered by curved 1/4-inch clear Plexiglas that's partially painted with flames are two Stinger SP1000 batteries and a Stinger SHD4MAX power-distribution block with diagnostic LEDs. Just behind the front seats in a part of the console that lays prone is an Audiovox 1020661 6.4-inch monitor that, like the rear monitor, is motorized and housed in a steel and wood enclosure finished in flocking. As the console continues forward, a covered compartment for DVD storage is stationed between the front seats. And where the console slopes downward again before swooping up and ending at the dash is another motorized drawer made out of 1/4-inch MDF and covered with flocking that holds the remotes for the Pioneer head unit and navigation system. The rebuilt center portion of the dash, above the relocated stock climate controls, is home to a Pioneer AVX-P7300DVD DVD player with a foldout 7-inch screen and an AVIC-9DVD DVD navigation system. Sitting on the very top of the Durango's dash is a center-channel consisting of a Focal 165 V 6 1/2-inch midrange and two Focal TN 45 1 3/4-inch tweeters. The speakers are secured in a 1/2-inch MDF baffle and topped by a grille made out of a combination of 1/4-inch Plexiglas and 1/2-inch brushed aluminum.

Custom kickpanels accommodate 4-inch midranges and 1 3/4-inch tweeters from a Focal 165 K3 component set, while the front doors hold the set's 6 1/2-inch midbass drivers. Positioned in each rear door is a 5 1/2-inch midrange and 1 3/4-inch tweeter from a Focal 136 K component set. The custom panels that house the speakers in the doors are made out of 1/4-inch clear Plexiglas that was painted black except for a center portion that lets neon behind shine through, and the transparent part of the Plexi is backed by perforated

metal. "The effect you get," Young says, "is that the perforated metal is molded into the Plexi." Behind the perfed metal is frosted Plexiglas that diffuses the blue neon lighting inside the door. Additionally, the

panels are adorned with 1/2-inch hand-cut aluminum ribs, and all of the speakers, including the ones in the kicks, are further highlighted with blue LEDs. "We wanted an individual look," says Young.



POWER GRAB: The engine was fortified with an Airaid cold-intake and throttle-body spacer and Jet Performance chip, (top); the stock battery was tossed in favor of a Stinger SP1000 (above).

WILD ON DURANGO

Underneath the hood, the power supply was beefed up with another Stinger SP1000 battery, while the engine itself was fortified with an Airaid cold-air intake and throttle-body spacer, a Jet Performance chip, and a Vortech exhaust kit. On the exterior, Phillips added a Reflections cowl-induction steel hood, Stillen front bumper and grille, A&A Specialties body kit and rear bumper, clear front and rear side lenses, and Sinister Rebel 20-inch rims wrapped with Toyo Proxes 265/50-R20 rubber. Giving extra shine to the exterior is additional lighted R/T logos in each side skirt.

But no matter how tricked out the Durango's exterior is, there's no way it can prepare onlookers for all that's going on inside. "I'm more than satisfied with the way it turned out. The reaction has been great," Phillips beams. "Folks have just been floored at the shows I've taken it to." Yeah, things that are wet and wild tend to do that to people... 