



# MONSTER OF METAL



It took minimal convincing for Michael Snipes to transform his fortified-with-steel 2002 Lexus SC430 into a raging mobile entertainment machine.

BY JEFF PERLAH • PHOTOS BY CARL EDWARDS

**W**HEN MICHAEL SNIPES brought his stock 2002 Lexus SC430 into Anderson Audio and Performance (AAP), there was no question about what he wanted to turn it into: a raging, 700-horsepower, twin-turbo monster. What Snipes, 49, ended up getting, however, was way more than he bargained for. By the time it was road-ready, the svelte convertible had been widened 3 inches in the front and 6 in the back — not with some flimsy fiberglass body kit, mind you, but with cold, hard steel — and gained an audio system he could not have imagined. Let's see how the Suwanee, Georgia shop exceeded Snipes' wishes.

#### LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT

Snipes was lovestruck from the minute he first spied the topless Lexus SC430 at the Atlanta Auto Show in March 2001. Soon he found himself plunking a deposit (plus three different color choices)



Heavy metal thunder: Following a colossal transformation under the hood, Michael Snipes' Lexus SC430 (above) was widened with (yes) steel to accommodate HRE 545R wheels (20 x 10s in front; 20 x 12s in back) and Pirelli Rosso P Zero Asimmetrico tires.

Stock value: Despite all the performance and cosmetic mods, much of the cockpit retained its stock appearance (right). "We really didn't want to 'import-tuner' it up inside too much," explains Anderson Audio and Performance co-owner Tim Gertz.





down at his local Lexus dealer to purchase an '02 model. Five months later, the car finally arrived, yet the infatuation that hit him at the auto show didn't exactly carry over to the cockpit once he was behind the wheel. "The Pearl White color was a good choice," Snipes concedes, "but the suspension seemed kind of soft — like it would've been better suited for my wife. I like a much more aggressive feel."

After a monstrous performance overhaul by Anderson Audio and Performance co-owner and namesake Chris Anderson (more on this stage later), the SC430 was delivered to JRD Tuning — also based in Suwanee but originally straight outta Sweden — where it received a full body makeover. The car was ostensibly widened to accommodate HRE 545R wheels and Pirelli Rosso P Zero Asimmetrico tires — 20 x 10-inchers wrapped in 285/30 ZR20TL rubber in the front; 20 x 12s with 345/25ZR20s in the rear. But as with most projects of this type, it's hard to discern which came first — form or function, design or desire. "It's one of those things where we'd come up with one solution, and it'd create a problem," Snipes reflects. "For example, when we got more power, we needed wider wheels. Then, to get wider

**Brainy beast:** Lodged in the dash is an Alpine IVA-D900 DVD receiver, out of which sprouts a motorized 7-inch monitor (above).

**Dash of performance:** Above the head and climate controls is a GReddy ProFec e-01 boost controller and E-Manage programmer (right); under the head is a TEIN EDFC suspension controller.





## SIGHTS & SOUNDS

**Web exclusive!** Leslie Shapiro does the ME SoundCheck & VideoCheck dance on Snipes' SC430 at [www.m-emaq.com](http://www.m-emaq.com).

wheels on the car, we needed to widen the wheel wells."

JRD owner Johan Ragnarsson did a computer rendering of what the car would look like as a wide body, and that's when the project took off. "He originally just wanted to do something with the engine," AAP co-owner Tim Gertz says of Snipes' initial plans. "But in order to put 700 horsepower at the wheels, you have to have more than 8 inches of rubber on the road." Hence, Ragnarsson removed the factory fenders and crafted new ones out of steel that was hand-rolled using that age-old workhorse known as the English Wheel. "I call Johan 'The Master of Metal,'" grins Gertz.

"It's a very rare way of doing it," explains Ragnarsson, "especially with a late-model car like the Lexus SC430. The way it's done — the old-fashioned way, with an English Wheel — is a little more common in Europe." Ragnarsson also left his mark on the hood by way of aluminum vents added to help cool the volcanic engine compartment. And he designed and built a fiberglass spoiler at the bottom of the front bumper, as well as a steel rollbar spanning the back seat area. After the car's body was bulked up, it received a fresh coat of the factory Pearl White paint.

### DESIGN DEAL

Ok, so it looks good and goes fast, but by now you're probably wondering: Dude, what about the tunes? To tell the truth, an audio/video system was never originally part of Snipes' plans for the SC430. But then an enticing deal made him rethink that stance. Snipes is the owner and president of Phoenix Retail Group, a Hiram, Georgia-based company that provides design and construction services to retail giants like Staples, Home Depot, and Circuit City. The recently relocated AAP facility was very much in need of an eye-popping showroom, so Snipes offered to build a dazzling, racing-themed one for AAP. In turn, Gertz arranged to concoct a killer mobile-entertainment system for the

**Draft dodger:** A custom, dual 3-inch stainless-steel exhaust with high-flow cats moderates the engine's wicked backdraft (top).

