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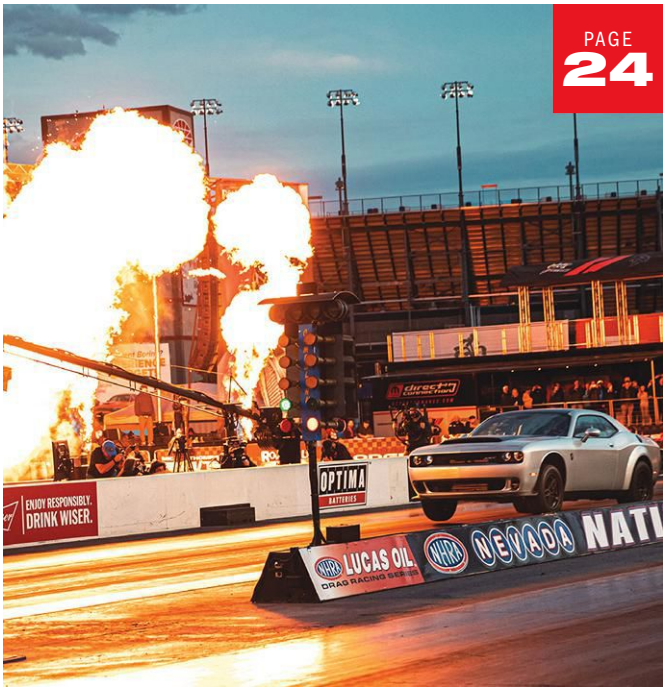
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ON THE COVER
With the booming popularity of camping and overlanding, aftermarket shops are finding their own little slice of heaven by offering sales and installation of rooftop tents. *See article on page 36.* (Photo courtesy Overland Vehicle Systems; inset photo courtesy Bill Holland/ARP.)

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Market Report Shows Reasons for Optimism

How's business been the past 12 months? At the industry level, data from the Specialty Equipment Market Association (SEMA) shows positive trends.

Despite a general sense of uncertainty about the U.S. economy, including questions regarding pricing, supply chains and workers, the automotive specialty equipment market enjoyed an overall growth rate of 2% in 2022, reaching $51.8 billion in sales, according to the new 2023 SEMA Market Report.

The numbers continue a decade of growth for the industry, even among recent economic turmoil created by the pandemic, officials note. While the growth percentage was down slightly from the industry's typical annual rate of 4% to 5%, some slowing was expected given current business-related challenges.

Near-future projections are optimistic. SEMA estimates sales will remain fairly flat in 2023, before ramping back up toward the industry's historical growth rate in 2024.

"Even as economic uncertainty looms, particularly around inflation, consumers are passionate about customizing and continue to buy from our industry," says Gavin Knapp, SEMA director of market research. "This report provides new and relevant findings that businesses can use to better connect with their customers, find areas of opportunity and drive their business."

The SEMA Market Report is designed to provide a comprehensive annual review of the automotive specialty equipment market and includes new data on U.S. market size, consumer profiling and industry trends that can help companies make more informed business decisions.

Key findings from the report include:

- Light-duty truck accessorization remains the biggest segment of the industry, having topped $15 billion in sales last year
- The CUV accessory market continues to grow, having reached 14% of specialty equipment sales in 2022
- Younger people continue to be the most likely to accessorize and upgrade their vehicles—50% of those modifying their vehicles are under the age of 40
- Half of all accessorizers own a powersports or recreational vehicle, opening up cross-selling opportunities
- More than 80% of companies expect their sales to stay the same or grow in 2023

The report is available for download at sema.org/research. ***TS***

THE SHOP

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MONEY IN THE BANK

■ Managing cash & avoiding institutional failures.

By Mark E. Battersby



The recent wave of bank failures has put a new focus on the security and stability of financial institutions.

The recent wave of bank failures has put a new focus on the security and stability of financial institutions. Even with protections in place, a bank's failure can be disruptive, causing delays and confusion regarding access to funds, not to mention the potential impact on funding necessary to every business in the automotive aftermarket industry.

Most small businesses face little risk of a failed bank. The Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) insures deposits of up to $250,000, an amount far above the $12,100 balance for most small businesses revealed in a recent JPMorgan Chase Institute survey.

The potential risk increases for automotive shops with many employees, however, or for those funded by venture capital. In any case, it's important to have full confidence in your banking partners.

AVOIDING POSSIBLE BANK FAILURES

Now that the panic from the collapse of not only SVB (Silicon Valley Bank) but also Signature Bank appears to be diminishing, experts are suggesting that small businesses examine their accounts to determine their level of risk and protect their deposits from potential future bank failures.

Fortunately, thanks to government programs, most small shops face little risk of their banks failing.

