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TOP STORY

Mesa teen a vehicle restoration champ

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Young Charles Spencer works at Charly's Garage in Mesa, which is owned by his father Charles Spencer (center), who learned the craft of car and truck restoration from his father, Chuck Spencer (left).

(David Minton/Staff Photographer)

At only age 19, Charles Spencer is well on his way to solidifying his place as a third-generation custom vehicle builder and restoration artist.

The Mesa teen last fall walked away with a big award at a special show in Las Vegas, where he showed off the 1969 Chevy C10 pickup truck he rebuilt from grill to rear bumper.

Spencer, who at age 14 bought the truck from his father, won the Young Guns 29 and Under award at the annual Battle of the Builders show sponsored by the Specialty Equipment Manufacturers Association.

He also placed in the top four in a competition celebrating “individuals who have demonstrated extreme talent, creativity and craftsmanship in modifying cars, trucks, SUVs, sport compacts and luxury and exotic builds.”

Charles had had his eye on the truck since he was 10 and had been working at his father’s business, Charly’s Garage, at 948 W. 1st Ave., Mesa, to earn the money for it.

Years earlier, at age 6, he would hang out at the prize-winning car and truck restoration and custom-build shop, learning how to turn a heap of junk into a work of art.

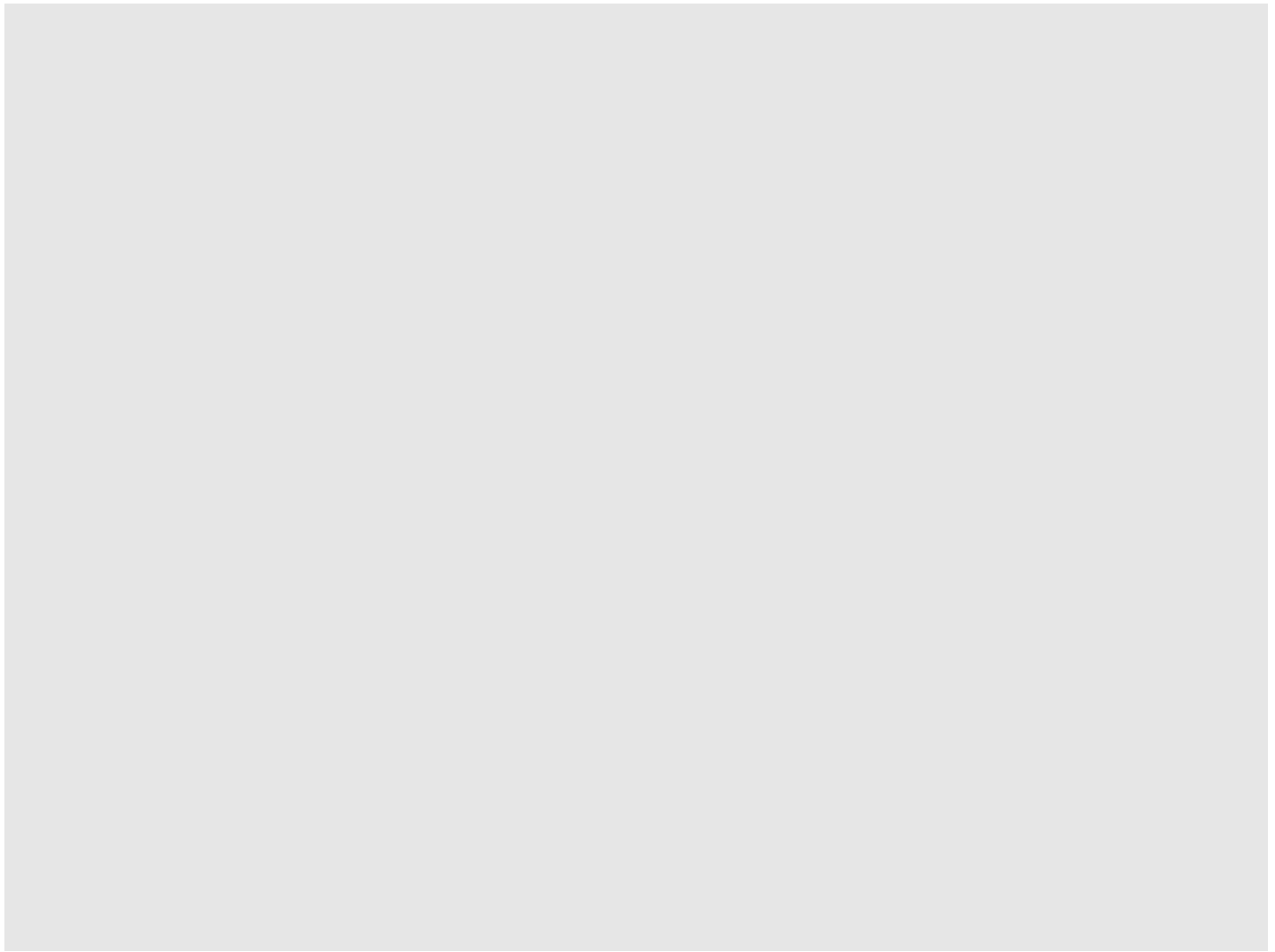
“I began to get into cars since I could walk,” he explained. “By the time I was 6, I was working with my dad and grandpa in the shop whenever I got a chance to go down there.”

At 6, he said, “the first thing my dad had me do was sand some model A parts.”

Plunking down that two grand for the Chevy started Spencer on a four-year journey that ended in Las Vegas with a gleaming emerald blue head-turner at the SEMA show.

He spent hours getting it in that condition.

“The time I worked on it varied because of school, sports, and work, but I have a few thousand hours in the whole build in the time period of four years,” he said.



Charles Spencer turned heads at the SEMA Battle of the Builders competition and show with the gleaming 1969 Chevy C10 pickup he completely rebuilt over the last four years.

(YouTube)

Though he said he got some help from various family members along the way – particularly from his dad and grandfather, both also named Charles Spencer, and both vehicle restoration craftsmen – he explained:

“I had guidance from my dad and grandpa in ways that i could do certain things better but I did all the work.”

“I built the engine, I installed and put the suspension together, I did the body work and painted it, and I wired the vehicle,” Spencer said. “There isn’t one part of the truck that I didn’t touch. “

“The thing that I needed the most guidance on was sanding because there were certain techniques that my dad used that made it easier to make lines straight and the curves follow a flow of the body.”

One of four children of Charles and Larissa Spencer, he looked at the finished product as realizing a dream he held since he was a kid.

“I wanted to build my own vehicle ever since I was 9 because I grew up watching my dad and grandpa build all these really cool vehicles and I wanted to be able to make something that I could call my own,” he explained.

The truck isn't a museum piece.

“I do drive the truck. I mostly drive it to car shows on the weekends, but every now and then I take it out for special occasions,” he explained.

A student at Mesa Community College, he also still works at Charly's Garage “to learn more about how vehicles work and what the importance of each component is.”

“I work there when I am not in school and it just depends on what is in the shop at that time,” he added. “Sometimes I do body work, other times I do electrical or mechanical work.”

Not surprisingly, his goal right now in life pretty much echoes what it's been since he learned to walk.

“My long-range ambition is to continue building custom vehicles and continuing to improve my skills in the automotive field.”