

Rock 'n' roll gearhead from A to ZZ

ZZ Top guitarist writes a book

Crazy about a sharp-dressed car

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SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Billy Gibbons appreciates two types of fender: the brand of guitar, and the one he leans on whenever he's home long enough to take one of his hot rods to a car show.

The famously bearded front man for ZZ Top has combined both into a book, *Billy F Gibbons: Rock + Roll Gearhead*. He'll be signing copies at noon this Wednesday at Indigo Books & Music at the Eaton Centre.

"They said, 'Let's see if we can get Gibbons to do cars and guitars and a little bit of history, and see what shakes,'" says Gibbons.

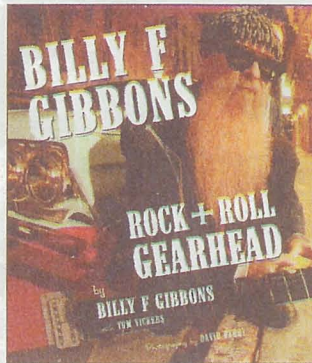
Shake it does. The oversized volume is Gibbons's recollection of his four-decade recording career, a picture history of some of his most famous cars, and highlights of the 600 guitars he owns.

"At last count I had 70 cars that were ready to roll, gassed up, batteries charged and ready to fire up down the freeway," he says.

"I love being a pack rat."

The folksy narrative starts with Gibbons's childhood in Houston, Tex., and makes its first pit stop at the Eliminator, a red 1933 Ford that he commissioned after he saw a similar car and wanted one.

"It's hard to say if it's an absolute favourite, but it certainly got the ball rolling," he says.



"It was the first one to really see the light of day."

After a five-year build period, the car went directly to the set of a ZZ Top video. "All that waiting, and it was the pretty girls in those videos that got to drive it first!" Gibbons laughs.

The car is currently on loan to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland.

"It gives everybody a chance to get up close and personal with what has become this icon for myself and ZZ Top."

An equally famous creation, the stretched-and-lowered Cadzzilla, wasn't quite as meticulously planned. "I was hanging out with a couple of my pals, late night in a Mexican cantina, and they said, 'What would you do if you built another car — how would you eclipse the popularity of this little red creature (the Eliminator)?" Gibbons says.

"After a couple more shots of tequila, we figured the 1933 is short — let's go long, low and organic. We had run out of bar napkins to draw on, so in the early wee hours of the morning we tore off a shirt cuff and drew the side view of a 1948 Cadillac, and that was Cadzzilla."



DAVID PERRY PHOTO

Gibbons strikes the pose with one of his 70 road-going cars, a '32 Ford roadster that's powered by a rare French-built V8 flathead engine.

While he will get his fingernails dirty, Gibbons isn't really a car builder; most of his vehicles are created by others, most notably legendary customizer Pete Chapouris and his SO-CAL Speed Shop.

Unlike many enthusiasts, Gibbons isn't a purist, and several pages of the book are dedicated to his customized BMW 325i.

"That's pretty much against the grain of the European set

but you know, it's just a car — come on," he says.

He credits his love of hot rods to the recurring theme of cars and music. "I always go back to that term 'fast and furious,'" he says. He attributes much of it to a 1951 record, "Rocket 88," named for an Oldsmobile.

"Ever since then, there's been this mysterious, incongruous coupling of cars, and rock and roll music. Chuck Berry sang

about Maybelline and his Coupe deVille flying over the hill, the Beach Boys' Little Deuce Coupe. The cars and the electric guitars are loud and that's what we find most attractive."

Although touring keeps him away from his cars much of the time, there's always a project in the shop. Currently, it's a 1936 Ford pickup truck that he's doing as a "rat rod": rough, raw and without fancy paint or chrome.

"Anybody can restore a car, but it takes a real man to cut one up," Gibbons says. "I've got that joker gene that wants me to create havoc, and it's on constant drone, 24 hours a day. Loud, fast and furious automobiles, that's my personal preference."

And those famous female legs in all ZZ Top's videos? Gibbons just chuckles. "All curious bystanders," he says, "may go directly to page 100."