**Gold standard:** The rebuilt door panels accommodate a Kicker S556.2 component speaker set, whose 5 1/4-inch mids are decorated with gold Lexus logos (right).







Cooled whip. Air vents were cut into the SC430's aluminum hood to help cool its eruptive engine compartment.





Lexus in trade. "After the showroom was built, Tim said, 'I owe you one, man,'" Snipes recalls. "I said, 'Well, whatever you think is fair.' Then he turned out a system that I think is second to none."

The SC430's rebuilt door panels accommodate a Kicker S556.2 component speaker set. The set's 1-inch tweeters dropped into the factory midrange location in each door's front top corner. Gertz molded together the factory trim for the midranges and the mounting cups for the tweeters, then painted them white. The set's 5 1/4-inch mids fit in the stock provisions at the bottom front corners of the doors, and Gertz finessed gold Lexus logos over the speakers to serve as grilles. Wood trim added at the bottom of each rebuilt door panel matches the stock stripe of wood at the top. More wood accents are visible in other parts of the SC430, and Snipes' business lent a helping hand in this regard. "Because my business does mill work, I was able to take wood trim from the car and match it in my finishing department," Snipes reveals. "Tim would mold a part out of fiberglass, and my shop would put the veneer over it."

#### DETAIL-ORIENTED

The veneer also frames an Alpine IVA-D900 DVD receiver in the dash, out of which flips a motorized 7-inch monitor. "We removed the factory radio from the single-DIN factory slot and used components from it to make a frame to mount the Alpine head," Gertz says. Since the IVA-D900 works in tandem with an Alpine NVE-N852A navigation unit tucked in the trunk, the space above the head unit and the factory climate controls that held the factory navigation display was taken over by a Greddy PRofec e-01 boost controller and E-Manage programmer. Under the head is a TEIN EDfC fully adjustable suspension controller. The dash mods stopped there, and the SC430 kept its factory gauges and steering wheel. "We really didn't want to 'import-tune' it up inside too much," Gertz admits. The car's

**Re-subholstered:** Residing where the rear seats once sat are two fiberglass/MDF enclosures, each housing a square-shaped Kicker Solo-Baric S10L7 10-inch subwoofer (top).

**Pod peephole:** Perched above each sub is a painted pod holding a 5 1/4-inch midrange and 1-inch tweeter from a Kicker S556.2 component set (middle).

**Tank topped:** Nestled between the square drivers is a tank for a custom Holley NOS nitrous intercooler kit (bottom).



factory seats, however, were swapped for motorized Recaro models, installed by JRD Tuning. They're upholstered with leather that matches the factory leather, and the same hide also swatches the center console. "The leather on the factory console was the same color, yet it had a different texture," Snipes notes. "So they changed it. The attention to detail in this install is incredible." All of the leather upholstery work was done at Tim's Upholstery, also in good ol' Suwanee.

More leather wraps the large panel where the rear seats once were. Hidden behind the panel are two sealed enclosures — made out of fiberglass and MDF, and each containing 1 cubic foot of air space

— housing a pair of Kicker Solo-Baric S10L7 10-inch subwoofers. Nestled between the subs is a tank for a custom Holley NOS nitrous intercooler kit, and perched above each square-shaped driver is a Pearl White-painted pod holding a 5¼-inch midrange and 1-inch tweeter from a second Kicker S556.2 component speaker set. Sprinkled around the speakers are more wood accents.

Ensclosed in a fiberglass rack in the trunk — painted Pearl White, of course — are a Kicker SX700.4 amplifier (85 watts x 4 into 4 ohms) that powers all of the Kicker separates and an SX1250.1 monoblock amp (1,250 watts x 1 into 1 ohm) that drives the subs. Keeping the amps

company on the rack, along with the aforementioned Alpine nav unit, is a Kicker KQ30 equalizer and the passive crossovers for the separates. "The amp enclosure had to be built so that the retractable hardtop could still close properly," Gertz points out. "I also created a logo on the rack for Michael's business — a phoenix — out of auto-body filler, and added a red LED for the eye."

### SOME KIND OF MONSTER

While the SC430's A/V arsenal packs quite a punch, its performance enhancements are downright menacing. "Oh yeah," Snipes confirms. "I'm an ol' redneck gearhead from way back. All my life I've had fast



Rear view: Long shot of the trunk (top left), where you'll find...

Rising power: Lurking in a fiberglass rack in the trunk is a Kicker 4-channel amp firing all the separates and a Kicker monoblock amp powering the subs (top right); in between the amps is a phoenix logo symbolizing the name of Snipes' business.

Top companions: Keeping the amps company out back is a Kicker equalizer and the passive crossovers for the separates (left); the enclosure was fabbed to allow the SC430's retractable hardtop to close smoothly and properly.