Even so, diversifying accounts is usually a good idea. As mentioned, the FDIC insures each depositor at each institution—not separate accounts at one institution. Having a second banking relationship makes it easier to quickly wire funds to safety when worries develop about one institution being unstable.

Since these protections usually come into play only after the fact (such as after the failure of a bank), it is critical that shop owners take the necessary precautions in advance to avoid needing these protections in the future. The safest course of action is to do your own due diligence and distribute your risk.

A typical Due Diligence Checklist might include:

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- Assess the overall health of the operation's bank
- Review the bank's investments
- Ensure the bank participates in so-called "stress tests"
- Regularly monitor the bank for material changes
- Protect deposits beyond FDIC depositor protection such as with accounts in more than one institution



Even with protections in place, a bank's failure can be disruptive, causing delays and confusion regarding access to funds.

MITIGATING RISK

Surprisingly, it is banks themselves that may offer the most protection from possible failure.

The IntraFi Network is a system that can split a customer's large deposits into smaller chunks that are below the $250,000 cap and send those chunks to other banks in the system. The result? Customers have multiple FDIC-insured accounts without having to open each one independently.

One option involves the bank chopping a customer's money into certificates of deposits (CDs) of less than $250,000 before placing those accounts in other institutions. While the CDs earn interest, the money can't be withdrawn before the CDs mature.

A second option involves a so-called "sweep account," where a customer's balance in excess of $250,000 is "swept out" to other banks periodically in smaller blocks. With both options, deposits are protected by the FDIC because, technically, they are sitting elsewhere.

Although free, banks usually limit the service to businesses with uninsured deposits. Even if eligible, however, an automotive aftermarket professional may not want to utilize either option, leading to copying bigger operations by creating a treasury strategy.

TREASURY-RELATED PROFITS

Aftermarket professionals know how difficult managing an operation's finances can be. Tracking profits and losses, planning future expenditures and securing expansion capital can be challenging.

One answer is treasury management—those back-office, behind-the-scenes services that enable small businesses to



Diversifying accounts is usually a good idea.

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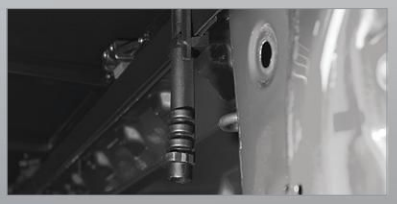
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MONEY IN THE BANK



Experts advise small businesses to examine their accounts to determine their level of risk and protect deposits from potential future bank failures.

make and receive payments electronically, in-house or through a financial services provider.

While accounting software can usually handle day-to-day cash flow management, treasury management is more involved. Both in-house and via outside providers, treasury management includes handling the operation's holdings with the ultimate goals of managing its liquidity and minimizing potential risk.

A simple switch to electronic deposits wherever possible can improve cash management, keep deposits safer and save time. Plus, there is faster notification of attempts to deposit checks where there might be a lack of funds.

For some shops, in-house treasury management might also incorporate the Automated Clearing House (ACH) clearing network for electronic payments. ACH is an efficient, economical way of making and receiving payments.

ACH payments are made by directly transferring funds from one bank to another, cutting out the use of paper checks. While it costs an average of $1.22 to process a paper check, the same payment can be processed for pennies using ACH.

TODAY'S FUNDING OPTIONS

In a recent National Small Business Association (NSBA) poll on the current state of lending following the collapse of SVB, more than half of the respondents said they were unable to obtain adequate funding even prior to the collapse, with a third claiming terms had become less favorable.

It's not that banks are reluctant to lend to small businesses but, rather, traditional financial institutions have outdated, labor-intensive lending processes and regulations that are often unfavorable to smaller organizations. When credit dries up and liabilities become harder to roll over, there may be a need for alternative financing.

Alternative financing refers to any method through which performance, restyling and customization professionals can acquire needed capital without the assistance of traditional banks.

Generally, if a funding option is based entirely online, it is considered an alternative financing method. By this definition, options such as crowdfunding, online loan providers and cryptocurrency qualify as alternative financing.

Among the reasons why a shop might turn to alternative financing are:

Lower credit requirements. Traditional banks are almost certain to decline loans to borrowers with poor credit.

Faster approval. Traditional bank loans can take weeks to be approved, whereas some business loan alternatives provide access to funding in as little as one week.

Easier qualification. Not all small business owners meet the additional requirements to apply and be approved for traditional loans. In these cases, business loan alternatives are helpful.



Generally, if a funding option is based entirely online, it is considered an alternative financing method.

