



# King of Lowrider graphics

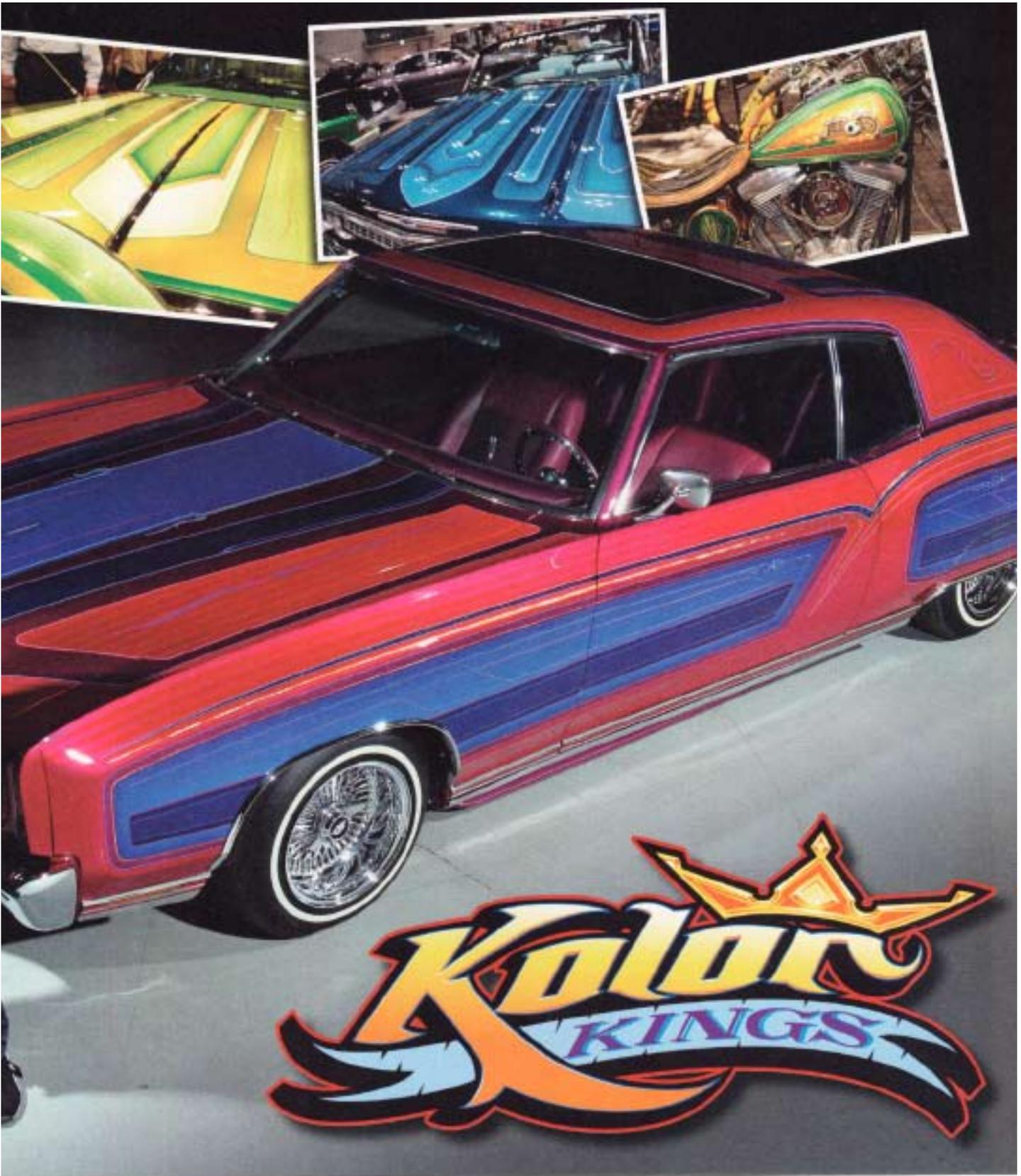
"I'VE ALWAYS BEEN KIND OF SHY,  
SO I EXPRESS MYSELF WITH MY PAINT,"  
SAYS STEVE DEMAN.

