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Whether fitted on a truck, Jeep or SUV, overlanding rack systems make long hauls and short adventures more convenient and less stressful. *See article on page 20.*
(Photo courtesy Leitner Designs; inset photo courtesy Aeromotive)

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The Cost of Vehicle Ownership

A new study shows consumers are committing more resources than ever to car ownership, even while fewer drivers are getting the vehicle they really want.

The report means more opportunities for the specialty automotive aftermarket, which supplies in-demand performance and styling accessories to walk-in clients and dealerships.

Car owner app Jerry's 2023 State of the American Driver Report analyzes results from a national survey of more than 1,200 American drivers across 50 states and four generations—Gen Z, millennials, Gen Xers and baby boomers.

Two-thirds of respondents confirm that rising car costs forced them to cut spending in other categories last year, including groceries, restaurants, clothing, entertainment and vacations. Nearly a quarter of Americans report spending more than 15% of their household's monthly after-tax income on their monthly car payment—even before accounting for insurance, gas, repairs or maintenance.

Those who are buying aren't getting what they actually want, however.

A third of drivers surveyed who purchased a vehicle in 2022 said they ended up buying used instead of new because of limited supply, and a quarter said they bought a make or model that wasn't their first choice.

"The disruption we're experiencing in the car market is likely to continue for at least another year or two," predicts Henry Hoenig, Jerry data journalist and study author. "Supply chain problems that have hit vehicle production are not fully resolved and the supply of newer used vehicles likely won't return to normal until at least 2025. This means used-car prices will probably remain elevated, even if they fall somewhat from the recent highs."

The report says 24% of drivers expect to shop for a car in 2023, and a majority (61%) of those who plan to shop remain loyal to traditional dealerships versus online retailers.

Other key findings include:

- Insurance costs are rising, but policyholders aren't taking action. Rising car insurance premiums forced nearly a quarter of Americans to take out less coverage than they wanted in 2022, yet 63% didn't shop around for better deals.
- The roads are more dangerous. Nearly a third of Americans say driving has become more dangerous since COVID. In 2022, nearly 1-in-5 witnessed a driver get out of their car to confront someone in another vehicle, and 1-in-5 men and nearly 1-in-10 women say they sometimes keep a loaded handgun within reach while driving, according to the report.

Nearly half (49%) of American drivers are interested in buying or leasing an electric vehicle as their next car—a 10% jump from last year, motivated mainly by the high gas prices seen in 2022.

For the slight majority of Americans (51%) that say they have no interest in buying or leasing an EV for their next vehicle, the main reasons cited are the inconvenience of charging and high electric vehicle prices. ***TS***

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Birmingham, AL 35253

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1900 28th Avenue South, Suite 200
Birmingham, AL 35209
205-212-9402

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THE SHOP (ISSN 2380-7415) is published monthly by Cahaba Media Group, 1900 28th Ave S, Ste 200, Birmingham, AL 35209-2642. Periodicals postage paid at Birmingham, AL and additional mailing offices. Free to qualified recipients within the United States and U.S. Possessions. Publisher reserves the right to determine qualifications. Annual Subscription Prices: U.S. – one year, $45; two years, $80; three years, $108. Canada – one year, $76; two years, $142, three years, $201 (U.S. Funds); All other countries – one year $98, two years $186, three years, $267 (U.S. funds). Customer Service, call 800-256-2785. POSTMASTER: Please send address changes to THE SHOP, PO Box 271, Lincolnshire, IL 60069-9835.
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CARS across AMERICA

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Caught up in the day-to-day workings of an automotive aftermarket shop, it can be easy to forget that there are others across America fighting the same types of battles and enjoying the same types of victories.

To bring the industry a little closer together, here's a look at some recent aftermarket events, reports and analysis celebrating classic vehicles and those keeping them on the road.

EBAY MOTORS ROAD TRIP SPOTLIGHTS LOCAL BUILDS

These builders know what it takes to hit the road with style and performance.

eBay Motors arrived in Los Angeles in November to mark the finale of its Parts of America tour, dubbed "the ultimate cross-country car enthusiast road trip."

The three-month tour stopped in 12 towns notable for their car cultures and communities, including sports cars seeking to tame the Tail of the Dragon in Deals Gap, North Carolina; bagger motorcycles meeting in Rogers, Arkansas; and rock crawling Jeeps hitting the trails in Moab, Utah.

It all finished up at the LA Auto Show, where the eBay Motors hauler displayed the full collection of wild, one-of-a-kind, custom-modded rides acquired along the route, all made possible with parts from eBay Motors.

"We met builders, maintainers and restorers throughout the country who showed us what makes their regional car cultures so special," says Ron Jaiven, GM





Last fall's eBay Motors Parts of America tour arrived at the LA Auto Show with a one-of-a-kind collection of road trip-worthy vehicles gathered at stops across the country. (Photos courtesy eBay Motors)

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Featuring the talents and creativity of professional and enthusiast builders, four of the vehicles from the collection were put up for auction on eBay Motors. (Photos courtesy eBay Motors)

of parts & accessories, eBay Motors. "These communities are as unique as the vehicles we picked up along the way, and it was remarkable to see firsthand how these enthusiasts—professionals and hobbyists alike—have used our marketplace to support their deep automotive passions."

Four of the vehicles representing the grand tradition of local car culture were put to auction, listed here with eBay's descriptions:

1969 FORD F100 RANGER "RANCH RELIC"

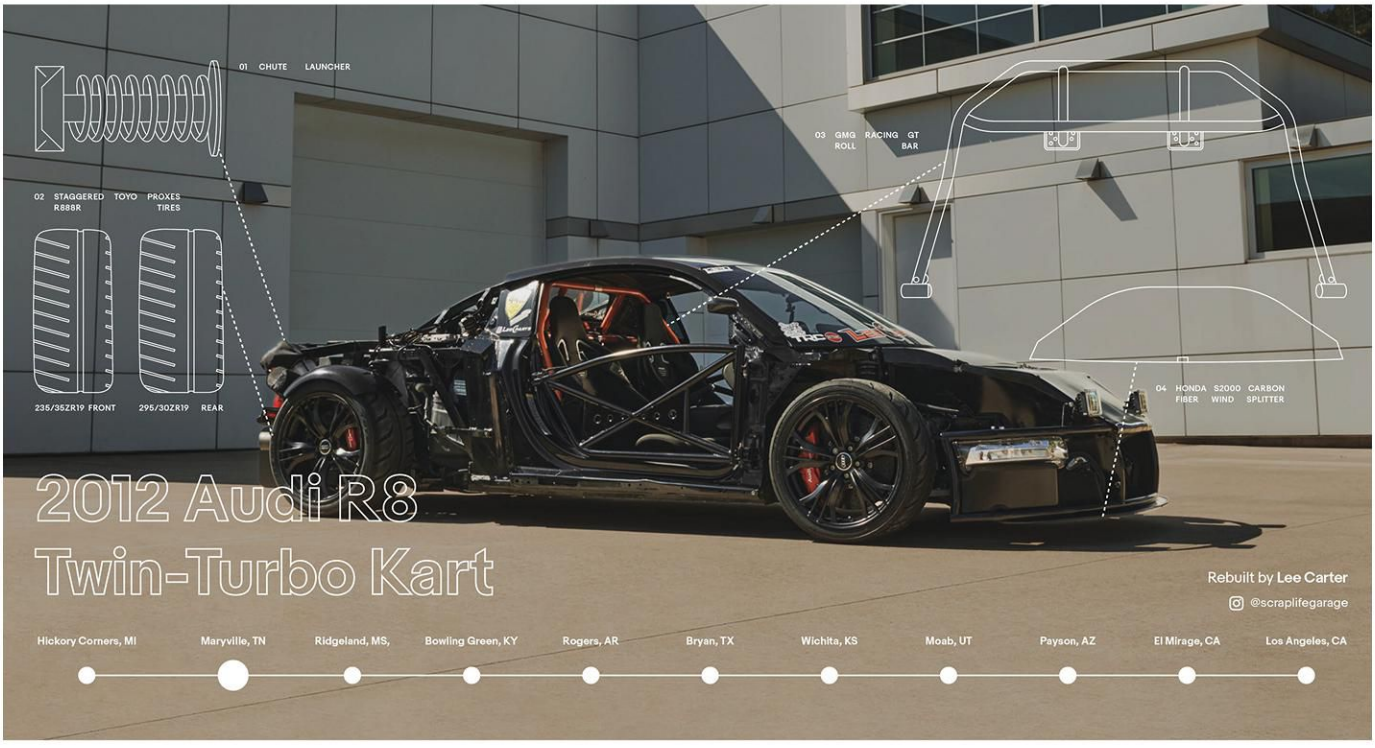
Builder: Mike Satterfield of @TheGentlemanRacer

Satterfield's 1969 Ford F100 Ranger is an authentic ranch truck marked with true patina, including light rust and dings. The exterior updates include an old hickory bed inset and gorgeous work truck lettering to bring the aesthetic to life.

2010 DODGE CHALLENGER R/T "1000 HP BUDGET BUILD"

Builder: Christina Roki of @ChristinaRoki

Roki built her Dodge Challenger R/T to punch above its weight at the drag strip with an iconic Hellcat Redeye engine. Coated in a copper chrome wrap, the combination of performance and style turns heads on and off the track.



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2020 PORSCHE 718 CAYMAN GT4 "POOR-ISH GT4"

Builder: LeeC Parts of @ScrapLifeGarage

This Porsche Cayman GT4 spent its early life as a racetrack machine before being totaled in an unfortunate accident on the street. Purchased during a salvage auction and rebuilt with manufacturer-spec parts and accessories found on eBay Motors, it's back in action, complete with track-appropriate livery.

2012 AUDI R8 TWIN-TURBO "SUPER-KART"

Builder: LeeC Parts of @ScrapLifeGarage

The crew at LeeC Parts loves crazy, track-ready racing machines. This Audi R8 Twin-Turbo has been modified to look, ride and race like an oversized go-kart complete with 1,500 hp.

THE CARS LIKELY TO RISE IN VALUE

It's like playing the market, but with your favorite classic vehicles.

Automotive lifestyle brand and insurance provider Hagerty announced its 2023 U.S. Bull Market list, an annual collection of enthusiast cars and vehicles with the best potential to hold or increase in value in the coming year.

In its sixth year, the list is compiled using data from public and private sales, insurance valuations and historical trends.

"Bull Market is a guide for enthusiasts of all types to find, buy and drive something they love while also making a good investment," says Larry Webster, Hagerty senior vice president of media and editorial. "Buying an enthusiast vehicle can be a big decision, but the good news is that we've done the legwork for you by using the best valuation data and market insights analyzed by our team of experts."

This year's Bull Market list includes a diverse range of vehicles, including microcars, muscle cars, sports cars, exotics, a motorcycle and even a military-grade SUV.

"The common factor is timing. Even against the current economic backdrop, we believe this group is poised to grow the most in value next year," notes Brian Rabold, Hagerty's vice president of automotive intelligence. "Buying a fun car while it's on the way up means you can use and enjoy it while likely coming out ahead when it's time to sell."

Here's the 2023 U.S. Bull Market list (excellent condition price range) with Hagerty's analysis:

1992-2006 AM GENERAL HUMMER H1 ($105,000–$127,300)

There's something undeniably appealing about a utilitarian, no-frills off-roader, and they don't get more rugged and ready for action than the Hummer H1. Gen Xers (the biggest fans of collectible SUVs) own over half of all H1s protected by Hagerty, but millennial quotes are up to almost a third, which has doubled since 2020. Meanwhile, appreciation since 2019 has lagged, with an increase of only 9.9%. It seems the H1 may be overdue for a price increase.

1968-70 AMC AMX ($30,500–$40,600)

An underdog in the pony car world of Camaros and Mustangs, the stylish two-seat AMX is an incredible value, but for how long? The AMX has appreciated 28.8% since 2019, which is behind 1967-69 Camaros (up 40.5%). However, interest from next-generation enthusiasts has nearly tripled since 2019, from a share of 13% to 38% of insurance quotes, suggesting these will continue to hold or increase in value.

2008-15 AUDI R8 (MANUAL) ($154,000–$186,700)

The R8 has always been a special car, and a huge part of that appeal lies in the examples equipped with a manual transmission sprouting from a metal gate—a nod to classic Ferraris and Lamborghinis that came before. Insurance policy growth is more



What's better than finding a fun vehicle to drive and having it appreciate during ownership? (Photo courtesy Hagerty Media)



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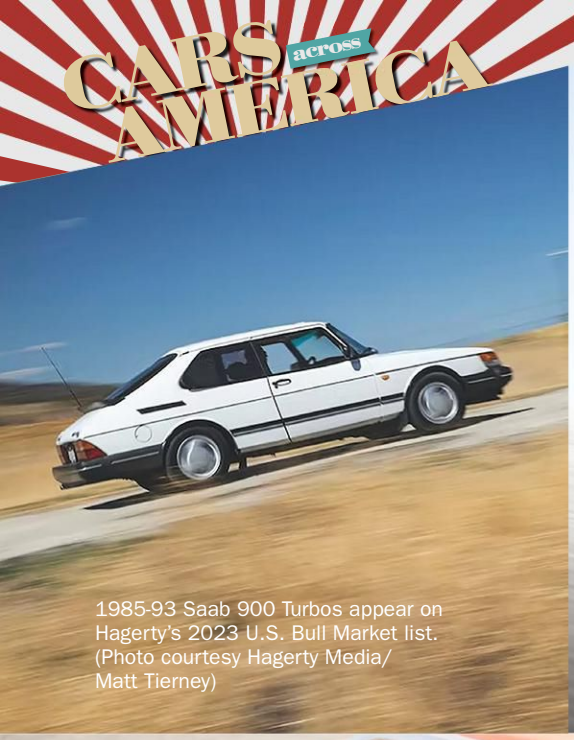
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1985-93 Saab 900 Turbos appear on Hagerty's 2023 U.S. Bull Market list. (Photo courtesy Hagerty Media/ Matt Tierney)



2001-10 Lamborghini Murciélago models appear on Hagerty's 2023 U.S. Bull Market list. (Photo courtesy Hagerty Media/James Lipman)



1968-70 AMC AMX models appear on Hagerty's 2023 U.S. Bull Market list. (Photo courtesy Hagerty Media/James Lipman)

than three times faster than the Hagerty average over the past five years. Lookups on Hagerty Valuation Tools have doubled in the past 12 months, and they lead lookups for the similar Lamborghini Gallardo. R8 values are up 37% since 2019, with plenty of room to continue climbing.