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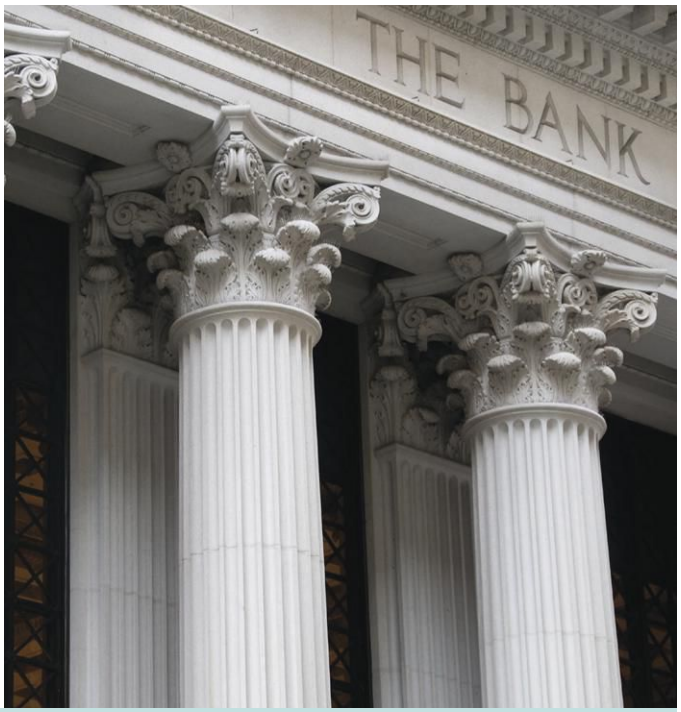
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Small-business lending is becoming big business, with hundreds of millions of dollars raised from unique platforms such as crowdfunding, peer-to-peer lending and marketplace lending.

ONLINE OR BRICKS AND MORTAR?

Small-business lending is becoming big business, with hundreds of millions of dollars raised from unique platforms such as crowdfunding, peer-to-peer lending and marketplace lending. The entire lending marketplace is an emerging segment of the financial services industry that increasingly uses online platforms to lend directly or indirectly to consumers and small businesses.

As the needs of investors and financial services customers become more complex, there is a demand for effective tools to simplify the process. So called "digital transactions" involve constantly evolving methods where financial technology (fintech) companies collaborate with various sectors of the economy to take advantage of new lending and capital raising opportunities.

Financial institutions are increasing the digitized services they offer while the financial marketplace competes with offerings such as peer-to-peer lending, alternative online financing and crowdfunding.

So, how can an automotive aftermarket business take advantage of these speedy financing options while avoiding the risks associated with borrowing from so-called "shadow banks?" One option is marketplace lending.

Online marketplace lending refers to the segment of the financial services industry that uses investment capital and data-driven online platforms to lend directly to small businesses and consumers.

While the newer "marketplace" funding remains largely undefined, it encompasses lenders that make loans to higher-risk, lower-income borrowers, as well as micro-finance and larger-scale lenders that market their products to traditional consumers and small businesses.

The U.S Department of the Treasury has issued a rather broad definition for "marketplace lending," stating it is "the segment of the financial services industry that uses investment capital and data-driven online platforms to lend either directly or indirectly to small businesses and consumers."

It goes on to say: "Companies operating in this industry tend to fall into three general categories—balance sheet lenders, online platforms (formerly known as peer-to-peer or P2P), and bank-affiliated online lenders."

While the volume is tiny in comparison with traditional bank lending, marketplace lending has experienced rapid growth, with new lenders originating over $12 billion in loans.

Marketplace lenders employ new, largely automated underwriting processes.

In fact, some online lenders purportedly rely on "big data" not evaluated as part of traditional bank underwriting processes. Unfortunately, there has yet to be one consistent, concise definition of what marketplace lending truly means or universal guidelines for qualifying.

TIME TO PREPARE

While bank accounts remain safe because regulators have shown a willingness to step in when needed, experts advise small businesses to diversify their funds while cementing their relationships with their bankers.

Preparing for the potential of a bank failure is something that should be started today. ***TS***

MARK E. BATTERSBY *writes on financial and tax-related topics. Learn more at thetaxscribe.com.*

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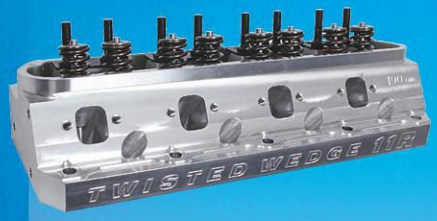


