

LOSE 150 POUNDS IN JUST A FEW HOURS!

By: Robert Weathers
Photography by author

Every now and then, something comes along that's so cool, you've just got to say something about it, and the lineup of tubular front subframes from Smith Racecraft definitely fits in the cool category. With applications to fit 67-69 Camaros, 70-81 Camaros, 62-67 Novas and 68-73 Novas, just about any GM muscle car with a factory front subframe can benefit with the installation of one of their sturdy lightweight pieces.

These tubular front subframes were the brainchild of Andy Parks of Smith Racecraft. It was over 5 years ago, that Parks put the idea into practice on his own 68 Camaro, and thoroughly tested the piece before building several custom frames for local racers in the Dallas/Fort Worth area. Even a 3000lb. big-block Chevy powered racer running 4.80 1/8th mile passes, was no match for the strength of Parks' subframe. With a few race seasons of testing on several different cars under his belt, he was confident that the design was solid and ready for production. He then teamed up with Kim Smith, owner of Smith Racecraft, and they began a series of modifications to add those details and workmanship that Smith is famous for.

The concept of making the tubular front subframe was easy, but accomplishing it was a major challenge. They keep everything located just where the factory did. Even the engine is kept in the same spot, which is another reason racing organizations love this frame. Factory components such as control arms and springs can be used on their subframes, but most customers opt for the

THE TUBULAR DIET



Made with mild steel tubing, or custom orders in chromemoly steel, these tubular front subframes are a racer's dream. No long waits at the chassis shop to get that front-end just right, and a significant weight loss to boot. The subframe in this car was installed in just a few hours.



Smith Racecraft's tubular front subframes are accepted for competition by several racing organizations. The Nova pictured has seen improved 60 ft. times and lowered ET's due to the weight loss and improved front suspension, which gets the weight over the rear end quicker.

Factory mounting locations for all components make the tubular front subframe from Smith Racecraft a unique piece. Even the factory springs and control arms can be used.

We removed the front clip of this Nova for illustration purposes. Installation is much easier if the front clip is left in tact. Notice the difference between the two frames. GM made their front subframe beefy enough to handle a snow plow attachment.

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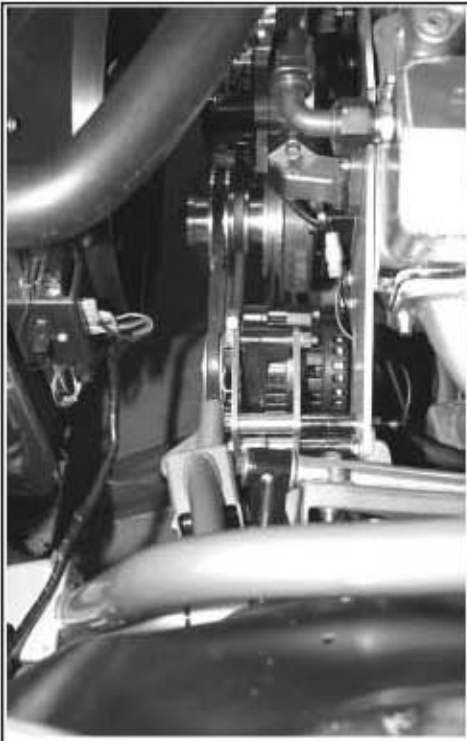
Most of the components for the tubular front subframes are manufactured in-house on CNC machines to make everything fit like it should. If it isn't CNC'd, it's laser cut, and the precision is very apparent. The spring bucket and A-arm mounting location (shown) requires several individual pieces which are meticulously fitted and welded



Billet aluminum steering arms save a couple of pounds on the 67-69 Camaros and 68-74 Novas, and add to the great look to the already impressive tubular subframe.



Smith Racecraft's tubular control arms are made from chromemoly steel and are available for the standard spring and shock configuration, or coil-over shocks. According to Smith, the standard spring set-up actually works better than the coil-over shocks on a small tire car, because of the stored energy in a large custom front racing spring.



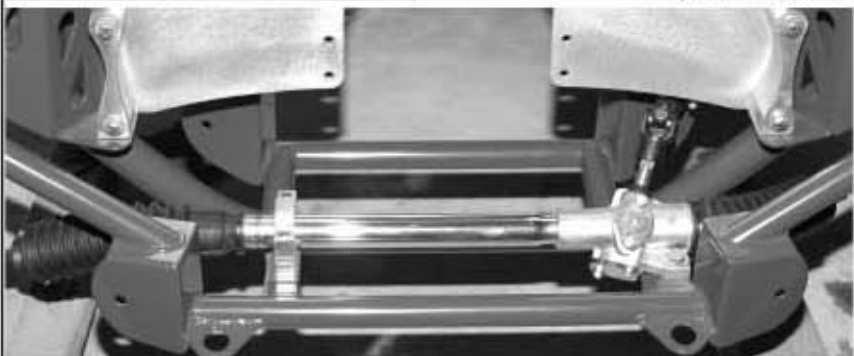
Header and oil pan clearance is abundant, and turbocharged applications will really like the additional space made available with the tubular front subframe.

Engine front and mid-plates are CNC machined from 1/4" thick T-6 6061 aluminum sheet, and add structural integrity to the frame. Watching a car equipped with one of these frames launch with the wheels up, demonstrates just how rigid it is. A properly installed and tuned front suspension will help a car carry the front end evenly.



The bolt on the right is a 38 year old factory piece. It's safe to say that replacing it with a new grade 8 bolt is a good idea. Be sure to clean and lube all four nuts in the body's mounting pads to help avoid cross-threading.