2001-04 CHEVROLET CORVETTE Z06 ($31,400–$39,300)

A supercar in disguise, the C5 Z06 is a track day monster that is also easy to live with on a daily basis. Lookups for the C5 Z06 on Hagerty Valuation Tools have more than tripled since 2021—a strong indicator of an impending climb. In addition, an equal share of insurance quotes come from boomers, Gen Xers and millennials, showing that demand is spread evenly throughout the market.

1936-47 HARLEY-DAVIDSON KNUCKLEHEAD ($90,300–$115,000)

Throw a leg over this low and long cruiser and you'll have some idea of what freedom and rebellion meant in postwar America. Knucklehead owners are nearly three times more likely than Indian Chief owners to be under 45 years old, and those younger enthusiasts are insuring Knuckleheads for 15% more than boomers. As far as motorcycles go, the Knucklehead has a bright future with the next generation taking up the torch.

2001-10 LAMBORGHINI MURCIÉLAGO ($302,700–$342,700)

It's hard to argue against a 632-hp V-12 barking to 8,500 rpm just over your shoulder. If that's your thing, grab one of these wild Lambos now. Values for the Murciélago are up 48% since 2019 but have lagged behind cars like the Porsche Carrera GT, which doubled in value over the same period. As next-generation enthusiasts are a growing share of owners (approaching two-thirds), values for the Murciélago appear poised for more appreciation.

2004-10 MERCEDES-BENZ SLR MCLAREN ($329,300–$380,700)

If ever there was an underappreciated hypercar, the SLR McLaren is it. While values for the Porsche Carrera GT have more than doubled since 2019, the SLR has increased a modest 37%. The SLR has long held a large premium over its spiritual successor, the SLS, but the value gap narrowed to only 7.4% in July 2022. In

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the third quarter of 2022, the SLR premium widened again to 23%, with younger buyers fueling much of the demand.

2003-08 NISSAN 350Z ($37,500–$44,900)

The 350Z arrived at the perfect time, giving Nissan a new performance car it could be proud of and enthusiasts a reason to fall in love with Z cars all over again. Average No. 2 values for the 350Z have increased 78% since the start of 2021—the largest increase for any Z aside from 1978-83 280ZXs, which doubled in that time. Boomers still own the majority of 350Zs, but 19% of new policies added in 2022 were from buyers under 40.

1985-93 SAAB 900 TURBO ($22,200–$25,800)

If quirky, practical performance appeals to you, the 900 Turbo is calling. Increasingly owned by next-generation enthusiasts, the Saab 900 Turbo appears to be trending toward faster appreciation. Owners under the age of 40 have tripled since 2019 from a share of 7% to 22%.

1991-98 SUZUKI CAPPUCCINO ($12,200–$16,700)

The 63-hp Cappuccino won't win any stoplight battles, but in the turns it's a Miata on a diet and sure to surprise more than a few folks in your rearview mirror. Millennial and Gen Z enthusiasts submit over 80% of insurance quotes, which assures there will be a dedicated following for the Cappuccino in the future. It's nearly impossible



Black, white and gray hues topped Axalta's 2022 Global Automotive Color Popularity Report, representing 82% of cars on the road today. (See article on page 16)

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to find a more interesting car for under $10,000.

1984-88 TOYOTA 4X4 PICKUP ($20,700–$26,700)

If you're into vintage 4x4s but have been priced out of Land Cruisers and Broncos, consider Toyota's robust, handsome second-generation pickup. The number of Toyota trucks added to Hagerty policies has quadrupled since 2017, with younger collectors as the fastest-growing segment. Although boomers currently own 43% of them, collectors under 40 more than doubled their ownership share since 2019, from 7% to 16%, ensuring a healthy appreciation for the model in the future.

BLACK, WHITE & GRAY TOP CAR COLOR REPORT

When it comes to last year's top vehicle colors, the answer is black and white—and gray.

Global coatings company Axalta Coating Systems released its 70th annual Global Automotive Color Popularity Report, which revealed the top three automotive colors of 2022: white, black and gray.

But that doesn't mean they're bland.

"Today's vehicles are more vibrant than ever," says Robert Schnell, vice president, global sales & product management, Axalta. "For example, compared to the white color variations of the 1950s, these whites are brighter and beam with iridescent flakes. Together, vehicles in white, black, gray and silver add up to 82% of cars on the road today."

Globally, white shades held the lead (34% total) with pearlescent whites at 14% popularity and solid whites at 20%. Next, deep black colors radiate with sparkling effects and total 21% of vehicles on the road. And gray colors (19%) had sparkling effects in an assortment of colorful hues.

Overall, colorful variations of blue (8%), red (5%) and green (1%) were found with high color intensity and complex sparkling effects, according to the report.

First published in 1953, Axalta's full Automotive Color Popularity Report can be accessed online at axalta.com. Together with Axalta's Color Trend Report, the history and future of automotive color is compiled by global color experts and gives automotive OEMs insights into consumer preferences.

OKLAHOMA, MISSISSIPPI OFFER BEST SITUATIONS FOR MECHANICS

Automotive mechanics are in demand seemingly everywhere, but there are places where the occupation really pays off.

A study by findthebestcarprice.com analyzed data from the U.S. Census Bureau on industry job opportunities, average salary and cost of living in each state to discover where it's best to work as a mechanic.

Oklahoma topped the website study's list, as mechanics can earn considerably more than the state's average salary. The median annual salary for people working as automotive service technicians and mechanics is $46,180, nearly a full $10,000 more than the median salary across all jobs in the state, which comes to $37,500.

In addition, Oklahoma ranks as having the second-lowest cost of living of all 50 states, while job opportunities for mechanics are also better than average, with 4.9 mechanic jobs per 1,000 jobs in the state. That rate ranks as the 20th best nationwide.

Mississippi ranks as the second-best place to be a mechanic, thanks to the lowest cost of living in the country and a median salary of $36,760, which is slightly higher than the statewide median of $35,070.

It also offers good employment opportunities, with 5.6 of every 1,000 jobs in the state being a mechanic—well above the national average of 4.6 per 1,000.

New Mexico places third on the list as it has the highest number of people employed as mechanics per 1,000 jobs. Overall the Census data estimates that 4,930 people work as automotive service technicians and mechanics in the Land of Enchantment, which equates to 6.3 jobs per 1,000.

The median salary for mechanics in New Mexico stands at $37,920—just above the overall median salary in the state ($37,810).

Meanwhile, in pure monetary terms, Washington D.C. offers the highest pay for mechanics, with a median annual wage of $60,590; however, that is nearly a quarter below the overall median salary in the district, which is $79,960.

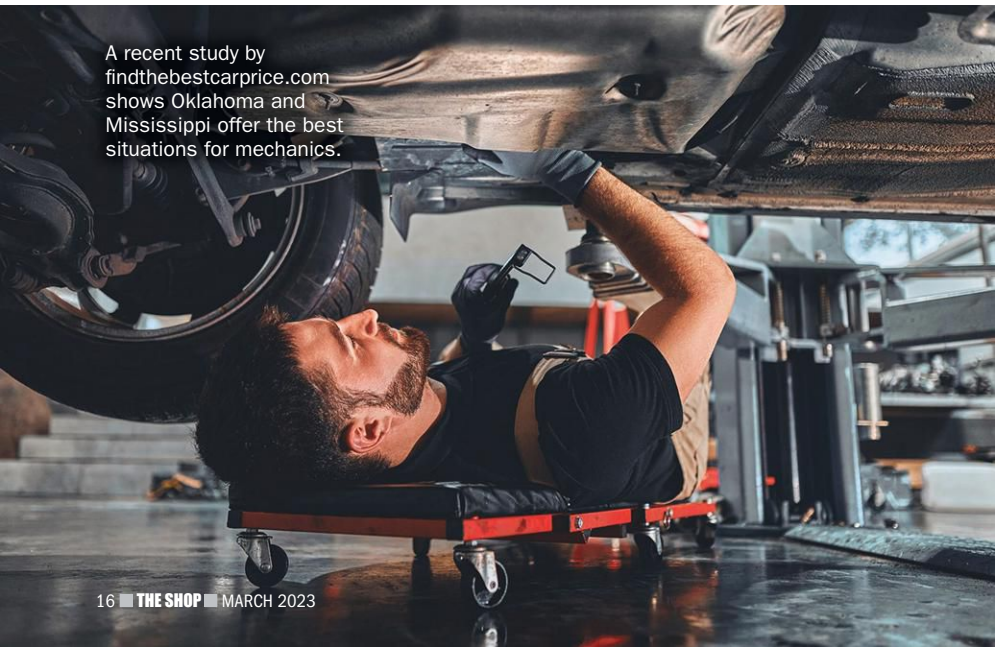
That, combined with the second-highest cost of living in the country behind only Hawaii and the fact that there are only 0.6 mechanic jobs per 1,000, makes D.C. America's worst place to be a mechanic.

The Census data estimates that there are around 629,000 people working as automotive service technicians and mechanics across the U.S., with the median annual salary at $46,650.

Top Five:
1. Oklahoma
2. Mississippi
3. New Mexico
4. Tennessee
5. Georgia

Bottom Five:
47. Washington
48. Massachusetts
49. New York
50. Connecticut
51. Washington, D.C

TS



A recent study by findthebestcarprice.com shows Oklahoma and Mississippi offer the best situations for mechanics.

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EMPLOYEES FINDING EMPLOYEES

Why nonrecruiters are sometimes the best recruiters.

By Jeremy Eskenazi



Not every professional recruiter can be an engineer, hair stylist or mechanic. They know how to hire for these roles, but not how to become them.

On the flip side, it's not as hard for an employee to act as a recruiter. In fact, employee recruiting power is often unrealized because owners and managers are so busy relying on outside sources to find new workers.

There was an incredible program once developed for the service industry. Every manager in a company went through training to both identify and learn how to engage with potential candidates. A calling card was available to hand out to potential new workers, and managers could facilitate introductions.

The candidate would always get a call and the managers received a referral bonus if a connection was made—even if the candidate wasn't hired. The company paid managers for this time, and with a 20% success rate, a fruitful pipeline of high-quality candidates emerged.

What they learned was just giving out the cards wasn't enough, however—managers also needed training to spot potential. In other words, they needed a little of that magical eye of a recruiter.

While specialty aftermarket shop owners may not necessarily use an official recruiter to fill job openings, they don't have to go it alone, either. Here are four reasons why your employees can be your best recruiters:

They far surpass the "post and pray" method.

We know a lot of shop owners do this—post a generic job ad everywhere they can think of, then wait and hope. You may get a bunch of applications this way, but most of the applicants won't be the right fit or won't have the right experience, and you'll end up wasting a lot of time.

This is not a strategic approach, nor is it effective. You need to do more than passively wait for people to come to you.

Asking employees for recommendations is a fantastic way to build your pipeline of better candidates.

Top performers have a very clear idea of who they'd want to work with and what it takes to be successful at your company.

Once they know what roles you're hiring for, give employees tools to help you—train them on how to be a recruiter so everyone is always on the lookout for talent that makes the workday, the product and the customer experience better.

Good employees will be happy to help the team, and you can add to the excitement by recognizing their recruiting efforts. Thank them in front of the company and through gestures that don't come with strings attached.

More candidates mean better hiring practices.

If you can work fast to meet the candidates that non-recruiters bring you, they will want to do it more often and feel more credible wearing their recruiting hat.

You may need to update your processes to be able to move faster to connect with

spotted talent and keep communications open if a position isn't available right away. Don't make your employee recruiters go through a long process or wonder if you're going to get back to someone they recommend.

Be ready to follow up with every person your non-recruiters refer to keep motivation high.

If you truly believe good workers make or break a company, then you'll want to invest in finding and retaining quality staff members.

It increases everyone's investment in finding and keeping a strong workforce.

If you truly believe good workers make or break a company, then you'll want to invest in finding and retaining quality staff members. Consider giving employees an hour or two each month to work on recruitment, whether online through social media or at car shows or other events where they can find and engage with other professionals or talented enthusiasts that might be a good fit.

The process of learning how to be a recruiter takes a bit of an investment. Spend your time and money on a solid program that is easy to work with to help your employees develop the skills to find what you need.

Such trust and commitment can go a long way toward helping current employees feel good about participating in these efforts.

As with all programs, you'll need every stakeholder to be on board for it to be successful. While you're investing in great programs and recognition for this stretch role, make sure your recruiters are on board with the plans.

They are the best teachers and advocates to help make this a success, but they can also derail your efforts. Don't let current employees get territorial. It's crucial they understand that their work is valued, and the goal is not to replace them.

If every employee comes to work with the mindset that it is part of everyone's job to attract the best talent, everyone wins. ***TS***



JEREMY ESKENAZI *SPHR, SHRM-SCP, CMC, is the founder of Riviera Advisors, a boutique talent acquisition optimization consulting firm. Visit rivieraadvisors.com.*



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CARRY ON

Overland racks can handle the load. ///// By Jef White

There are a few staples of any self-respecting overland rig. Oversized wheels and tires. A recovery winch. And a versatile, dependable rack system for hauling and storage.

Today's overland rack market is overflowing with innovative, versatile products to take just about anything just about anywhere, and look good while doing it. Whether fitted on a truck, Jeep or SUV, the systems make long hauls and short adventures more convenient and less stressful.

With so many choices, it pays to study up on the market. Manufacturers and suppliers are happy to share market trends, hot new products and tips for increased sales.

MODERN SYSTEMS

Today's versatile overland rack systems feature high-tech designs to match late-model vehicles.

"Laser and robotic production assembly allows us to build a precision product and keep pace with demand," says Dave Williams, director of sales for Go Rhino.

Improved manufacturing processes result in better racks, agrees Bernhard Leitner, CEO of Leitner Designs.