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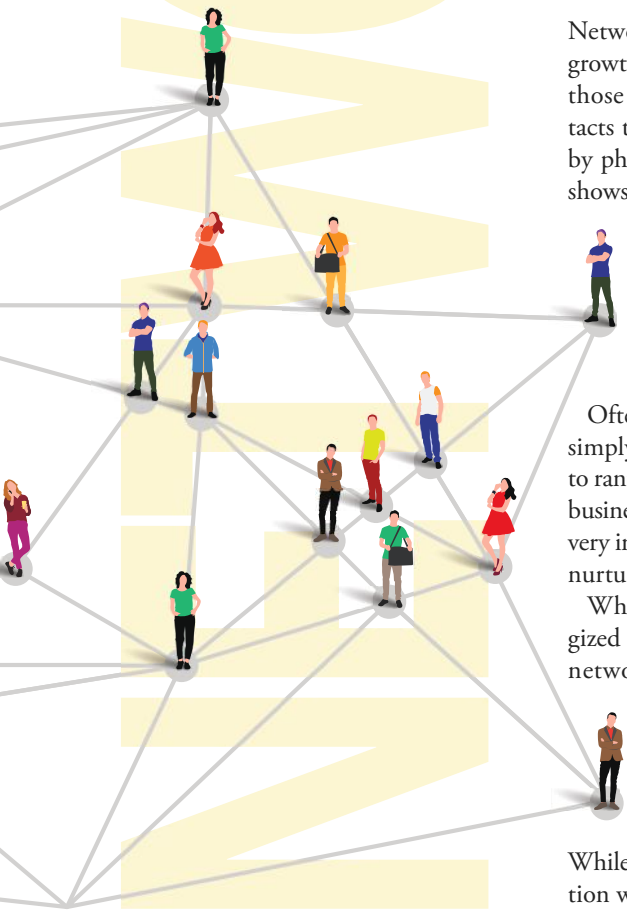
NETWORKING



IS YOUR BUSINESS NETWORK STALE?

■ 5 steps to reestablish, refresh & revive your connections.

By Jhan R. Dolphin



Networking is a crucial part of business growth and success. We all have them—those few, yet important, business contacts that we connect with every so often by phone, email or in-person at industry shows or events.

They are other businesspeople who we admire, appreciate and trust. They are the ones we can be brutally honest with and who don't sugar coat things when asked for their thoughts or advice.

Often, these people (your network) are simply a sounding board when you need to rant about difficult customers or current business challenges. But they also represent very important relationships that should be nurtured and grown.

When was the last time you strategized about how to expand your business network? Here are a few steps to help strengthen existing relationships and build new connections.

1 INCREASE YOUR LINKEDIN PRESENCE

While I could fill the pages of this publication with all the negative aspects of social media, the reality is it remains an important business tool that should be understood and used. Ensuring your LinkedIn profile is kept fresh and up to date is only the start.

Try to share professional insights or information that affects your industry at least once a week. It can be as simple as posting an article that you find interesting or helpful.

By demonstrating your knowledge through thoughtful posts, you're showing potential connections that you have valuable contributions to offer. Staying active and establishing a presence helps build awareness of your brand and increases opportunities to form relationships with others in the industry.

2 EDUCATING VS. PITCHING

Use your social media channels to teach people techniques and ideas they can use, interesting features that impressed you about certain products, and new and/or important information about your industry that customers may find interesting.

Many business owners make the mistake of constantly selling instead of creating a conversation. They say that marketing is



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like a first date—if all you do is talk about yourself, there won't be a second one.

3 ATTEND (A FEW) LOCAL NETWORKING EVENTS

Now, don't get me wrong. I do believe that most networking events are what you make them. I also believe, however, that you shouldn't rely on, or limit yourself to only attending local, long-standing business gatherings.

Chambers of commerce and other small business groups usually offer monthly or quarterly networking events, but you shouldn't expect too much from them. Typically, they are the same people who get together each time.