On 68-73 Nova applications, don't forget to keep the 1/4" factory spacers and re-use them with the aluminum bushing kit. Core support bushings and bumper brackets fit like a glove on the frames laser cut mounting locations.



Chromemoly drop spindles for 67-69 Camaros and 68-74 Novas lower the cars height 2" for a low stance that makes a car look fast, even when it's sitting still. Lightweight standard spindles for 70-81 Camaros will be available soon.



A tubular transmission crossmember is available for TH350 or Powerglide applications. Since the frame accepts stock crossmembers, those who run a TH400 will need to use the factory piece.



Pinto style rack-and-pinion units are available in standard radius and extended radius to get it closer to the factory turning radius. Rack mounts are machined from billet aluminum, and add a nice touch.



"The Tubular Diet", continued on page 14...

it's just a matter of removing or disconnecting the front bumper, front brake lines, steering shaft and six body bolts. A floor jack, jack stands, a little elbow grease, and the factory frame is history. Once the old frame is out, it's apparent where the weight savings comes from. The factory subframe looks like it belongs on a one-ton truck.

Some people may be inclined to remove the front clip, but this is not necessary, or advised. A little cleaning on the firewall or underneath the car, along with the application of some touch-up paint can all be done with everything in place. Leaving the front clip on the car makes it much easier to align the new tubular frame.

In addition to their line of front subframes, Smith Racecraft also manufactures chromemoly tubular control arms for the same applications as their frames. They even have chromemoly drop spindles for the 67-69 Camaros and 68-74 Novas. The parts and model applications are constantly growing, and there's been some talk about a few products for the Blue Oval boys. All the front subframes are available in stage one, two, or three, three being the most complete. They also have rack-and-pinion steering units, brake-line kits, front coil springs, tubular transmission cross-members, billet aluminum steering arms, rack mounts, and body bushings. Every piece that's bolted to the subframe comes with mounting hardware for easy installation.

So it looks cool, saves weight, vanquishes bump steer, and makes a car safer to race, but what's the best reason to install one of Smith Racecraft's tubular front subframes? It's the best performance enhancing product that can be bolted on to a car without blowing up the engine! Up to 150 lbs. is gone instantly, and that equals a massive reduction in ET. When equipped with adjustable shocks, high-energy coil springs, and tubular control arms, cars are able to launch more aggressively and achieve weight transfer much quicker than stock suspended cars. Weight reduction and a race-car quality front suspension has helped several cars reduce ET's by 2 tenths with no changes to the drive-train. That's impressive in anyone's book, and it's no wonder they're selling them as fast as they can make them, so it might be a good idea to get an order in before winter is over and the racing action starts again.

RPM
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Sources:

Smith Racecraft
Dallas, Texas
214-330-0660
smithracecraft.com



Smith Racecraft engineered these long coil springs to store more energy than any other spring available, in order to help get weight transfer to the rear as quick as possible. Cars that don't need this extra help can opt for standard racing springs, or go with coil-overs.

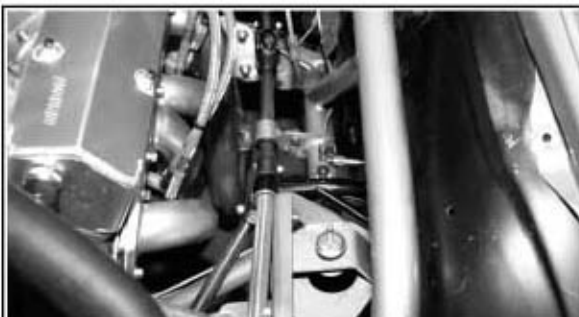
A-arms are available with spherical rod ends for race-only applications. This eliminates the resistance of bushings and allows the front suspension to work more efficiently.



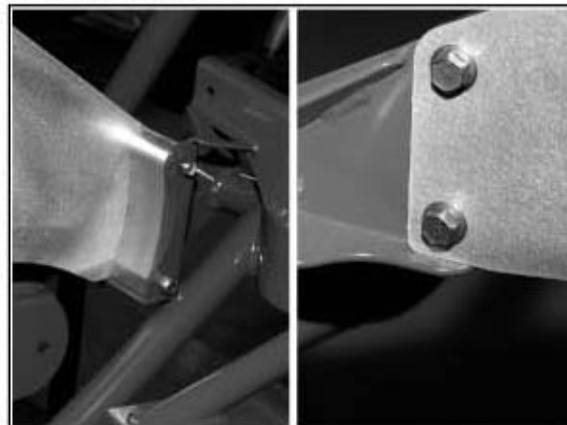
Firewall mount plates secure the down tubes and are equipped with high-quality heim joints for perfect fit



With a standard coil spring and shock configuration, Competition Engineering's 3-way adjustable drag shocks get the job done. Non back-halved cars have worked best with Smith Racecraft High-Energy springs and CE's drag shocks.



The steering kit is easy to install and comes with everything needed to connect from rack to steering shaft. Just remember, before drilling a hole through the steering shaft, reinstall the engine/trans so ride height can be established, and the steering wheel can be held straight. Measuring tow-in and getting everything as close to aligned as possible will insure there's plenty of adjustment available after it goes to the alignment shop. After drilling and bolting the steering shaft to the steering tube, Smith recommends a sizable tack weld for added insurance.



A built-in shelf for the front motor plate helps make engine installation a one-man job. This is a feature found on high-end chassis cars that Smith has incorporated into these front subframes.



This is a frame being prepared to ship to an anxious customer. All frames are shipped by truck, so don't expect UPS or FedEx to be ringing your doorbell.