"We have seen explosive growth in the overland market from when we first launched our ACS Classic back in 2014," he says. "When we started, our manufacturing process consisted of bending tubing, laser-cutting brackets and welding—the same processes you might see at most fabrication shops. Since that time, we have leveraged some of the most high-tech manufacturing processes available—we have even gone to the extent of custom-designing and manufacturing our own fasteners."

T-Rex Truck Products/ZROADZ Off



It's an exciting time to be a part of the outdoor adventure and exploration community. (Photo courtesy Rhino-Rack)

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OVERLAND RACKS

HOT PRODUCT:
Bushwacker Overland Rack
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Mid-height rack made of aluminum and steel; ideal for mounting a tent; holds up to 1,000 pounds while maintaining clearance for garage parking; side MOLLE panels allow a variety of accessory mounting; adjustable crossbars provide flexibility.

Bushwacker/RealTruck Group
Lee Riser
VP of Marketing

HOT PRODUCT:
Adjustable Rack System
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Expandable and adjustable design for a universal fit on trucks and Jeeps; 11-gauge U.S. steel construction; multiple tie-down and mounting points; four LED light pod locations; four step locations for roof access; bolt-on and/or hook-secure mounting system.

Fab Fours Inc.
Autumn Hauck
Director of Sales

HOT PRODUCT:
XRS Extreme Rack System for Truck Beds
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
T-slotted uprights and cross bars that utilize 4-CORE technology; allows users to mount all popular Go Rhino off-road and camping accessories as well as bike and kayak mounts from other well-known brands.

Go Rhino
Dave Williams
Director of Sales

HOT PRODUCT:
ACS Forged Truck Bed Rack
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Tough and modular; includes three sizes of patented, weatherproof Gear Pods locking storage boxes that can be reconfigured in minutes; patented sliding rear load bar allows full access to the bed with no tools; compatible with other T-slot accessories.

Leitner Designs
Bernhard Leitner
CEO

HOT PRODUCT:
Lost Canyon Overlanding Rack
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Quality at a mid-level price point; designed to work with tonneau covers from the beginning with no retro fitment or additional brackets/risers required; pairs with the new Lost Canyon Rove Edition rooftop tent.

Quadratec
Patrick Bennett
Product Designer

HOT PRODUCT:
Rhino-Rack Reconn-Deck
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Modular rack built for all truck beds featuring rails; offers extensive carrying space, a sleek and rugged design, and countless ways to customize for camping, fishing, biking, kayaking and more; create a platform to fit any need.

Rhino-Rack
Ryan Hoffins
VP of Marketing

HOT PRODUCT:
TRECK System
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Winner of multiple awards including top new product at the 2019 SEMA Show; patented height adjustability; patented tire relocation mount; bottle opener.

Road Armor
Mark Hanson
CEO

HOT PRODUCT:
Direct-Mount Jeep JL & JT Roof Basket
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Lightweight, rust-free aluminum construction; no-drill direct-fit mounting; front and rear fairing to reduce wind noise; can accommodate up to a 30-inch LED light bar and other accessory mounts; 150-pound load capacity.

TrailFX
Jane Donnelly
Marketing Director

HOT PRODUCT:
ZROADZ ACCESS Overland Racks
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Include three lightweight aluminum ACCESS gates that accept accessories and allow full access to the bed when opened and protect gear when closed and locked; maximum bed space without interference; can be used for canine transportation.

T-Rex Truck Products/
ZROADZ Off Road Products
Victor Casillas
Sales Manager







Racks are designed to not only manage storage, but also carry a load.
(Photos courtesy T-Rex Truck Products/ ZROADZ Off Road Products)

Road Products uses 3D CAD modeling and FEA analysis to design and test products virtually before prototypes are manufactured, notes Victor Casillas, sales manager.

"This gives our team of engineers and designers the ability to ensure the product will work within certain fitment parameters and understand how it will perform over its lifecycle," he says.

Quality racks are a must for today's consumers, says Mark Hanson, CEO of Road Armor.

"New technology is seriously advancing where we are going. Ultimately, it always comes down to design and craftmanship."

Modern vehicles can also bring modern challenges, however, says Autumn Hauck, director of sales for Fab Fours Inc.

"Our industry has adjusted quickly to added sensors and compatibility requirements with cameras on front and rear protection. Now, I feel like the same will be met with bed tech-

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EZ-Hard Panel Tri-Fold #12074-1100
Tri-Fold Soft #12074-1200



WHY OUR RACKS WORK WITH OUR TONNEAUS

- Lost Canyon Gladiator Bed Racks Have Been Engineered to Work with Tactik Tonneau covers
- Unique Cantilevered Uprights are Placed Further Outbound Specifically to allow Room for Installation of Tonneau Covers
- Built-In Tonneau Cover Mounting Provisions Require No Modification to Either Rack or Covers for Installation
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Consumers want quality designs and craftsmanship. (Photos courtesy Road Armor)



Racks and attachments help off-roaders overland in style. (Photos courtesy Bushwacker/RealTruck)

nology," she explains. "We'll do our best to make it work, but there will be some options the consumer may or may not be able to keep. I think many of us just assume someone adding accessories accepts the repercussions of adding aftermarket parts, but many consumers believe if it is available to purchase it should work with all the vehicle's (existing) technology."

Hauck suggests discussing any potential changes to factory systems prior to purchase.

Meanwhile, some manufacturers are looking even farther down the road to a time when electric off-roaders are more common.

"With EV introduction into this market, weight reduction while maintaining strength will be an important future selling feature," says Patrick Bennett, senior product designer for Quadratec. "The challenge will be maintaining an acceptable price point while applying new weight-saving materials and tech in rack construction. For now we have focused our engineering into clever designs and packaging to reduce weight and shipping costs for our steel rack without sacrificing load capacity or functionality."

VERSATILE & FUNCTIONAL

The racks themselves are also more capable and versatile than ever.

"T-slots and a variety of mounting options in the truck bed continue to offer more flexibility in the style of overlanding racks and the accessories that are out there, from mild to extreme," says Lee Riser, VP of marketing for Bushwacker/RealTruck Group.

Gone are the days of heavy, cumbersome units.

"Stronger, lighter weight materials make racks easier to install and more efficient to use," says Jane Donnelly, marketing director for TrailFX.

It's an exciting time to be a part of the outdoor adventure and exploration community, says Ryan Hoffins, VP of marketing for Rhino-Rack.

"With new technology, there is an abundance of opportunities for innovation and craftsmanship," he says. "We're seeing top-tier manufacturing and creative solutions that are designed to test the durability of

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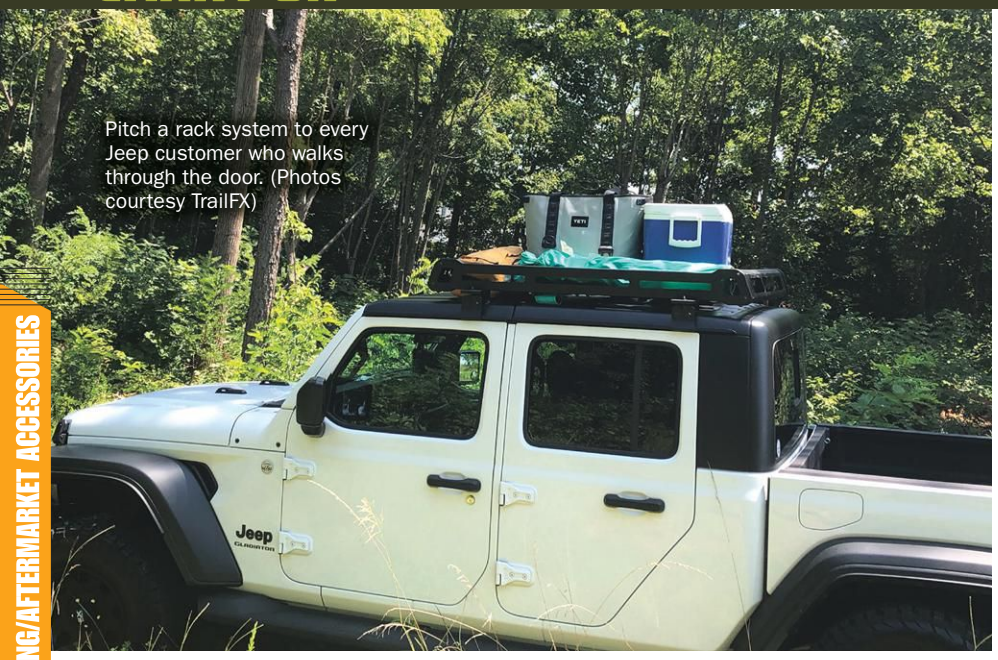
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INSTALLER REBATE FORM



CONSUMER REBATE FORM



Pitch a rack system to every Jeep customer who walks through the door. (Photos courtesy TrailFX)



equipment and gear, making the market's competition more aggressive and the products available that much greater."

TIME TO RACK & ROLL

Consumers want a reliable rack system that can handle the rigors of adventure travel.

"The perceived strength or durability of racks is often questioned," Williams notes. "With the rapid proliferation of choices in a rapidly emerging market and category, jobbers have had to ask around and conduct online research to learn which brands are receiving the positive reviews and providing consumers with positive experiences."

The racks are impressive—but do have their limits.

"It is a common misconception that all racks are made the same, but you really need to pay attention to what the max weight capacity of your rack is," Hanson cautions. "No one wants their stuff falling off down the road because their bed rack system fell apart."

Another strong selling point, Leitner notes, is that the racks keep working after the trail ride is done.

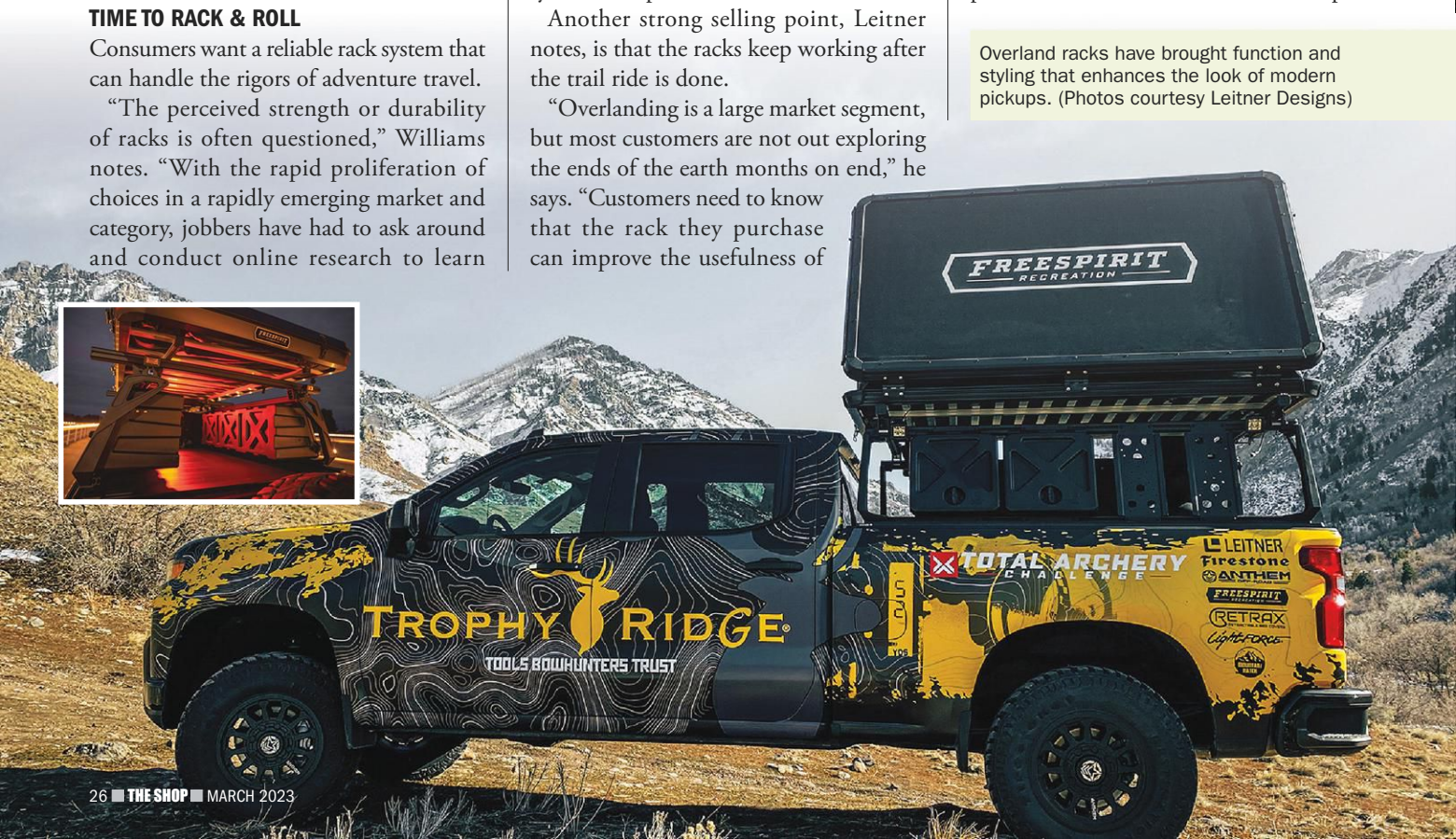
"Overlanding is a large market segment, but most customers are not out exploring the ends of the earth months on end," he says. "Customers need to know that the rack they purchase can improve the usefulness of their truck, from picking up long items like lumber to carrying their kayak to the lake. And having locking storage that keeps your gear from eating up backseat storage room is something everyone can use, even if you're just running to the store for groceries."

Bennett notes common misconceptions surrounding overland racks include that they severely reduce bed space and that they can't be used with tonneau covers.

"Our unique cantilevered mounting system provides one of the largest internal dimensions currently offered—very little bed function is lost," he says, "and both our half-cab and full-cab designs work with tonneaus."

Hauck, too, suggests fully explaining how racks will affect bed and bed cover usage, even while cautioning overlanders to not try to take it all with them.

"Just because you have a rack does not mean you can put anything and everything on it. It is important to remind customers that safety comes first," she says. "They may want a rig with all the bells and whistles, but adding that weight requires maintenance. Whether they are an avid off-roader or someone who just wants to look cool in their vehicle, run through the importance of checking the bolts and making sure the products are secured before and after trips."