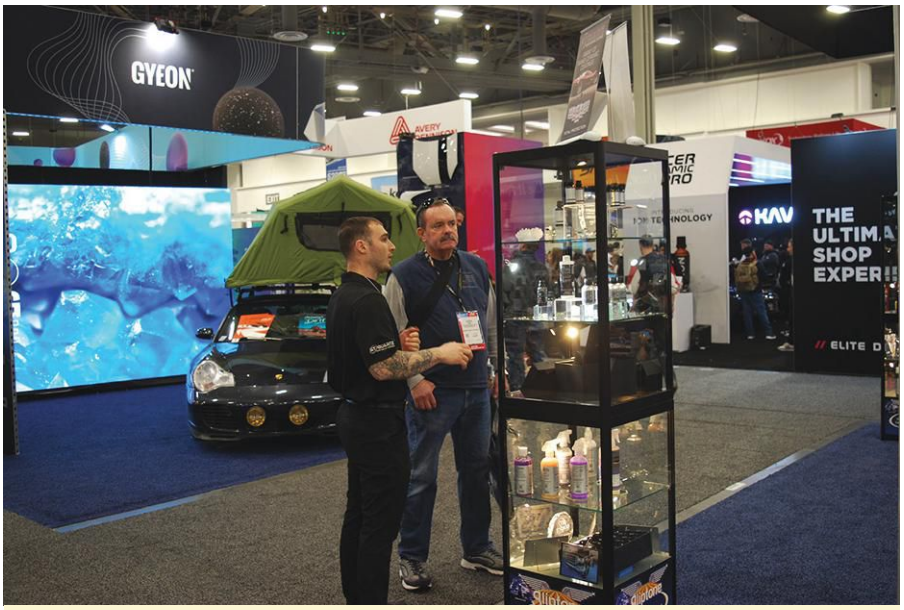
These events are worth attending on occasion, of course, to make sure the group knows you, your business and the type of work you do. And, in the true spirit of networking, you can also look to introduce people you know to members of the group who may benefit from a professional connection.

4 ATTEND INDUSTRY-SPECIFIC EVENTS

There's no denying that attending shows like SEMA and PRI, as well as regional events around the country, is a great way to connect with important industry professionals and meet new ones. It doesn't happen just by attending, however.

Networking is work, and it takes a conscious effort and a solid strategy to make the most of these important opportunities. Planning ahead by contacting people you would like to meet with and asking if you can set a time for coffee, lunch or simply to exchange business cards is a great start.

Also think about the people you already know and who you may be able to introduce to each other. The ability to identify those who should get to know one another and then making it happen is the mark of a true networking pro. Building relationships within your industry and connecting people is just as important for your business as knowing your way around a vehicle.



Before networking, determine some of the topics you would like to discuss and be sure you can articulate what it is you are hoping to learn.

5 TRAVEL A LITTLE MORE

I know, I know. You've got a business to run.

However, whether I am attending an off-road race, a local car show, the Indy 500 or any other enthusiast event, I always try to make plans to connect with other industry professionals who may be there as well. Or I make time to visit businesses similar to mine that are located in the same area as the event.

These are great ways to expand your network. I suggest looking at the calendar in advance and locating people you would like to connect with in the areas where you already plan to travel. Or, kick it up a level by organizing your own networking event during a time that you are traveling to a trade show or enthusiast event, inviting key people who you know will attend and then promoting it to other industry professionals who may be interested in joining you.

It's a great way to help establish yourself as an industry expert who is interested in bringing people together.

DON'T GO IT ALONE

Regardless of how you plan to move forward, another important part of networking is being a bit vulnerable. Remember, we can all use a little help now and then.

We know how fake it seems when people go on and on about how great things are



all the time. So, if you want your networking efforts to succeed, you must be bold enough to ask for assistance when needed.

Before networking, determine some of the topics you would like to discuss and be sure you can articulate what it is you are hoping to learn or get help with. Then, when someone asks if they can help, tell them the truth. ***TS***



JHAN R. DOLPHIN *is vice president of Michigan-based concept vehicle and prototype company Prefix Corporation and owner of marketing and promotional company J Robert Marketing. He often speaks to industry groups on sales, marketing and various business topics. He can be reached at jhan.dolphin@prefix.com.*

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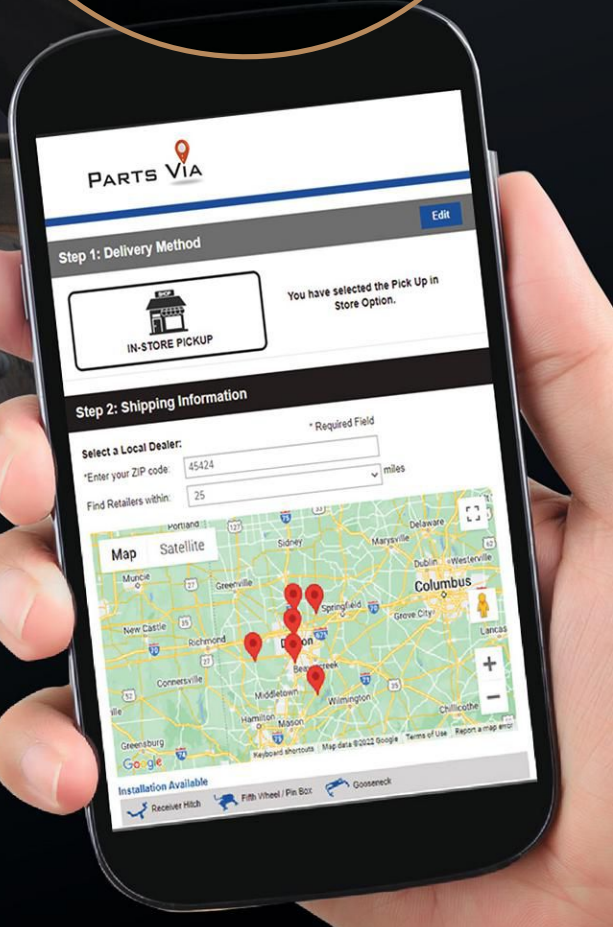
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PERFORMANCE