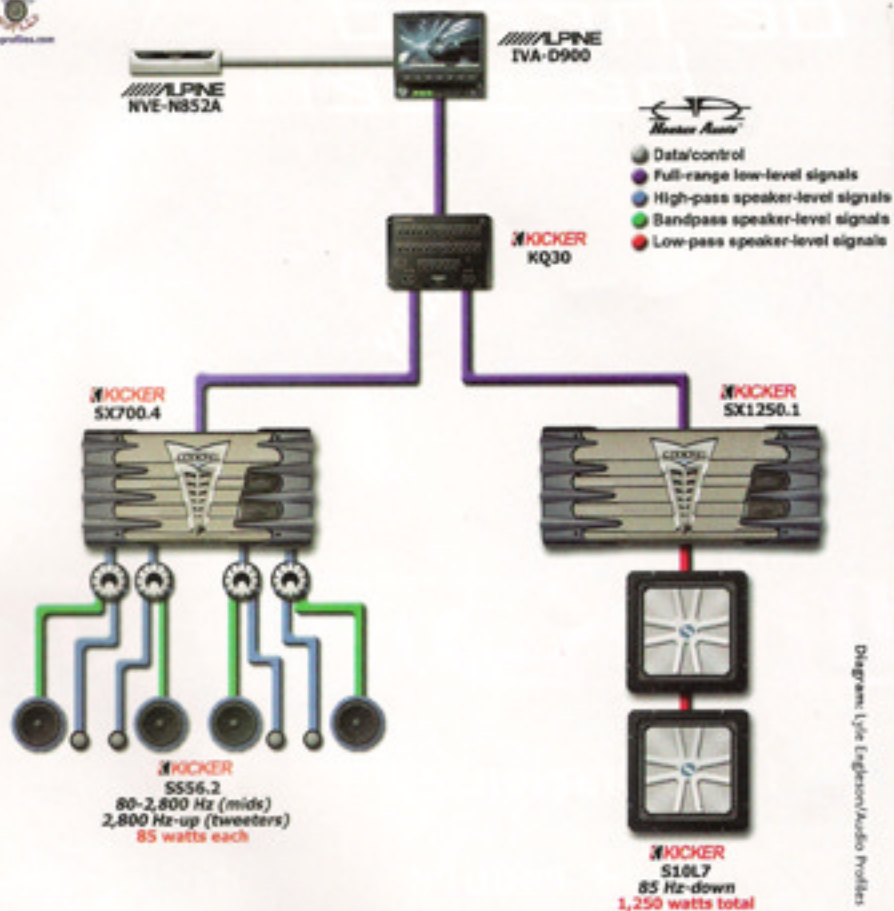




cars. They're my drug of choice." The factory V8 was beefed up with custom Pauter rods and pistons, while twin HKS GT2835 turbos help the engine achieve 700 horsepower (up from the factory 300). "It's a full-blown racing engine, period," Gertz stresses. "As far as we know, it's the only twin-turbo SC430 in the country." A custom front-mount intercooler that works in tandem with the NOS system helps the hot-rod engine keep its cool. A custom-built, dual 3-inch stainless-steel exhaust with high-flow cats handles the engine's potent back draft, and making sure everything runs smoothly is a MoTeC M800 engine-management system. "Getting the MoTeC system to interact with the factory computer — to get them to interface and talk with one another — was probably the biggest headache of this entire job," Gertz sighs. "But it worked out wonderfully, and everything runs awesomely."

Brembo brakes with 4-piston calipers (14-inches in front and 13-inches in the rear) ensure that the ferocious whip stops just as quickly as it accelerates. Other performance enhancements include a fully

**Speed freak:** "All my life, I've had fast cars," says SC430 owner Michael Snipes. "It's my drug of choice."







**Whoa, Nelly:** The factory V-8 was amped up with custom Pauter rods and pistons (left), and twin HKS GT2835 turbos help the engine achieve 700 horsepower — up from the factory 300.

**Mr. Cleaner:** A GReddy Airinx air filter ensures cleanliness in the engine compartment (below left).

**Tuned with testosterone:** Snipes' SC430 not only rages under the hood, but it looks menacing when the hood is closed. "Well, this is one for the guys," the Lexus folks told Snipes with approval when they spied his behemoth at this year's Atlanta Auto Show.



custom-built billet transmission with a ProTorque torque converter, an HKS blow-off valve, TIAL waste gates, and a TEIN coilover setup.

### CHOICES, CHOICES

Needless to say, Snipes is mighty satisfied with the end results. And when he returned to the Atlanta Auto Show earlier this year — this time to see his own SC430 in the spotlight in the AAP/JRD Tuning booth, which he himself designed — he couldn't help notice the reaction on some familiar faces. "What was so fun about it was that the Lexus people couldn't keep their eyes off of it," Snipes says. "They were displaying the stock SC430 at their booth, and then they came and saw my car. Their response was, 'Well, this is one for the guys.'"

Call us a bunch of sexist he-men, but it's easy to see where Snipes is coming from when this metal mutha's at full-throttle. And when that happens, he often wonders what to listen to: the enveloping sound system or the bestial engine? "They both sound so good," he admits. "It's challenging." It's those kind of challenges that prove your mobile entertainment mettle, Michael. **ME**