Overland racks have brought function and styling that enhances the look of modern pickups. (Photos courtesy Leitner Designs)

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It's important to remind customers that safety comes first. (Photo courtesy Fab Fours)

A SMART INSTALL

Of course, rack systems need to make sense for shops as well. Intelligent designs allow for quick, secure attachments.

"Shops may think it takes a lot of time to install, but once familiar with the products that are designed for current-gen trucks and SUVs they will see the installation time and complexity are worth it for the numerous upsell options that exist within this product category," Riser says.

There are a variety of options, so be prepared to do your homework beforehand.

"Some racks are application-specific and some are modular," Donnelly explains. "It's important to understand if you'll need the customer's vehicle fitment data before ordering. It's also important to fully understand whether the rack requires drilling to mount it on the vehicle—most don't, but some do and it's something you'll need to discuss with your customer if they choose one that does."

Not all racks are created equal, meaning price should not be the only factor used when choosing a system, Casillas believes.

"Racks are not only designed to manage storage, but also carry a load. A well-designed rack manufactured from quality materials will provide your customer with years of confident performance and off-road use."

The goal is to match the capabilities of different racks to each customer's specific needs.

"There are weekend warriors, families simply looking to carry extra items for road trips, off-road experts and some consumers that will use it for all the above," Hoffins says. "It's important to narrow down the customer's exact purpose in purchasing a rack, rather than selling what is biggest and best."

REACH THE SALES SUMMIT

To reach your sales potential in the overland racks market, it pays to be seen.

"In the shop, merchandise a rack and showcase accessories such as bikes on the rack so people can touch, feel and become inspired by what can be done to their vehicle to enjoy it even more," says Go Rhino's Williams. "This will enable sales of more than just the rack. Meanwhile, outside of the shop, build a decked-out overland vehicle that has your logo on it and make sure it's seen—on the streets as well as in front of the shop. It's guaranteed to draw attention and interest."

When it comes to sales area displays, Hauck from Fab Fours recommends making them fun and exciting.

"If space allows, create an overlanding theme in an area of the showroom," she says. "Build excitement around the product to get those wheels turning in the consumer's mind."

Leitner of Leitner Designs also believes that seeing is believing when it comes to these modern products.

"Outfit one of your shop trucks," he suggests. "For a customer to truly see the benefits, viewing one in person is a sure bet to selling a unit. For so many years, a bed rack has been a necessary evil relegated to contractor trucks. With the introduction of our all-aluminum forged rack we have brought function and styling that actually enhances the look of modern pickups."

Once you've gained the customer's attention, it's up to your sales team to get them into the right system.

"Have informed sales associates. Understand what is available and eliminate the misconceptions," suggests Doug Speece, Northeast regional sales manager for Quadratec Wholesale Division. "Be the expert. The consumer is looking to you for guidance. Understanding what the customer is looking to achieve (off-roader, weekend camper, true overlander, etc.) and knowing the available products and price points is key."

It often means asking a lot of questions, says Casillas of T-Rex/ZROADZ.

"Listening to the customer and understanding their intended use and expectations while asking the right questions is key," he says. "Doing this will help narrow the offering of products and will always create a better customer experience."

The more you know, the more you can help your clients.

"Understanding all the details and features of the product will help you explain the benefits to potential customers," says Hoffins of Rhino-Rack. "It's also important to have an understanding of competitor



Consumers will look to you for guidance in choosing the best rack for their purposes. (Photo courtesy Quadratec)



Today's versatile overland rack systems feature high-tech designs to match late-model vehicles. (Photo courtesy Go Rhino)

brands and their features so that you can compare and contrast them. Additionally, it is important to be aware of potential customer concerns and be prepared to address them in a helpful and reassuring way."

After all, the systems are a vital part of adventure travel.

"Shops can discuss the benefits of having an overland rack. It's a multiuse tool in a lot of ways," says Road Armor's Hanson. "You can carry anything you need to live comfortably on a good overland rack. It's one of those things you should really have if you are living an overland lifestyle."

While chatting, don't forget to discuss the options for customized carrying, adds Bushwacker's Riser.

"Showcase the product and rack on shop vehicles and carry all the key accessories that go with it, like all the recovery gear, from trail cans to traction boards," she says. "Show the endless options that help you overland in style."

Need a place to start? Try working with the most famous off-road brand out there.

"Pitch a rack system to every Jeep customer that walks through the door," says Donnelly of TrailFX with a laugh. "Jeeps have very little storage space, so Jeep owners are prime targets for rack sales. Ask how the customer uses their Jeep recreationally and explain all the available options, from direct-fit roof baskets to bolt-on safari racks to hitch-mounted cargo carriers. Converse long enough and you will certainly uncover a need that can turn into a sale." **TS**





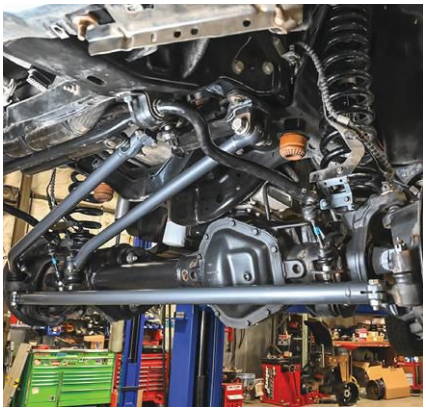
HD Radio

Retro Manufacturing, Henderson, Nevada, present the Motor 4HD classic car stereo that receives HD radio broadcasts with no static, hiss or fuzz. Featuring an RDS AM/FM tuner with Retro's HD Radio technology and 30 presets to save favorite stations, the radio includes a built-in 300W (peak power) amplifier and is SiriusXM-ready. Built-in Bluetooth provides high-quality music streaming and hands-free calls with the included microphone, and the 32,000-color display is adjustable to match the user's interior gauge color and adds an authentic look.

Drawer System Traction Mat

DECKED, Ketchum, Idaho, introduces Traction Mat by **SeaDek** to combat cargo or gear sliding around in a truck bed. SeaDek's marine-grade, self-adhesive, closed-cell ethylene vinyl acetate (EVA) foam padding fits on top of the DECKED truck bed Drawer System to add traction. The system holds up to 2,000 pounds of gear on top of the in-bed drawer storage.





Ford HD Steering Kit

Synergy MFG, San Luis Obispo, California, offers a Heavy Duty Steering Kit for 2005-newer Ford Super Duty F-250/F-350 pickups. Compatible with factory wheels and tires, the tie rod and drag link bolt directly into the stock location for an immediate upgrade in steering feel and strength. The tie rod is made from heat-treated 1.75-inch 4130 chromoly for maximum strength. The drag link is made from 1.5-inch 1026 DOM steel tubing and is machined to retain the stock steering stabilizer.

Soft-Shell Rooftop Tent

Roofnest, Boulder, Colorado, presents the lightweight Meadowlark Soft-Shell Rooftop Tent. Weighing less than 90 pounds, the tent is light and easy to store. Features include a telescoping ladder, a 2.5-inch-thick double-density mattress, and a standard rainfly that can be quickly unhooked. The tent's small footprint leaves room to carry a bike on the same crossbars on larger vehicles.





Bronco Gear Package

Nitro Gear & Axle, Cashmere, Washington, one of the **DPI Off-Road Brands**, presents a Full Gear Package Kit for 2021-newer Ford Bronco models. Shown to run 2,000 rpm at 60 mph on 37-inch tires, the packages include front and rear rings and pinions and front and rear master install kits.



Automotive Clear Coat

ZyCoat LLC, Olathe, Kansas, introduces ZyClear, a high-temperature, high-gloss clear coating formulated for the automotive industry. The liquid-thin, single-component film coating can be sprayed or wiped on engine parts and related surfaces. It measures 4 to 8 microns thick when applied and can withstand harsh under-hood environments to shine and protect chrome, stainless steel, cast steel, mild steel, aluminum and many other substrates. It can also be used on heavy truck stainless stacks to prevent carbon buildup and discoloration. ***TS***

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Constant EVOLUTION

Getting more out of influencer marketing.

Story and Photos by Jason R. Sakurai

Most shops understand how influencers can boost awareness by creating content and pushing it out organically to their followers. But are you missing opportunities, relinquishing bigger gains and realizing only a fraction of their value?

To get more out of influencer marketing, consider it in stages:

1. Create compelling content
2. Expand upon it
3. Test how well it does
4. Increase sales
5. Foster relationships

Take influencer content that grabs your attention, insert it into an ad or put it on your website and see how it resonates with your audience. Does the content outperform what you've created in-house in the past?



Passionate and knowledgeable influencers can be some of your best customers and help grow your business.

Focused only on awareness, you may not realize the content's full value and its impact on sales. All stages working in tandem will result in better engagement, a more efficient marketing spend and a higher return on your investment.

To achieve greater success with your influencer marketing, consider:

Negotiating content rights

How long do you want to use the content, across which platforms (ads, your website, social media), and do you want to pay for it now or after you see how well it performs?

Budgeting for influencer marketing

Will the content live only on your channels, or are you expecting the influencer to push it out? If you want the influencer to post the content to a larger audience, you should test how it performs organically and in paid social by running it along with messaging you've already created.

Contemplating an influencer as your spokesperson

Is the influencer recognizable by your audience—an unmistakable affiliate of your shop? Wherever they go, they'll be seen as an extension of you and your business. If you hire them as a spokesperson, keep in mind how influencers switching shops may be viewed after having invested in furthering their persona.

A GOOD MATCH?

Will the influencer's audience respond positively to your objectives to raise awareness and increase sales? Successful influencers can tell you why the way they present content to their audience inspires their followers to take action.

For example, an influencer who talks about having recovery



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MILE MARKER PARTNERS WITH TERRY MADDEN

Recovery gear company Mile Marker Industries has announced a multilevel partnership with well-known racer and motorsports television personality Terry Madden to introduce a line of signature products.

Madden began racing bikes, motocross and flat track at a young age and after high school served in the U.S. Army for eight years. His off-road resume includes two Baja 1000 wins, two Mexican 1000 wins, and many other championships and awards.

As a professional driver and rider, he has appeared in television programs and commercials.

"I'm thrilled to be joining the Mile Marker family as brand ambassador and a full-line dealer," Madden says. "I am familiar with the history of Mile Marker and how well-designed and manufactured their products are. What really sets the company apart is that they are a small, entrepreneurial group and go the extra mile for customers who rely on their products."

Mile Marker planned to launch new products with Madden in early February at the King of the Hammers off-road event.

"The Mile Marker team is excited to have Terry Madden represent our brand," says Paul Fioravanti, Mile Marker CEO. "Terry's understanding of the needs of winching, recovery and towing, along with his racing experience, will ultimately result in a new product line, the Terry Madden Signature Series by Mile Marker, that we'll all be proud to put our names on, and that line will bear Terry's signature colors of black and gold."



Mile Marker Industries has partnered with racer and motorsports television personality Terry Madden to introduce a line of signature recovery products.

Madden's California shop will also become a Mile Marker full-service dealer with stocked inventory, Fioravanti adds.

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Successful influencers gain exposure while growing their following.



Events are a great place to connect with influencers.

boards on their rig speaks to your audience's safety concerns. Connecting the influencer with what you are trying to achieve can result in a great collaboration.

You may have vast product knowledge and understand the needs it fulfills, but you may not know the influencer's audience. Influencers who understand your needs and how to convey it to their followers will achieve a much greater response.

KEEP IT GOING

Shops are seeing greater value in utilizing influencers on an ongoing basis rather than for one-off uses. With more content needed for social media channels, ad units and websites, why underestimate the value of continuous content creation?

Multiple influencers may also be effective because each has their own audience. Conversations on social media coupled with marketing and PR inspires action.

Creating more discussions positively impacts sales, as buyers go from awareness



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JL front kit



JL rear kit





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Matt Haugen, an influencer and pro drifter, attracts an audience wherever he appears.



Haugen practices what he preaches.

to purchase. Shops need to recognize an influencer's value. Awareness is fine, but it's only the beginning.

When influencer content is allowed to work harder, ROI soars.

SOCIAL'S CHANGING FACE

Social media influencers are everywhere—in our feeds, on TV and in the media. What was once a marketer's topic of discussion is now part of the mainstream.

Shouldn't influencers who've built their following through content and engagement have platforms that provide a favorable environment?

Recognition of influencers has made this form of marketing a part of most companies' budgets. At the same time, three major social platforms—Facebook, Instagram and YouTube—have made changes that negatively affect influencers' audience reach and revenue generation.

Facebook made changes to Pages on its platform, making it harder to reach followers organically. Facebook said this wouldn't affect them, but influencers used Pages—not personal accounts—to post content and reach their audiences.

They also used the branded content tool to provide disclosure and analytics to their sponsors. Influencers noticed these changes even before they were announced, as organic engagement rates decreased 30% or more.

Dealing with reduced reach, influencers "boosted," or paid, Facebook to push their posts in order to hit their sponsorship commitments.

Facebook isn't the only platform where influencers face new algorithms. Approximately 80% of influencers named Instagram their platform of choice, building followings with strong engagement rates.

Some influencers used business accounts to ensure analytics could be provided. Instagram's new algorithm, however, now shows posts to fewer followers unless it gets immediate engagement. Influencers



SpeedStrap asked the media and influencers to test its products.

Eibach's Mark Krumme balances listening to and advising enthusiasts.





Haugen answers questions about his cars and drifting, building a huge following as he goes.

may see follower increases over time, but engagement rates have dropped because fewer viewers get to see the posts.

This has impacted brands as well through decreased engagement.

How are influencers responding to the changes? They've banded together to create groups that engage with each other's content immediately, not only to "like" it but to post comments to build engagement and get their posts in front of more followers.

If this wasn't enough, YouTube then declared it wouldn't allow participation in its Partner Program and monetization of any channel without 1,000 subscribers and 4,000 watch time hours in the past year.

While it won't affect influencers with large numbers of followers, it has affected smaller creators who make passive incomes on YouTube—often the types of influencers shops like yours may target.

Overall, influencers are definitely experiencing a paradigm shift.