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ROADS TO RICHES

Helping customers make the most of track days. ///By John Carollo



Conceived and designed for championships or individual events, the Maserati GT2 will debut in the final stages of the 2023 Fanatec GT European Series and is due to participate in the entire 2024 season. (Photo courtesy Maserati)

Are your performance customers looking to do more than just sit in a parking lot or slowly cruise the main drag? Tell them to hit the road.

The road racing market is robust, viable and has a big secret just waiting to be tapped. That big secret most shops overlook is that this market includes smaller and even temporary events—sometimes in parking lots or other atypical racing locations—such as autocross and autoslalom.

And if drivers are worried about getting door-slammed by an overzealous competitor, there are individual events where it's just the driver, the car and the course. In fact, the Sports Car Club of America (SCCA) recently changed the name of its autocross racing to Solo.

Serving road racing customers who want to put their machines to the test can be fun and lucrative for shops. Performance product manufacturers have thoughts on the market's growth, hot products to investigate and common mistakes to avoid.

RISING CAR COUNTS

Autocross and Solo-style racing use the same parts and services and are part of the growing road racing market.

"Not long ago, it was all about SCCA, but then NASA stepped in with its HPDE (High Performance Driving Experience), which allowed the average Joe with a Miata or Mustang to get on track without worry of car-to-car contact," says Dave Brzozowski, motorsports/racing manager for Wilwood Disc Brakes. "That enthusiast can then stay within the HPDE



The Maserati GT2 was designed and built as a race car for private teams and gentlemen racers. (Photo courtesy Maserati)

program forever or step up to the prepared classes and battle for trophies."

Noting there are more and more track days being held nationwide, Brzozowski lists the performance products that have seen improvements thanks to racing innovation.

"Tire construction—radial, bias ply, compounds and materials; shocks, suspension types, chassis designs and materials; and brakes in general—calipers, fluids, pad materials, rotor designs, pedal ratios and master cylinder sizing," he says.

Meanwhile, more racers also mean more racing organizations.

"It appears that the Pro/Am series is at the top of the participation chain," says Edwin Mangune, sales manager for Hawk Performance. "I see growth in SRO, IMSA, WRL, Porsche GT3 Cup, Ferrari Challenge, Lamborghini Super Trofeo, etc."

There's also been an escalation of turnkey GT race cars being offered by manufacturers for events with rules such as using homologated parts, he adds.

"At the grassroots level, there's a rise in popularity in spec racing. People are looking for the most cost-effective way to be in a competitive class. There are more sanctioning bodies and track day groups such as GRIDLIFE and Global Time Attack. Speed events such as Time Attack are fairly new to the motorsports scene and are on an uptrend. Budget endurance



Porsche has announced a Manthey Kit for the 718 Cayman GT4 RS that is specially optimized for use on racetracks. (Photo courtesy Porsche)

CAYMAN TRACK KIT

Porsche has announced a Manthey Kit for the 718 Cayman GT4 RS that is specially optimized for use on racetracks.

A 493-hp GT4 RS with the Manthey Kit completed a lap at the Nürburgring Nordschleife in 7:03.121 minutes—more than 6 seconds quicker than a 718 Cayman GT4 RS without the upgrade.

The modifications focus on aerodynamics and chassis components. The new kit was developed especially for track days and in close collaboration between engineers at Porsche Motorsport and the Nordschleife specialists at Manthey.

The kit makes changes to functional aero parts. At the front of the car, flaps and new air curtains with a wheel arch Gurney flap and a new carbon underbody with diffusers improve the downforce on the front end. The kit includes a new four-position rear wing that is approximately 3.4 inches wider than the part it replaces and features larger side blades that contribute to an increase in downforce at the rear axle.

The bodywork of the rear engine cover is reinforced with a carbon-weave finish, while the aero-discs on the rear wheels are made of carbon fiber-reinforced plastic and can be customized with decorative film.

Together with Manthey, Porsche developed a special coil-over suspension with an inverted setup that can be adapted for the track. The spring struts can be set to four different positions, and the rebound and compression stages can be adjusted without tools. Spring rates on the front suspension have been increased by 20%.