**"I WANT IT TO BE PURE, CLEAR.  
I WANT TO SEE ALL THE LAYERS OF COLOR."**

**B**eing a shy guy is no problem if your work speaks up this assertively. Los Angeles-based Steve DeMan has made his mark with lowriders, hot rods, and specialty trucks that flaunt jewel colors, fabulous faux finishes, and intricate, body-enhancing designs.

For twenty years DeMan has been a force in lowrider culture, with a particularly strong following among its enthusiasts in Japan. He travels there regularly to attend shows and meet with clients. "To see what they do with their cars is incredible. It's the craftsmanship—they put their love into it." DeMan says, "I have so much respect for what they do and the culture there"





DeMan learned the business “from the bottom up,” he says. “I always had my eyes open to learn” from the big names whose paths he crossed, including Pete Santini (in whose body shop he worked for a time) Steve Stanford, and Larry Watson. “The ten years of struggle I

had 10 go through were hard, but it was worth it” His all-in approach was set at the tender age of 13, when he rebuilt, refurbished, and painted a bicycle that he’d rescued from the trash. “People started dropping stuff off for me to work on out of my mom’s single-car garage.

From a small platform I graduated to the next thing and then the next thing”- helmets to dirt bikes to jet-skis to his first boat “It was just a hobby of mine while I was in school, working after school in that garage till 2 Of 3 in the morning: He set up his own shop at age 18.

**W**ith each new project, DeMan worked to understand the mechanics of the item, so that its ultimate look would accentuate and enhance its function. "It's been valuable for me to know what goes into custom work, how to shave a door handle or do body work or deal with suicide doors," he says. Not only does his wide range of mechanical skills keep him from being pigeonholed, "it helped me develop my

design sense, taught me not to fight body lines: he explains.

Because his designs mesh so beautifully with the forms of the items he paints, DeMan's style can't be simply categorized. "You have to know the different lifestyles of the culture: he says. "I try to take it to the edge a little bit but not tear it up." His lowrider designs, for example, emphasize the cars' lean lengths with long, narrow blocks of bold color and special effects on hoods, roofs, and side panels.

DeMan expertly employs metallics, prismatic bands, leafing, and more. "I layer a lot of my colors," he notes. "layering makes it a lot deeper. My paint jobs have to be vibrant."

His methodical approach means a relatively slow pace. "I do fewer cars now because they take me a long time. I see each one as an original masterpiece," he says. "It's all hand-drawn first. My goal with customers is to help them design something that's a piece of them. I kind of have to train them in design sense—I



hear what they want, but I may have to pull them back from it."

Some clients, aware of the latest trends and effects, start out wanting to put every last one of them on the vehicle. "I tell them that you don't have to throw the whole enchilada at the wall; you have to make it timeless," DeMan says. "So I may do a sketch with them or throw some tape on the car. Then they are involved





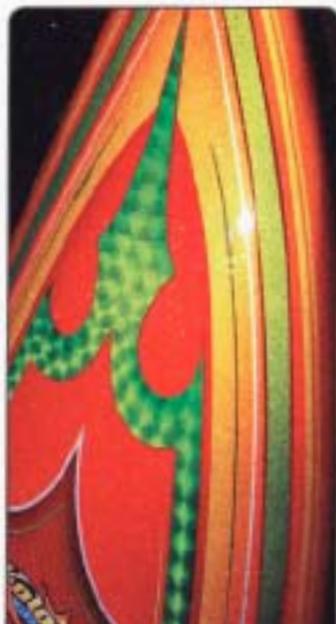
with it it's a piece of them. It's much more appreciated."