TAKEAWAYS

The bottom line is that a knowledgeable, charismatic user of your products and services with a strong social media following can help build brand awareness and spur more sales. Here are the takeaways:

- The social platforms remind us that no one owns these audiences. What we do own is our blogs, email lists and the content we create.
- Keep in mind that, according to Nielsen, 92% of consumers trust recommendations from people they know more than any other form of paid advertising, whether it's TV, print, digital or radio.
- The study goes on to say that 70% trust consumer opinions posted online, and 58% trust editorial content such as newspaper articles or company websites.
- Influencer marketing can provide trusted, viewable and compelling content. With creators making and sharing sponsored content, they are well-positioned to continue indefinitely. What they need to do is continue to adapt, just as the media and platforms have. ***TS***



JASON SAKURAI *heads up Roadhouse Marketing, a marketing, advertising and sales solutions firm dedicated to the automotive aftermarket. A frequent contributor to THE SHOP, Jason's byline appears in many enthusiast and trade publications, in print and online.*





SENDING A MESSAGE

Red Clay Graphics & Signs offers vehicle wraps & more.

By Carly Hollman

In a market heavily saturated with competition, it's personal touches and unique offerings that can help set a business apart and create lasting connections.

This approach has helped Erin Ricks, owner and lead designer of Red Clay Graphics & Signs, create a go-to vinyl graphics, sign and wrap shop for her traditional "Friday Night Lights" community.

Located in Moultrie, Georgia, Red Clay Graphics was formed about a decade ago by Ricks, who has a background in fine arts, and her brother. When her brother relocated to middle Georgia, Ricks took the reins and evaluated how the primarily graphics-based shop could diversify and give its customers more.

One way was to focus on full-service branding.

"We try to package everything together and offer our customers all the options that will help elevate or start their company," Ricks explains.

Red Clay's services include signs and projects, banners and displays, as well as wraps and murals. The company has served commercial and residential clients, churches and campuses.

"On the surface, Red Clay Graphics Studios, Inc. is a sign shop, manufacturing signs of all shapes, sizes and materials," the company states on its website (redclaygraphics.com). "We are also designers and innovators. We will manage your project from beginning to end with creative solutions and professional quality worthy of your investment."

The scope of these jobs can vary greatly, from window signage for small mom-and-pop shops, to wrapping a fleet of vehicles for a nearby meat packing plant, to full service projects that include packaging and marketing materials.

It's this variety of offerings that excites Ricks the most.

"I was scared to death of a desk job," she says. "But with this work I get to get out, drive around and talk to people. I'm busy all day, so there's no boredom."

COMMUNITY SERVICE

One of the biggest clients Red Clay Graphics services, and a perfect example of everything the company does to maximize its talents, is a local high-end construction company. Red Clay first started with design and branding and then created a complete



Erin Ricks, owner and lead designer of Red Clay Graphics & Signs, has created a go-to vinyl graphics, sign and wrap shop.

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SENDING A MESSAGE



Red Clay Graphics serves the vehicle wrap and signage needs of Moultrie, Georgia and the surrounding areas.



Wraps jobs include local police department and vehicle fleet clients, and small businesses looking for a complete marketing makeover.

strategic marketing plan for the owner that included signs, wraps and more.

"He runs an elite company with fancy graphics, so we knew we were going to need something more than just a typical yard sign," Ricks says. "He now has custom routed jobsite signage as fine as his homes. We also created two vehicle wraps for him—one full and one partial, which took about 10 hours of total design. It resulted in very effective, eye-catching wraps."

Red Clay also services a fleet of semis for a large meat packing plant, vehicles for many local farms, and several food truck companies and event trailers.

In addition to the large jobs, Ricks prides herself on giving back to her community. She partners with local schools and maintains a close relationship with the dean of her college.

"If it doesn't involve education, I don't participate," states Ricks when it comes to philanthropic ventures, noting it not only boosts the company's visuals and allows her to support a cause close to her heart, but also provides a direct line to potential hires.

Ricks utilizes alumni events, job fairs and referrals to help diversify and grow the Red Clay team, which is also a family affair—Ricks and her brother are the founding members, their father is the bookkeeper and financial officer, and her husband Caleb heads production and installs.



Glorybelle Construction is a full-service client of Red Clay Graphics, which creates the company's signage and vehicle wraps as well as providing marketing services.





Ricks' fine arts background has helped the company stretch beyond vehicle wraps to include signage, design work and marketing materials.

MEETING THE CHALLENGE

An added benefit of being a small-town company focused on community is that it helped Red Clay Graphics not only survive during the pandemic, but grow.

"It could be in part that we weren't as affected like bigger cities that had more lockdowns," Ricks explains.

When COVID-19 hit, however, the shop adjusted its focus by making signage for schools, hospitals and restaurants and then shifted to branding for companies moving to more online formats. It also tried to assist new businesses by making car magnets and Now Open signage.

This isn't to say that Red Clay didn't see its fair share of struggles—particularly since many of its customers work in industrial and agricultural fields.

"Lumber prices skyrocketed. It hurt our clients because budgets changed. We utilize a lot of metal, so it was the first time I had to pay attention to embargoes," Ricks recalls. "Little things like tools and hangers—things we need for our business—were held up if they weren't American-made. Whenever there are shipping issues, it affects our little town."

Business savvy, talent and personal connections helped Red Clay prove it has what it takes to continue to thrive and evolve with the times.

"Give us a challenge and we can do anything," says Ricks. "If we can find it, we can source it. On the design end, you'll never have to worry. We want to provide the top tier of everything." ***TS***

CARLY HOLLMAN *is the former editor of Printwear magazine and currently works as a freelance writer, artist and esthetician based in Denver. She has a background in fashion and 12-plus years of writing website copy and B2B content. She can be reached at carly.hollman@gmail.com.*

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GLOW from within

Interior lighting is becoming a selling point. ///// **By Brett Solomon**

Automotive interiors are getting brighter. Ambient lighting has become a selling point.

Perhaps the one manufacturer most famous for leading the pack in interior lighting is Mercedes-Benz. Its ambient lighting packages are among the brightest and most prolific, and other automakers have followed suit.

Aftermarket ambient lighting is possible and relatively easy to wire into a vehicle's 12V electrical system. The challenging part is doing it with class and style—making the lighting look like a natural part of the interior and not like a neon tube plugged into a cigarette lighter socket, as it was in years past.

It's possible to achieve classy ambient lighting solutions with LEDs and fiber optics.

HOW MB DOES IT RIGHT

When looking at ambient LED lighting, a model you may want to follow is the new S-Class Mercedes. The number of LEDs incorporated into the newest S-Class has increased from 40 to around 250.

At 200 candela per square meter, the ambient lighting is 10 times brighter than before. According to Mercedes, the optical fibers of the active ambient lighting are concealed behind black panel facing and are not visible when switched off.

An LED is positioned inside every 0.6-inch. In the S-Class, the individual LEDs are controlled and actuated by the CAN-BUS in real time. This allows flowing light effects—a soft transition within the light band and color transitions.

When entering the vehicle, the ambient light band is animated in finely granular form as a welcome feature. Since the system is controlled by the CAN-BUS, the lighting can also display and reinforce warnings.

For example, the Active Blind Spot monitoring system alerts the driver of an impending collision by glowing angry red.



The 2022 Toyota Tundra Capstone was named a 2022 Wards 10 Best Interiors and User Experience (UX) winner with a cockpit featuring world-class infotainment and technology. (Photos courtesy Toyota)

Setting the HVAC to a lower temperature results in a cool blue flash. When the voice assist "Hey Mercedes" is active, the corresponding seating position is animated when voice input is expected. Mercedes knows how to design lighting systems right.

THOSE SPEAKERS ARE LIT!

Although a Mercedes-level of integration



Rolls-Royce pioneered Starlight Headliners. (Photos courtesy Rolls-Royce)

cannot typically be achieved in the aftermarket, it is amazing to know what is possible. It's certainly easy to tie accessories such as audio systems into add-in ambient lighting setups, and you can even have the lights pulsate to the beat.

In fact, audio manufacturer KICKER has a kit for its speakers and grilles that already has LED lighting built into the speaker surrounds and is controlled by its KMLC wireless remote.

Installers can wire multiple speakers/grilles in parallel to be controlled by the KMLC by first splicing them together. Connect up to 12 KICKER LED-lit speakers/grilles to one KMLC to get the lighting party started.

STARLIGHT EXPRESS

Since they first appeared in Rolls-Royce models, Starlight Headliners have become an aftermarket lighting indulgence for luxury vehicles. And everyday vehicles, too. We have even seen installations of the illuminated headliners on the removable hardtops of Jeep Wranglers.

As the story goes, the original Starlight Headliner from Rolls-Royce was created when a good customer of the brand was suffering from an unusual ailment called photophobia, which is an extreme sensitivity to light.

The customer was only able to read his daily newspaper very early in the morning



under the starlight on his rural ranch. He requested the engineers develop a similar ambience in his Rolls-Royce.

Delivered in 2006, the car was equipped with a new fiber optic headliner featuring 800 stars. The intensity of light emitted by each star varies to make a facsimile of the nighttime sky above the customer's ranch.

Each Rolls-Royce Starlight Headliner is completely unique. Some are patterned after the sky the evening the first Rolls-Royce was created. Some use the latitude and longitude of the owner's home on the evening of a special anniversary.

And, while the aftermarket does not need to concern itself with astronomical accuracy, it is impressive that Rolls-Royce craftsmen use a template for the bespoke headliner that can take a week to complete.

To create the headliner, the leather is perforated with 1,400 to 1,600 holes, each carefully counted. Fiber optic threads are



A GLOW from within

TAILLIGHT ENVY

Not all attractive lighting accents go inside the vehicle. You can show some style on the rear exterior as well.

Modern OEM taillight design is pretty good. Twenty years ago, the rage was to have clear taillights when they were introduced on the Lexus IS 300. Now, the trend for trucks and SUVs is setting the taillights off in a flush-mounted package.

Oracle Lighting recently introduced solutions for the new Jeep Wrangler JK, and Ford Super Duty and Bronco models. Justin Hartenstein, Oracle's director of development, notes "Our flush taillights have become very popular in the Jeep market and are a top-performing category for us."

The low-profile design has a more streamlined appearance, coupled with an animated turn signal sequence. Less protrusion also helps with potential taillight damage when hitting the trail.

Moreover, they are customizable.

"The new modular design for Ford Super Duty trucks allows the light to be quickly disassembled for custom painting," Hartenstein notes. "The reverse light module and stop/tail/turn module can be easily removed from the black housing, which can then be painted to match the body color of the vehicle to provide a more customized appearance that more seamlessly blends with the truck."

Oracle also created a high-mount lightbar solution for Broncos as well.



Flush taillight kits add accessorization options to new truck and SUV models. (Photo courtesy Oracle Lighting)



The latest Mercedes-Benz models set the standard for ambient interior lighting. (Photo courtesy Mercedes-Benz)





Shops can look to emulate top luxury models with aftermarket products and kits. (Photos courtesy Mercedes-Benz)

hand-trimmed at different angles to achieve a twinkling effect.

These are then countersunk into the headliner template holes by hand. A craftsperson then ensures that the fibers are perfectly seated on the visible leather surface, ready to shine.

Shooting stars are a cool new take on the headliners. These are installed in a similar fashion but use the latest in lighting controllers to produce a star that appears to travel across the headliner.

CAN YOU DO IT AT YOUR SHOP?

My search revealed that aftermarket starlight headliner kits are available on Amazon, typically through products made in China. I could not find a U.S.-based manufacturer, but the technology is reasonably rudimentary—just a bunch of fiber optic strings that link into a light engine and controller kit.

If you've ever been to a Disney-themed live production, you may be familiar with the fiber optic toys for sale. Customers who see an illuminated headliner probably have the same desire as a child at a Disney event who has to have that magic wand.

When shopping for fiber optic kits, you will see an overall number of strands with different lengths of fiber optics. For most headliners to look good, 400 to 600 fiber optics will do the trick, and once you've perforated a headliner with that many holes you'll be able to appreciate the attention to detail Rolls-Royce performs in the factory.

I suggest a kit with fiber optics that use







Lighted speaker systems can bring life to bland vehicle interiors. (Photos courtesy KICKER)



Aftermarket ambient lighting is achievable for a variety of applications.

an appropriate length for the vehicle. This way, the installer will be able to comfortably mount the light engine, which will probably live in the trunk.

Most of the remote controls will be reminiscent of generic thin IR controllers for LED "neon" signs—you'll be familiar with them if you've ever ordered a custom LED faux-neon sign for your storefront.

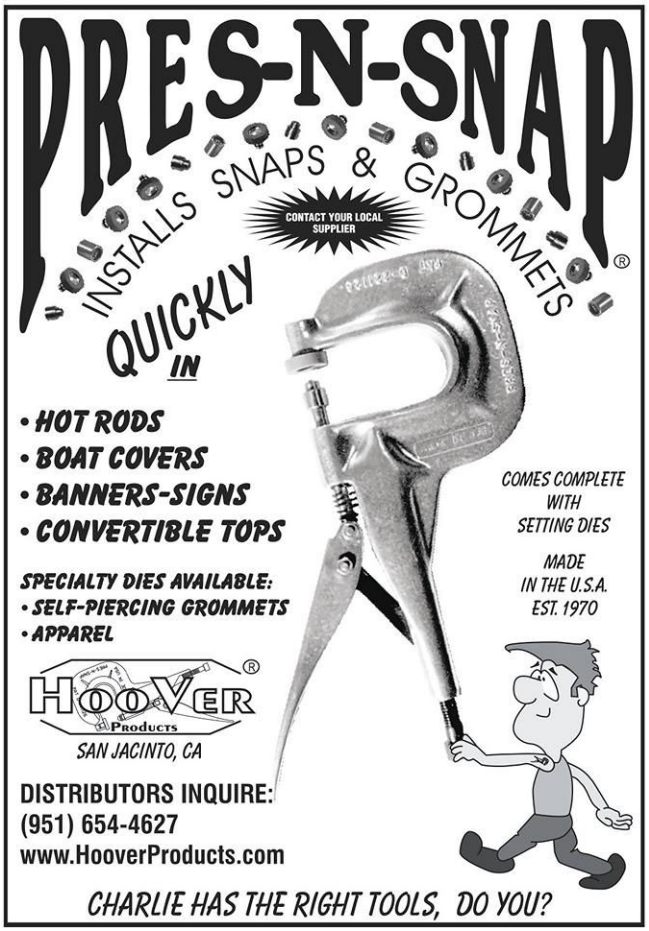
The expense comes in the installation that includes piercing hundreds of holes into a headliner. The challenging part is mapping out a removed headliner and accounting for factory modules and OEM lighting in the ceiling.