The chassis is available in two versions—for cars with or without a front axle lift system. Steel brake lines are included, along with special racing brake pads.

The kit can be extended with a specially designed CFRP rear spoiler that attaches to the standard rear spoiler. In combination with the bigger rear wing, it further increases downforce on the rear axle by around 4%.

Performance is visually underlined by optional CFRP wheel arch vents on the front fenders.

Illuminated door sill guards with the Manthey logo are available, as are towing loops designed for track use.

Performance products have seen improvements thanks to racing innovations. (Photo courtesy Wilwood Disc Brakes)



ROAD RACING PRODUCTS

■ **HOT PRODUCTS:** Wheel Studs
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Premium-grade 8740 chromoly steel forgings; in-house precision heat treatment to a nominal tensile strength of 190,000 psi; threads rolled after heat treatment to provide 10 times the fatigue strength of ordinary studs.

ARP
Bob Florine
Executive Vice President

■ **HOT PRODUCT:** Accusump Oil Accumulator
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Available in 1-, 2- and 3-quart models; air pressure gauge to set pre-charge and monitor performance; can be mounted in any position; finely finished hard-coated aluminum tubing; O-ring seal and threaded end caps; several valving options available.

Canton Racing Products
Iann Criscuolo
Technical Manager

■ **HOT PRODUCTS:**
DTC Motorsport Brake Pads
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
High-, medium- and low-temperature compounds; torque specifications to meet the demands of pro-level and grassroots racing; very good initial bite and linear progression; consistency across temperature ranges; fast brake pad release.

Hawk Performance
Edwin Mangune
Sales Manager

■ **HOT PRODUCT:**
VP Stay Frosty Race-Ready Coolant
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
100% water-based, glycol-free formula; won't hurt track surfaces; premixed and ready-to-pour; industry-leading number of surfactants that deliver noticeable temperature decreases.

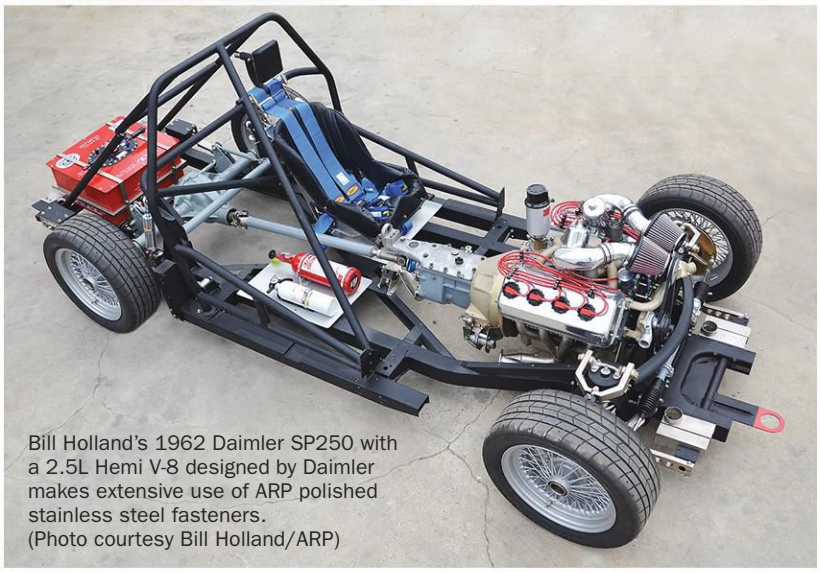
VP Racing
Kevin Parlett Sr.
Marketing Manager

■ **HOT PRODUCTS:**
Direct/Complete Race-Specific Brake Kits
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Available for numerous types and classes of cars; complete compatibility with factory hydraulics; kits include hard-anodized calipers, insulated Thermlock pistons, anti-knockback springs and race-proven pad compounds.

Wilwood Disc Brakes
Dave Brzozowski
Motorsports/Racing Manager



Items like fuel cells and safety harnesses can become dated and require periodic replacement, serving as a good income source for shops. (Photo courtesy Bill Holland/ARP)


Bill Holland's 1962 Daimler SP250 with a 2.5L Hemi V-8 designed by Daimler makes extensive use of ARP polished stainless steel fasteners. (Photo courtesy Bill Holland/ARP)

racing has seen good growth as well with Lemons, Lucky Dog, ChampCar, AER and NASA. Vintage racing seems to be growing as well. There are more vintage groups than I can remember. There are more cars out there participating in these events, but they're so spread out now."

Kevin Parlett Sr., marketing manager for VP Racing, has watched as road racing has grown dramatically over the last decade, "from the accessibility to grassroots racing series like NASA all the way to the manufacturer-backed GT and Prototype classes of IMSA."