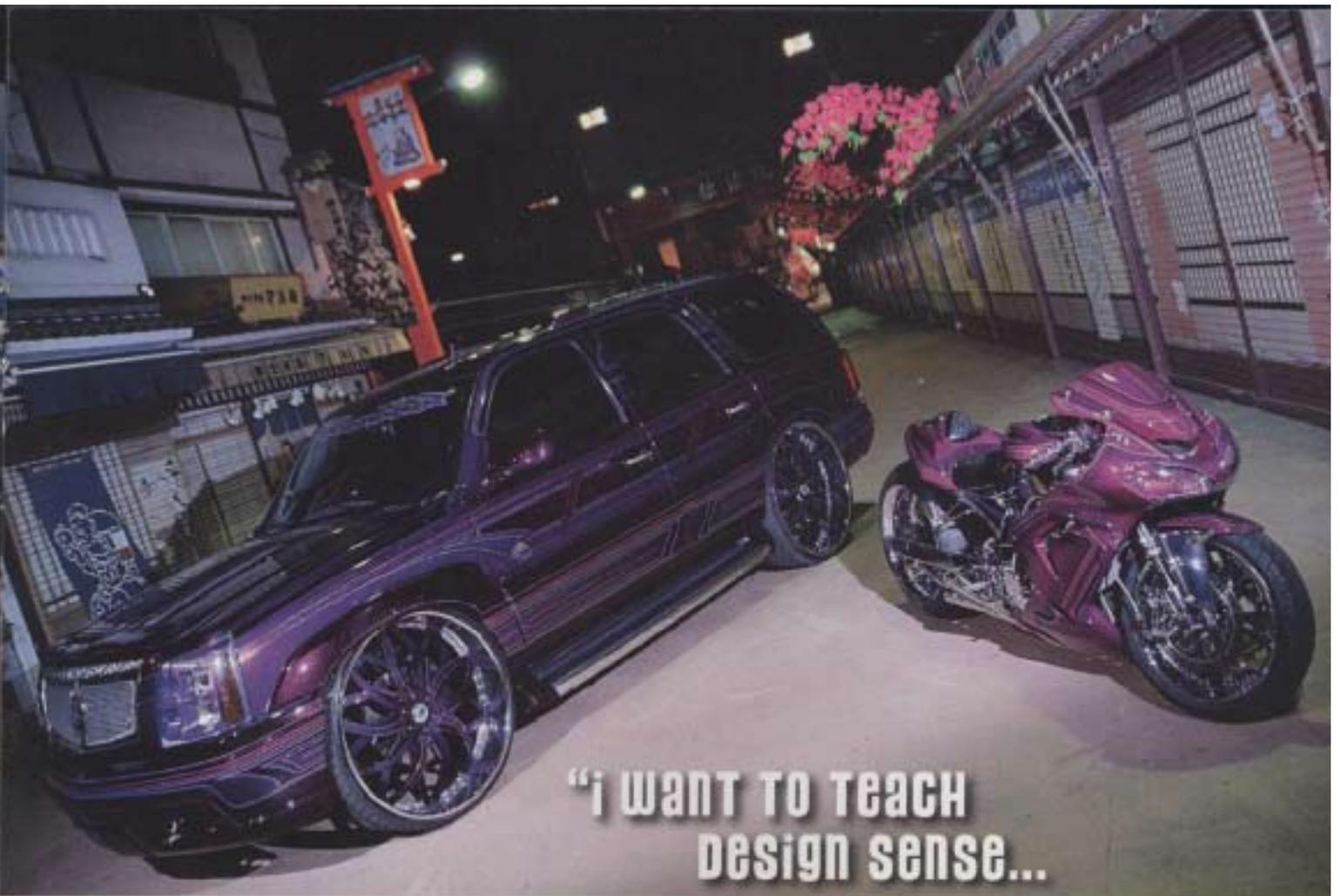
Through his shop, KolorKings, DeMan is venturing into sidelines like apparel, tools, and painting materials, including FBS tape and Iwata airbrushes and spray guns. He's been using these companies' products for 15 to 20 years, "and I stand by the quality of their stuff. For a long time, they were my secret arsenal."

Teaching is one area where DeMan's career is expanding. He'll be helping a class on low rider graphics at this October's Airbrush Getaway Workshop in Las

Vegas (see page 44 for details). "I want to teach design sense. That's a big part of it: he says, and every bit as important as the painting tips and techniques that his students will pick up. "Whether it's a hot rod or a truck or an offshore boat, you've got to study it before you can tweak and modernize it."

"Everything I've taught myself, I take to the limit: DeMan says. That's the philosophy he plans to pass along to his students. "You can't be scared—you have to love the challenge."





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