For those with interior upholstery skills, the job should be easy but repetitive. Removing a tight factory headliner can be a chore, but if a customer needs a headliner replacement for a show vehicle, a starlight headliner upgrade could warrant thousands of extra dollars with minimal money spent on equipment.

You'll definitely want an extra set of hands to help reinstall the headliner. It's kind of like reinstalling a liner with what looks like hundreds of fishing line tangles on a busy charter boat. The procedure can be done in-vehicle with the headliner resting on the seats, but the ability to do it on a table will make the fiber optic installation easier, though trickier to replace the finished product. You'll have to make the call depending on the vehicle. ***TS***

BRETT SOLOMON *is a freelance writer based in New York City, specializing in the mobile electronics market.*







Fast-Charge Phone Mounts

Scosche Industries, Oxnard, California, offers a full lineup of new Phone Mounts, including MagSafe-compatible and wireless charging models. MagicMount Pro Charge5 mounts are designed to hold and wirelessly charge all MagSafe and Qi-enabled phones. They will fast-charge MagSafe iPhone 12 and later models, as well as Qi-enabled devices. Neodymium magnets are strategically placed inside the mount head to hold all phone sizes, and a 360-degree adjustable head allows for portrait or landscape phone views.

LED Fog Lights



Lumileds, Farmington Hills, Michigan, presents **Philips** Ultinon Essential LED Fog Lights. A powerful upgrade for conventional halogen fog light bulbs, Ultinon Essential LED fog lights provide drivers with style and safety improvements. They deliver a color temperature of up to 6500K while keeping their beam directed onto the roadway, and a compact design allows for easy installation on cars, SUVs, vans and light trucks.



Ambient Lighting Kit

VAIS Technology, Englewood, Colorado, offers a Fiber Optics Interior Ambient Lighting Kit designed for any vehicle. The kit adds six light sources to the interior. Flexible fiber optics cables can be run to any location and then connected to the ECU module. Color and brightness are controlled via a smartphone app.



Illuminated LED Letter Badges

ORACLE Lighting Metairie, Louisiana, presents new Universal LED Letter Badges. Available in a matte white or matte black surface finish with either white or amber LEDs, the illuminated letters create a marquee-style glowing badge for the vehicle. When turned on, the letters emit a soft edge-lit glow. The systems have a low draw of less than 0.1 amp per letter, with an overall size of approximately 3.75-by-1.4-by-0.5 inches. Installation is easy with VHB double-stick adhesive.



Integration Accessories

Axxess by Metra Electronics, Holly Hill, Florida, offers a full lineup of Integration Accessories featuring new vehicle applications. Now shipping is a new DSP Lite package designed to fit select 2010-newer Toyota models; a dash kit integration package designed to fit select **Pioneer** receivers into 2020-up Jeep Gladiator models; and a Stop/Start engine override interface designed to fit six different 2019-21 Ford models. The new integration accessories deliver upgraded sound systems and everyday convenience to drivers, with less labor and work in the install bay.

Maverick Cruise Control/Speed Limiter System



Rostra Accessories, Aberdeen, North Carolina, a wholly owned subsidiary of **VOXX International Corp.**, presents its Cruise Control and Speed-Limiting System, now available for 2022 Ford Maverick XL, XLT and Lariat applications. Allowing fleet owners the opportunity to save on fuel costs and vehicle wear and tear through more consistent highway driving speeds, the kits provide a hardwired solution to setting a maximum speed for a vehicle that cannot be modified by the driver and does not require a full-scale, subscription-based telematics suite.

'Fat Fingers' App Mode

onX Offroad, Missoula, Montana, offers Fat Fingers Mode, now available on both Android and iOS versions of its wayfinding app. One of the company's most requested features, Fat Fingers Mode leverages industry-first technology to eliminate tap ambiguity and help users select off-road trails and drop waypoints with precision. The app includes more than 550,000 miles of trails and 500,000 recreation points.



Amplifiers

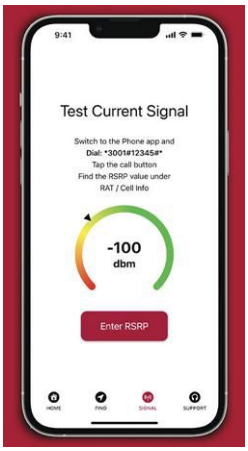


Crunch Car Audio, Libertyville, Illinois, offers Powerzone PZ2 amplifiers, designed to deliver rich playback with clean audio. The amplifiers create space and opportunity in the tightest and smallest areas to deliver an in-car concert experience with sharper details, richer playback and immersive listening. PZ2 amplifiers are available in mono, 2-, 4- and 5-channel configurations, and an electronic equalizer is included.

Compact Amplifiers

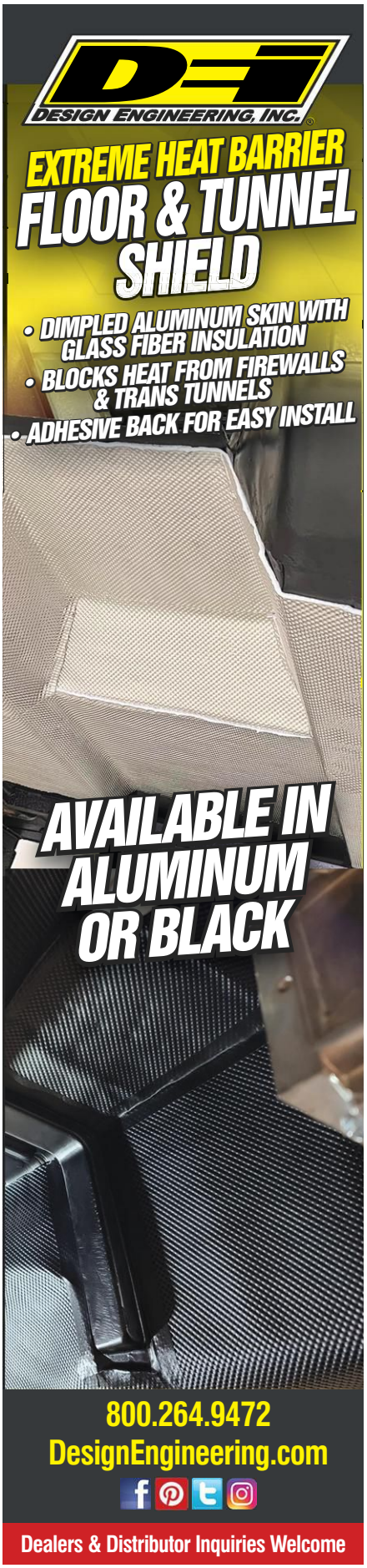


Autotek, Libertyville, Illinois, presents MEAN MACHINE amplifiers, designed to deliver higher sound quality with minimum distortion levels in a slim, compact size. Featuring a sleek, black finish, MEAN MACHINE amplifiers have a small footprint but create extreme power with PRO-FI high-speed MOSFETS and high sound quality with minimum distortion levels. A heavy-duty aluminum alloy heatsink with illuminated logo adds a vibrant display.



Cell Signal Booster App

Wilson Electronics, Salt Lake City, offers the free weBoost app that provides customers with a step-by-step guide to aid with installation of all weBoost's self-install vehicle and home cellular signal booster products. The app includes easy-to-follow videos and instructions, plus a cell tower locator and cell signal strength reading. While in-box instruction guides are still included, the weBoost app walks customers through the entire installation process. ***TS***



PERFORMANCE

Fuel Pumps p. 52 / Classic Car Market p. 57 / Performance Products p. 61



THREE FOR ONE

Performance exhaust systems deliver power, appearance & sound enhancements. /////

By John Carollo

With a performance exhaust system, drivers get to check off three boxes on their personalization lists at the same time—performance, appearance and sound.

For shops looking at product lines that can help sell themselves, performance exhausts are a smart place to start. Racers and speed demons enjoy added horsepower and efficiency; street cruisers can make an entrance coming or going; and proud vehicle owners get to show off a variety of attractive tip options.

Manufacturers are happy to share their thoughts on the market, explaining how performance exhaust systems deliver a three-for-one benefit for installation shops.

ADVANCED DESIGNS

Performance exhausts have been a market mainstay for decades. But that doesn't mean the systems haven't had to change with the times.

"Vehicle technology continues to evolve," says Tim Sayers, muffler development manager at Borla Performance Industries. "Engine technology, engine control technology and exhaust system technology are constantly changing. All are significantly different than they were just a few short years ago."

Aftermarket exhausts add the power and sound drivers seek. (Photo courtesy aFe Power)

EPA regulations governing exhaust components, including headers and catalytic converters, differ from state to state, often making it challenging for shops to know what to sell, says Jane Donnelly, marketing



Quality is an important selling point for today's performance exhaust systems. (Photos courtesy AWE)



Work closely with customers to target exactly what they want and need in an exhaust system. (Photo courtesy Borla Performance Industries)



Exhaust tone is so ingrained in the performance sector that systems that add sound to electric vehicles are already gaining in popularity. (Photo courtesy Borla Performance Industries)

director at SpeedFX.

"Axle-back and cat-back aftermarket exhaust systems are always safe options for a shop to recommend because they're installed behind all OE emissions control components, ensuring that the vehicle remains emissions compliant," she explains.

An important selling factor these days is quality, notes Jesse Kramer, partner and vice president of marketing at AWE.

"Today's consumer demands top-shelf stainless steel, no-drone technology, lifetime guarantees, simple installation with perfect fitment, no Check Engine light issues, dyno-proven performance gains, phenomenal tone and a made-in-the-USA product," he says. "If an aftermarket exhaust brand is not adding an extra layer of 'hell yeah!' to what the consumer can obtain from the factory, then it won't exist for long."

And all that must be accomplished while dealing with rising costs in raw materials, adds John Gray, director – exhaust product development at advanced FLOW engineering/aFe Power.

CHOICES & CHALLENGES

Shops will have some choices to make when it comes to the brands and types of systems they carry.

"Let's assume that a shop's already bought in on the idea that an exhaust must have quality, sound and performance. From there, shops need to be looking at exhaust brands that understand that installations are often at a flat rate," Kramer says. "If there isn't a focus on fitment, a shop will be making less per hour, and that doesn't work. There's no reason a shop should settle for a poorly fitting brand."

It also doesn't have to settle for an aftermarket setup that drones, he adds.

"Anyone can make a car louder. But can a brand do it so that the driver can still use it as a daily driver if they want to? With the right technology and engineering, an exhaust should have no compromises—providing perfect tone, additional power, perfect fitment and longevity."

Even among the same types of products, differences exist, Donnelly explains.

"Not all stainless steel exhaust systems are created equal. There are varying grades of stainless steel used to manufacture exhaust systems—the two most common being 304



THREE FOR ONE

PERFORMANCE EXHAUST PRODUCTS

■ **HOT PRODUCTS:** GM Silverado Muffler Delete Pipe & Jeep Wrangler JK Axle-Back Exhaust
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:** High value; low cost; customers get the sound they want.

advanced FLOW engineering
John Gray
Director – Exhaust Product Development

■ **HOT PRODUCTS:** Vehicle-Specific Exhaust Systems
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:** USA-engineered sound, performance and quality; applications for the Jeep, truck, modern muscle and sport compact markets; popular offerings include Jeep 392, GMC, Subaru BRZ/Toyota and C8 Corvette exhaust lines.

AWE
Jesse Kramer
Partner & Vice President, Marketing

■ **HOT PRODUCTS:** Active Performance Sound Systems for EVs
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:** Generate performance exhaust sounds for electric vehicles; provide the ability to customize an EV's acoustic profile; deliver audible feedback to the driver to enhance the total driving experience.

Borla Performance Industries Inc.
Tim Sayers
Muffler Development Manager

■ **HOT PRODUCTS:** Maxflow Xtreme Cat-Back Exhaust Systems for Pickups and Jeeps
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:** 304 austenitic stainless steel construction with 300 series stainless steel weld filler for corrosion resistance; CNC machining and mandrel-bent pipes for maximum airflow; chambered muffler for a deep, rich tone.

SpeedFX
Jane Donnelly
Marketing Director



Axle-back and cat-back aftermarket exhaust systems are always safe options for a shop to recommend. (Photo courtesy SpeedFX)

and 409 stainless," she says. "Take the time to educate your staff and your customers on the differences so that when they are comparing products, they are comparing apples to apples."

Sound considerations are also important, notes Gray.

"All aftermarket exhausts are louder than stock," he says, "but there are many options for performance exhaust that will improve the sound and look of the OE exhaust system without violating sound or emissions ordinances."

Sayers recommends working closely with customers to target exactly what they want and need.



Work with enthusiast groups to spread the word about your exhaust offerings. (Photos courtesy aFe Power)

"Not every customer is a candidate for a premium system," he says. "However, some customers will be willing to purchase a premium system if the shop has done its homework and is knowledgeable about the various manufacturers and their products and is able to convey both product features and benefits to its customers. For example, Borla axle-back and cat-back systems are drone-free. For many customers, this can be the benefit that prompts them to purchase a premium system. But the customers need to be educated about it."

TRICKS OF THE TRADE

Gearing up to sell to the performance exhaust market means looking for areas of business growth.

One approach, says Gray from aFe Power, is "working with automotive enthusiast groups, whether online or through local events. These groups will form a relationship with shops and help them better serve their customers."

When those relationships have been established, be sure to know each driver's full project list, Sayers advises.

"When customers are getting quotes or having other performance products installed, make sure they know that the shop does performance exhaust work as well," he says. "The customer who is interested in performance products like cold-air intakes, tires, wheels, lift kits, etc. may very well be in the market for a performance exhaust as well."

Manufacturer information can help answer any questions.

