



Top, from left: *B & B Double Header* by Brian H. Thomas, John Youell's *Boat Car (TX-NOT 4 H2O)*, *The Sunflower Car* by Timothy Young, two Elvises, *La Fairona* by Theresa Houston. Sunroof seating on top of *Shut Up 'N Dance!* by Kathy Whelan (above).

## My Art Car Parade

A 17-year Houston tradition. My first time.



Top, from left: *Mobile Lisa* by Hector Garma, Ben Gibson's *Student Driver*, *Play Vroom* by Dawn Black, George Sacaris's *The Slinger*, *Gulf Ghost* by Charlotte Wells. Blowing kisses from *Sandra's Botti-car-lee* by Sandy Schorr Newton (above).

**IT IS MORNING** on the day of the Art Car Parade. Tank Girl and I are standing in her driveway, drinking coffee and running down a list of things to bring with us. "Sunscreen...water...fire extinguisher."

Once we're through the list, we take all non-essentials out of Tank Girl's art car. *Everyday Treasure*, her glitter-covered Jeep Cherokee, is what is called a "daily driver," meaning it is her primary mode of transportation, parade or no parade. We

are removing the junk mail and CD cases, the sweaters and garbage that tend to collect in backseats.

We are wheels up by 9 a.m., heading to a brand-name gas station. "We get premium today," says Tank Girl, "No cheap stuff on parade day." While she fills the tank, I watch a massive Big Wheel being towed by on a flatbed trailer. A sedan with a Piet Mondrian paint job pulls up to the pump opposite us. "Happy parade

day," the driver wishes us.

Driving toward the parade route, we pass a scrap-metal dragon inching its massive, hinged way south on Waugh against a backdrop of drab townhouses. A rusted iron horse on a barely discernible car chassis blows past us as we stare.

There must be no art left in the museums. It's all in the streets.

When we arrive at Allen Parkway, which has been closed for the parade,

we are waved through the blockade by a volunteer on skates, no questions asked. Exceptional cars are the rule today, and also apparently our tickets in.

The next skater we encounter glides over to the driver's-side window. "Happy parade day," he says. "Do you have your fire extinguisher?" Tank Girl points it out, our line up number is checked off a list, and we are waved on to the next skater. "Do you have your fire extinguisher?"



Top, from left: *Draka the Dragon* by Lisa Nigro, Shelley Buschur's *Pink Slip*, *Noggin del Fuego II* by Brian Mahanay, KPRC-TV's *Scrap Dragon*, *Under the Sea* by Jim Griffes. Mayor Bill White smiles from the back of *Uncle Sam* by Russell Janise (above).

Our line up spot is a good one: in the shade of the Montrose overpass. We park, stand up and stretch, and start receiving visitors. Two hundred and fifty cars are lined up for the viewing. Tank Girl gamely fields questions about glue and where she gets her ideas. Along with the strolling sightseers and day-trippers are roving journalists and on-air personalities.

"What's the feeling of being in the parade?" asks a hairdo with a micro-

phone and a cameraman. "Aaaaaaaah!" screams Tank Girl, with her hands up by her face, and I know she's made the six-o'clock news.

The lead skaters zip down the line. "Drivers to your cars! Drivers to your cars!" I take my seat on the rim of the shotgun door, and the parade is off. Tank Girl mans her car's PA system. "Look at me," she says in the falsetto singsong she uses to voice her car. "I'm so sparkly." The

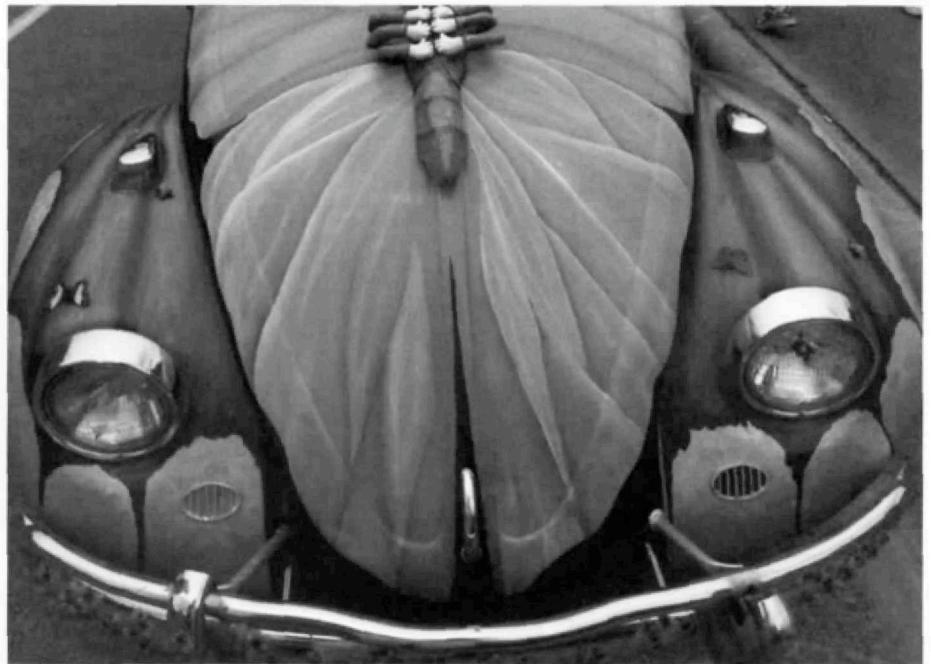
crowd laughs when I snap their pictures.

The parade is so long that it wraps around its own route. We can see the first few cars—including the one carrying Mayor Bill White—across the median, heading back west.

Friends of our car and its riders break ranks with the spectators and rush up to us as we pass. One of them presses a pink flower into my hand, and I wave it at the crowd the rest of the way.

There are places along the route where the crowd is close enough to touch, and looks happy. But when we make the turn at downtown, the crowd is held fast behind a barrier and eyes us more warily. This is where the girls wearing pink slips and riding in the overtly partisan, *Give Bush a Pink Slip* truck are called whores.

But mostly the crowd loves us, and we love them back. I've never had my picture taken so many times, not even on



Top, from left: *Mildred the Mad Cow* by Dave & Gina Hamperson, *Bonnie Blue's The Women Rock Art Car*, *Splinter* by Isaac Cohen, Charley Scott's *Belinda*, *No Float Boat* by Bill Wise. Pretty grills, clockwise from top left, above: *Car-tography* by Allan L. Griffin, Jr., Donna Dommel's *RU GAME*, *Play Vroom* by Dawn Black, Konnie May's *Flutterbug*.

my wedding day. "Swimming party at my house," announces Tank Girl on her PA as we reach the end of the route. "Come on over." By the time we turn off the route and drive back through the looking glass, back up out of the rabbit hole, I feel as sparkly as the car, and so ready for a swim. ■



Tank Girl (Rebecca Lowe) and *Everyday Treasure*.