"There's a huge opportunity for shops to pull in data so that they can easily repre-

TUNED EXHAUST NOTE AMONG HIGHLIGHTS OF NEW LEXUS RC LINE



Enhanced exhaust notes will highlight certain 2023 Lexus RC models. (Photo courtesy Lexus)

Tuned exhaust notes are among the features available at the higher end of the new 2023 Lexus RC line.

"With its muscular form and aggressive stance, the refined Lexus RC is crafted to stand apart from the crowd. A bold fascia, available premium triple-beam LED headlamps and strong character lines that sweep toward the dramatic rear valance and LED taillamps allow the RC to captivate from every angle," Lexus says in the model's introduction.

Among the trim levels, the high-performance RC F continues this year with GT3-inspired looks and a naturally aspirated 5.0L V-8 producing 472 hp. Among the highlights, the company notes, is a unique exhaust signature.

Meanwhile, the RC 350 and RC 350 AWD's 311-hp, 3.5L V-6 generates 280 pound-feet of torque at 4,800 rpm and boasts direct and port fuel injection, "not to mention an awe-inspiring sound reminiscent of the LFA supercar."

sent a brand's catalog online, even if they don't want to have an eCommerce presence," says Kramer. "AWE is fully ACES and PIES compliant, which means that we have all of the information that a dealer will need to get information into a catalog."

Nothing sells an exhaust system more than sound, he believes, "so shops should fully leverage product media. Reach out to manufacturers for videos, sell sheets and content—the good brands will be ready to help."

Comparison info should include as many systems as possible, suggests Donnelly from SpeedFX.

"Offer multiple brand options at varying price points that will appeal to a broader base of customers on different budgets and deepen your reach in the category," she advises. "Coordinate exhaust installation services with other routine on-lift maintenance services like tire rotation or discounted oil changes, and provide referral discounts to customers who steer additional exhaust business your way." ***TS***

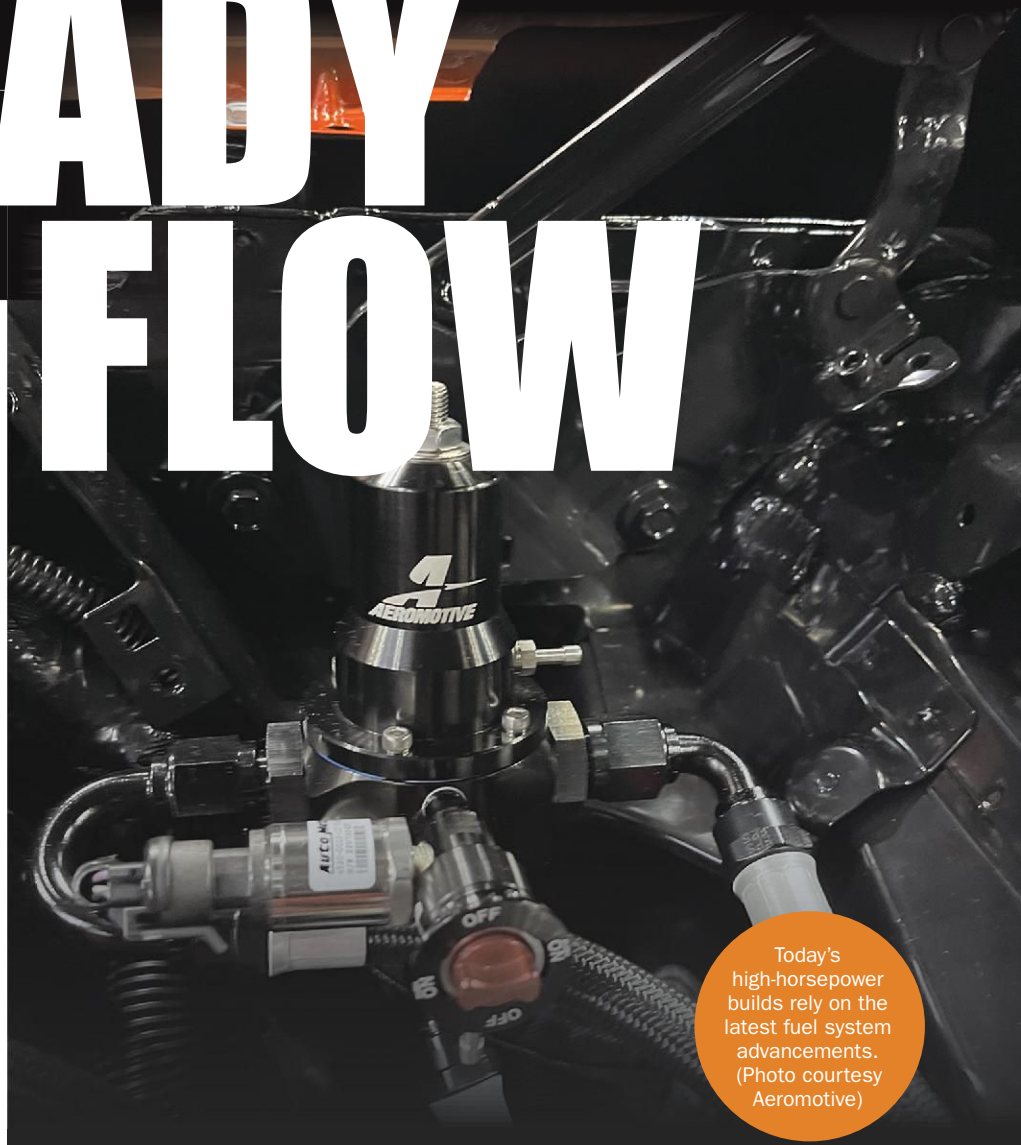




STEADY FLOW

By Jef White

Fuel pumps & systems meet today's high-horsepower demands.



Today's high-horsepower builds rely on the latest fuel system advancements. (Photo courtesy Aeromotive)

Performance fuel pumps and systems are a vital part of today's high-horsepower engine builds.

Whether on the street or at the track, drivers expect the fuel they need when they need it to get them where they're going.

These days that fuel isn't always gasoline, either, as diesel, ethanol and even methanol applications are on the rise.

Becoming a fuel pump and systems expert can help shops build trust and repeat business as customers chase power numbers and performance goals. To help you get there, fuel system insiders have a steady flow of information to share.

MAKING MORE POWER

Much of the innovation driving the performance fuel pump market comes from the need for more speed.

"Customers want higher-power and more-transparent fuel systems," says Krista Lamb, director, products and customer experience for DeatschWerks. "This is pushing us to develop fuel components that work with the OE return-less and PWM-controlled systems to support 1,000-plus-hp street cars with relatively stock fuel systems that are daily-drivable."

Drivers also want more fuel flexibility from their fuel pumps for a wider range of applications, states Bryan McTaggart, technical writer for Holley.

"Some combinations, like dual-fuel systems, weren't as prevalent as they are now," he says, "and enthusiasts have opened up to a broader range of fuels, especially ethanol-blended fuels, as E85/E90 will allow an engine to run cooler."

Top builders will anticipate new uses down the road.

"A customer who is buying a fuel pump today for a carbureted application might also be looking at an EFI conversion in the future, or might consider moving to a different fuel type later on," says McTaggart.

Some of the power numbers are staggering, reveals Phillip VanBuskirk, national sales manager for Aeromotive.

"Ten years ago, a 1,000-hp street car was crazy. Now that number has doubled, and 1,500- to 2,000-hp street cars are everywhere," he says. "Many have turned to ethanol or methanol fuels and require more volume to support the big horsepower."

High-volume pumps are a must for such applications.

"Mechanical pumps can support from 500 to 10,000-plus hp," VanBuskirk continues. "With options of cam, belt or cable drive, mounting locations are almost endless. Cable-driven pumps at the back of the car have become very popular for racers who need large-capacity fuel cells in the rear of the car. And when a mechanical pump just won't work, we offer up to 10 gpm with the brushless gear pumps."

New vehicle designs are also pushing product innovation.

"Now that most diesel engines use common rail fuel injection systems, it has become more important than ever to provide superior filtration over the OEM filtration system, as even the smallest contaminates can be damaging," says Josh Thornton, who does research and development for FASS Diesel Fuel Systems.



Selling and installing fuel system components gives shops confidence when it comes time to tune the car. (Photos courtesy Aeromotive)



ANSWERING THE CALL

Selling and installing performance fuel pumps gives shops the upper hand when a customer comes in looking for a complete fuel system upgrade, Lamb explains.

"Fueling components aren't pretty or flashy, like a new turbo or supercharger. The fuel system is often overlooked during the upgrade process," she says. "Not understanding that oversight until the car is already strapped to the dyno and going through the tuning process when it runs out of fuel can be costly. Having fueling components on-hand and the knowledge of how to use them will allow shops to take care of their customers' needs promptly."

Manufacturers look to help shops by simplifying installations, McTaggart notes.

"Our 12-170 (in-line electric fuel pump) is designed to work easily with -8AN and -6AN fittings, which allows for an easy-to-design answer when creating a fuel system," he says. "For most customers, the fuel system may not be as sexy of a project compared to paint or interior work, but they are willing to spend money on quality, durability and function."

Successful projects can also lead to repeat sales, according to Thornton.

"Installing a FASS Titanium Signature Series not only benefits the truck it is installed on, but the shop can also benefit from residual fuel filter sales, FASS fuel heater sales and other add-ons," he says.

Creating packages can mean add-on

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Aeromotive
Phillip VanBuskirk
National Sales Manager

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FEATURES & BENEFITS: Digital programming; OLED display; password protection; brushless pump mode that allows voltage output of up to 26V; universally compatible with all makes and models; available in single- and dual-pump versions.

DeatschWerks
Krista Lamb
Director, Products & Customer Experience

HOT PRODUCTS: Titanium Signature Series Systems

FEATURES & BENEFITS: Flow rates from 100 to 290 gph; enhanced filtration, longevity and quietness; Extreme Water Separator removes over 99% of emulsified and free water and filters down to 2 microns absolute; multiple electric fuel heater options.

FASS Diesel Fuel Systems
Josh Thornton
Research & Development

HOT PRODUCT: Holley 100 GPH In-Line Electric Fuel Pump

FEATURES & BENEFITS: Ability to support 900 hp (naturally aspirated EFI), 1,050 hp (N/A carbureted) or 700 hp (EFI, boosted) on pump fuel, race fuel, E85/E90 and diesel.

Holley
Bryan McTaggart
Technical Writer

HOT ROD HERITAGE RACING RETURNS

The NHRA has revealed the nine-race schedule for the 2023 NHRA Hot Rod Heritage Racing Series, which will feature a pair of Wally Parks NHRA Motorsports Museum Hot Rod Reunions, the sanctioning body announced.

The series will again feature appearances from Nostalgia Top Fuel dragsters and Nostalgia Funny Cars, NHRA officials say, with two groups of additional classes.

Group 1 includes A/Fuel, Jr. Fuel and 7.0 Eliminator, while Group 2 includes Nostalgia Eliminator I, Nostalgia Eliminator II, Nostalgia Eliminator III, A/Gas, B/Gas, C/Gas, D/Gas and Hot Rod Eliminator.

Drivers in each class can compete at five events to earn points toward their respective championships.

The 2023 Hot Rod Heritage Racing Series Schedule:

- **March 2-5**: Famoso Dragstrip, Bakersfield, CA (TF, FC, Group 1, Group 2)
- **April 8-9**: Redding Motorsports Park, Redding, CA (G1, G2)
- **May 6-7**: Firebird Raceway, Boise, ID (FC)
- **May 12-13**: Sacramento Raceway, Sacramento, CA (G1, G2)
- **June 15-17**: Beech Bend Raceway Park, Bowling Green, KY (TF, FC)
- **Aug. 4-6**: Firebird Raceway, Boise, ID (TF, FC)
- **Sept. 15-16**: Tulsa Raceway Park, Tulsa, OK (TF, FC, A/Fuel)
- **Sept. 22-23**: Sacramento Raceway, Sacramento, CA (G1, G2)
- **Oct. 13-15**: Famoso Dragstrip, Bakersfield, CA (TF, FC, G1, G2)

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The NHRA Hot Rod Heritage Racing Series will run a nine-race schedule in 2023.

sales while ensuring the system functions properly.

"The less the customer has to be concerned about their fuel system, the better," McTaggart says.

Helping drivers set up their fuel systems correctly in the beginning pays off in the long run.

"There are so many parts that go into a build and when the fuel system isn't correct it can cause all kinds of issues later on," warns VanBuskirk. "Selling and installing the fuel system gives you the confidence when it comes time to tune the car—it's the last thing you are going to have to worry about."

DRIVING THE MARKET

Performance fuel pumps and related components continue to be of particular interest to drag racing competitors.

"The rise in popularity of drag-and-drive events such as Drag Week and Sick Week brings with it the demand for consistent and reliable fuel delivery. DeatschWerks continues to drive fuel pump and sup-



Having fueling components on-hand and the knowledge of how to use them allows shops to take care of their customers' needs promptly. (Photos courtesy DeatschWerks)

porting system component development to meet the demands of each motorsport," says Lamb, citing as an example a 1995 Ford Mustang build with a DeatschWerks fuel system specifically for Drag Week. "During Drag Week 2022 they hit their goal of running 5.50s in the 1/8-mile (8.50 in the 1/4-mile). The car runs and drives around on the streets on 93-octane pump gas in 100-degree heat and never gets over 180 degrees, and the passes they made had about 30 minutes between them in 95-degree heat with zero issues," she recalls. "This customer shared that 'the fuel system is rock solid.'"

Holley recently assisted freelance contributor Scotty Lachenauer with his 1965 Plymouth Barracuda. McTaggart explains how the partnership shows the versatility of today's components.

"His A-body is powered by a Chrysler LA 360 that is breathed on with a Paxton centrifugal supercharger," he says. "This is the kind of project that could have used



STEADY FLOW



Successful projects can also lead to repeat sales. (Photo courtesy FASS Diesel Fuel Systems)



Search for add-on sales to create complete fuel system upgrades. (Photo courtesy FASS Diesel Fuel Systems)

our 12-170 pump regardless of how the engine was finished. Ultimately, the blown Barracuda received a Sniper Stealth 4150 throttle body and a HyperSpark ignition, but this fuel pump would've worked even if the car had stayed with a traditional four-barrel carburetor. There's also plenty of room for power improvement before the fuel system needs to be reassessed."

Spencer Ekstam is currently building several high-horsepower diesel trucks ranging from 1,500 to 3,000 hp, all fueled by a single FASS Fuel System, Thornton reveals.

"We have also worked with several Class 8 truck fleets to improve their bottom lines, ranging from decreased fuel consumption to prolonging the life of fuel injectors," he adds.

As far as overall trends, Aeromotive's VanBuskirk sees mechanical fuel pumps making their way into nearly every form of performance.

"We work with partners that use them in monster trucks, Sprint cars, NASCAR, standing mile, no-prep, drag-and-drive, WaveRunners, motorcycles and anything else you can race." ***TS***





Drivers want more fuel flexibility from their fuel pumps for a wider range of applications. (Photos courtesy Holley)

DRIVING AND THRIVING

By Jef White

The classic car market still owns its share of the road.



If you're uncertain about the classic car market heading into 2023, a panel of experts has some advice:

"STOP WORRYING AND START DRIVING"

Sharing their thoughts at the Classic-Car Trends: Preparing for the Future seminar during the 2022 SEMA Show, panel members expressed optimism that the classic car market is more than prepared to weather a variety of potential storms, ranging from a soft economy to the advent of electric vehicles.

"COVID helped drivers realize priorities—life is short and fragile," says John Kruse, principal and auctioneer at Worldwide Auctioneers. "People started looking at what's important… there's a lot of enjoyment to be had with these vehicles."

A SENSE OF COMMUNITY

The numbers reflect a strong and thriving market. Jonathan Klinger of Hagerty reports identifying more than 2 million classic vehicles in North America in the past 12 months, with over 300,000 transactions representing $12 billion.

But even stronger than the economic potential are the lifelong bonds forged through shared appreciation of the cars themselves and the emotions they evoke.

"Camaraderie is huge. We're all in the same club," says Mike McCullough of Barrett-Jackson. "People used to buy whatever someone said was collectible. Now they want to connect."

Be it at an auction, car show or related gathering, many of those connections are made in person. Klinger points to a rise in local Cars & Coffee events nationwide as an example.



The numbers reflect a strong and thriving classic car market.

DRIVING AND THRIVING



The Classic-Car Trends: Preparing for the Future seminar during the 2022 SEMA Show included, from left, ***John Kruse*** of Worldwide Auctioneers, ***Mike McCullough*** of Barrett-Jackson, ***Randy Nonneberg*** of Bring a Trailer Media, ***Jonathan Klinger*** of Hagerty, and moderator ***Wade Kawasaki*** of The Wheel Group.

A COOL CAR is a COOL CAR

"You're there for an hour with like-minded people," he says.

"Like-minded" doesn't mean "close-minded," however, as enthusiasts and shops continue to accept a wider definition of "classic" that now includes vehicles from the 1980s, '90s and even today.

"A cool car is a cool car," says Wade Kawasaki of The Wheel Group, who moderated the event.

It's a passion that's both very public and very private.

"Whatever the vehicle, does it speak to the experience of that owner?" asks Klinger.

Kruse suggests answering this query:

"What's valuable to you? Think of the true value and the value to the community."

BEHIND THE WHEEL

If there's one trend that's driving the market, it's just that—driving.

"Over the last two years, people are driving their collector cars more," says Klinger. "The market is taking off on driver-friendly vehicles."

While traditional car insurance transactions saw a slowdown once COVID hit, "for us, activity went up, and some newbies started working on cars," he adds.

McCullough agrees that more owners are looking to get behind the wheel.

"Usability has changed over the past 20 years as Barrett-Jackson has broadened our segments," he says. "We are seeing people still investing the same or even more dollars, but they want something they can use."

When officials at the Bring a Trailer online auction site began crunching numbers following the first days of the pandemic, "we thought the activity would be primarily older cars," says Randy Nonneberg of Bring a Trailer Media, "but people were buying daily drivers. They were filling the first, second and third stalls in their garage."

For aftermarket professionals entrusted with the care and maintenance of these vehicles, it equates to added opportunities, he explains.



Today's classic car owners use their vehicles as a way to connect with like-minded enthusiasts.





"People are using them much more. They are important to their owners, and they'll need tires, paint, etc."

These days, questions of drivability often lead inevitably to discussions of electric power plants to replace traditional internal combustion engines. The panelists see room in the market for such conversions.

With enthusiasts having modified vehicles since the beginning, electric "provides another option for people," says Nonneberg. "I personally like (traditional) restorations, but can see why people would be drawn to it."

McCullough says Barrett-Jackson has already had such EV conversions come across the podium.

"Technology is technology and I think you'll see more of it with the younger generation," he predicts. "There definitely will be a market."

His preference, however, would be to preserve extremely rare and/or valuable vehicles in their original state.

"Maybe (convert) those that would



Classic cars are all about fun and nostalgia.

















If there's one trend that's driving the market, it's just that—driving.

never be a restoration candidate otherwise," he suggests.

YOUNG AT HEART

Will the next generation of drivers continue to have the passion and drive to maintain a healthy classic car market? Kruse notes it's a question that's been asked since at least the 1960s.

Strong interest is "reflected in the growth of Cars & Coffee and other grassroots events that help bring in a younger crowd," says McCullough, along with a noticeable shift in wealth to the next generation of drivers.

"Our future collector events will be directed at nurturing the hobby and filling the pipeline," he adds.

Nonneberg explains that BAT's online platform naturally skews toward a younger audience and that activity and support continues to increase.

"More people are considering this type of car for the first time," he says.

Finally, Kruse reveals that as more and more older collectors start transitioning their collections, many classics will become more affordable and more available.

"It's time to get in and start having fun." ***TS***



Flex Fuel Self-Tuning EFI System

ACES EFI, Dayton, Tennessee, and **Advanced Fuel Dynamics** present the ACES Flex Fuel Killshot TBI System. The advanced flex fuel throttle body EFI will safely run gasoline, E85 or any blend of the two fuels. It senses the fuel mixture and adjusts the calibration in real time, utilizing four 160-pounds-per-hour fuel injectors to support up to 650 hp. A handheld programmer delivers easy tuning and monitoring of engine data and displays the actual gas/E85 fuel mixture in real time.

Performance Climate Control Systems

Vintage Air, San Antonio, introduces new Gen 5 Magnum and Super Magnum Climate Control Systems, the latest evolution in its Builders Series line. Featuring OEM-quality, injection-molded cases and blend air doors, as well as block-type expansion valves, the systems are entirely electronically controlled. Higher-torque actuator motors increase durability and efficiency.





GDI Blueprinting

RC Fuel Injection, Torrance, California, offers GDI (gasoline direct injection) refurbishing services. The process includes flowing the injectors at up to 300 bar fuel pressure (depending on system requirements) and documenting the results. Next, the injectors are ultrasonically cleaned in a special mixture—pulsing them for a more thorough purification. Then, all components subject to wear (O-rings, seals, filters, etc.) are replaced. The refurbished injectors are then flowed again to check volume and evaluate the spray pattern. Before/after results are provided.

Gated Automatic Transmission Shifter

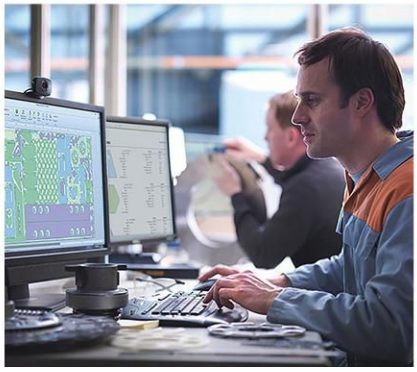
Clayton Machine Works, Knoxville, Tennessee, introduces a Gated Shifter for automatic transmissions that allows for virtually any shifter-lever-and-knob combination including **TREMEC**-style shifter levers. The gated, side detent feature eliminates the need for a shifter button, making gear selection as easy as a flick of the wrist. Available with mounting options including transmission mount, tail mount and floor mount, it can be used with most GM, Ford and Chrysler transmissions. All mounting hardware is included.



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CAD/CAM Nesting Software

Hypertherm, Hanover, New Hampshire, presents a major version update to ProNest 2023 advanced CAD/CAM nesting software for automated cutting. ProNest 2023 includes full functionality for PlateSaver, a SureCut technology that combines the arc stability of X-Definition plasma with specialized software parameters to increase material utilization when cutting mild steel. Enhancements include the ability to edit production times for completed nests.

LS Piston Set

MAHLE Motorsport, Fletcher, North Carolina, offers drop-in Replacement Pistons designed for use with the factory Gen 4 rotating assembly that minimizes machine work and maximizes reliability and performance for stock bottom-end 5.3L LS engines. The Flat Top PowerPak set works in both naturally aspirated and 5.3L LS engines with power adders and functions with LMF, LH6, LY5, LMG, LC9, LH8, LH9 and LS4 engine codes. The pistons are developed from high-strength 2618 aluminum alloy and manufactured with a slipper skirt forging.





New Street Tire Sizes

Mickey Thompson Tires & Wheels, Stow, Ohio, presents its ET Street Tire line, now in new sizes for popular SUV fitments. Street performance tires that are ready for the drag strip, the DOT-approved ET Street S/S and ET Street R tires feature the company's R2 drag tire compound and a polyester-ply, steel-belted, tubeless radial construction for dry traction performance and reliability. The new size of the ET Street S/S is P305/45R20, and the new size of the ET Street R is P315/55R17.



Mustang Caliper Kits

LEED Brakes, Cheektowaga, New York, presents MaxGrip Lite 4 Piston Aluminum Calipers for 1964-73 Ford Mustang applications. Designed to fit all factory disc brakes and most aftermarket wheels, the kits include everything needed to add calipers and brake pads. Using the Mustang MaxGrip Lite 4 Piston Calipers, installers can upgrade current D11 calipers or convert factory drum brake vehicles to high-performance disc brakes.

C10 Brake Kits

Wilwood Engineering, Camarillo, California, presents complete Brake Kits for 1963-87 Chevy/GMC C10 truck 2.5-inch drop spindles manufactured by **Classic Performance Products**. Newly released six-bolt hub kits join existing five-bolt offerings, and CPP iron drop spindles provide a reinforced caliper mount and larger wheel bearing to support bigger brakes. The systems are designed to handle towing, hauling and highway speeds, even on heavy trucks. Matching rear kits for OE factory and Ford 9-inch rear axles are also available.





Digital Display Dash Panels

Classic Dash, Carson City, Nevada, presents Bolt-In Dash Panels, including an application for the new **Holley EFI** 12.3 Pro Dash digital display. With its large 1280-by-480-pixel high-resolution display, the 12.3-inch (diagonally measured) screen serves up easy-to-read information from a variety of functions. It can also be employed to tune Holley Dominator, HP, Terminator X and Sniper EFI systems. The unit can be programmed to monitor up to 238 functions, including a GPS speedometer. ***TS***

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Autonomous Racer Hits 180 MPH

The Indy Autonomous Challenge (IAC) team PoliMOVE from Politecnico di Milano, Italy, and the University of Alabama won the second annual Autonomous Challenge @ CES, reaching max speeds of 180 mph—a new autonomous speed world record for a racetrack.

Pushing boundaries of head-to-head autonomous racing, PoliMOVE competed at the Las Vegas Motor Speedway against a field of nine teams from 17 universities spanning six countries, all seeking to break autonomous racing records.

TUM Autonomous Motorsport from Technische Universität München (Germany) took second place.

"Exactly 365 days later, we were so proud and excited to be back in Las Vegas for the Autonomous Challenge @ CES," said Sergio Savaresi, professor and team lead of Politecnico di Milano. "Today was a major step forward in speed, in complexity of the race and in overcoming challenging head-to-head situations. We are very glad for this success, for the contribution of the Indy Autonomous Challenge, and for all the teams in advancing the technology of A.I. drivers."

IAC rules consist of a single-elimination tournament with multiple rounds of head-to-head passing matches, culminating in a championship round. The world's fastest autonomous race cars, Dallara AV-21s, took turns playing the role of Leader (Defender) and Passer/Follower (Attacker) in front of a global crowd of CES attendees.

Passes were attempted at ever-increasing speeds until one or both cars were unable to successfully complete a pass.

Each team qualified in a high-speed autonomous race car time trial competition to determine their seeds in the head-to-head passing competition. Six of the nine teams seeking to compete went head-to-head on Saturday.

The IAC is working to accelerate the pace of innovation for high-speed automation, with a goal of attracting the best and brightest minds in the workforce, serving as a platform for students to excel in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) and inspire the next generation of innovators, officials say.



The Indy Autonomous Challenge (IAC) team PoliMOVE from Politecnico di Milano, Italy, and the University of Alabama won the second annual Autonomous Challenge @ CES.



The IAC is working to accelerate the pace of innovation for high-speed automation, with a goal of attracting the best and brightest minds in the workforce.

"We came to the world's most influential innovation event this week, CES, to showcase to the entire technology ecosystem how this program and this competition is catapulting autonomous technologies forward," said Paul Mitchell, president, IAC. "We're harnessing the power of head-to-head competition to push and test the limits of autonomous driving to further the state-of-the art technology in safety and performance of automated vehicles, and today we snagged yet another world record."

Initially, 31 university teams signed up to compete more than two years ago, representing top engineering and technology programs from 15 U.S. states and 10 countries. The nine teams from six countries representing 17 universities that participated in Las Vegas this year were:

- AI Racing Tech – University of Hawaii (Hawaii), University of California San Diego (California), Carnegie Mellon University, and University of California, Berkeley
- Autonomous Tiger Racing (ATR) – Auburn University (Alabama)
- Black & Gold Racing – Purdue University (Indiana)
- Cavalier Autonomous Racing (CAR) – University of Virginia (Virginia)
- KAIST – Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (South Korea)
- MIT-PITT-RW – Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Massachusetts), University of Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania), Rochester Institute of Technology (New York), University of Waterloo (Canada)
- PoliMOVE – Politecnico di Milano (Italy), University of Alabama (Alabama)
- TII EuroRacing – University of Modena and Reggio Emilia (Italy), Technology Innovation Institute (United Arab Emirates)
- TUM Autonomous Motorsport – Technische Universität München (Germany)

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