Manufacturers are working hard to keep pace with increased demands, he notes.

"With an influx of racers at all levels, the technology has also grown rapidly in the aftermarket industry, from hard parts like suspension and complex ECUs to the technology that goes into the fluids we make at VP Racing."

Shops carrying these products will want to focus on dependability and performance, says Bob Florine, executive vice president of ARP.

"Racers are now concentrating more on reliability and recognizing that fortifying the engine, driveline and suspension is important," he says. "You can't get the checkered flag if you don't finish the race."

Iann Criscuolo, technical manager at Canton Racing Products, sums up the current state of the road racing market.

"It has seen growth and usage of better parts, more horsepower and better handling road racing vehicles," he says.

AVOIDING TROUBLE

Shops, like racers, will want to avoid trouble at every turn. Manufacturers offer advice for serving road racing customers.

Brzozowski says a common mistake

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ROADS TO RICHES



Road racers place a premium on reliability. (Photo courtesy Canton Racing Products)



Drivers are more interested in performance and reliability than saving a few pennies. (Photo courtesy Hawk Performance)



A wide range of racers means no two projects are ever quite the same. (Photos courtesy VP Racing)



is "not getting every bit of information about the customer's specific class of car and what they are trying to accomplish before addressing their needs," which can lead to "selling them incorrect parts/kits."

Good sales principles are evergreen. Mangune lists five:

1. Underpromise and overdeliver.
2. Everyone thinks they'll be a great driver. Don't aid that misconception.
3. Ask for a deposit upfront.
4. Know the budget size.
5. Have inventory on hand. You can't sell what you don't have in stock.

Passing on valuable mechanical knowledge always scores points with customers.

"The single greatest cause of fastener failure is improper installation technique—either too much or not enough torque," says Florine. "Torque wrenches are delicate instruments that should be calibrated periodically. Proper fastener lubrication is also important, which is why we developed ARP Ultra-Torque fastener lubricant to ensure getting 95%-100% of the desired preload on the first pulling cycle (we recommend reaching the desired preload in three equal stages)."

Staying current on the particular aspects of engines is also critical, Criscuolo explains.

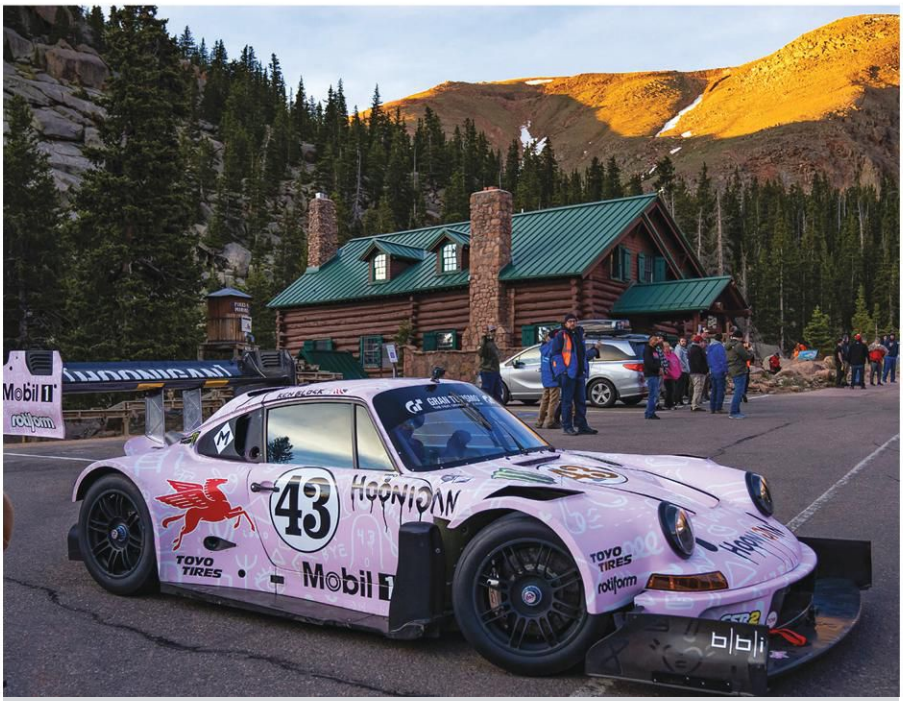
"A common mistake is not proportionally enhancing the oiling systems and cooling system along with engine upgrades and upgrades to handling characteristics," he says. "The need for either a dry sump system or single-stage wet sump system with an oil accumulator can ensure that the investment in a high-performance power plant will last for many seasons without catastrophic failure. Stock oiling systems on some setups cannot handle the new performance demands and can lead to premature failures."

A wide range of racers means no two projects are ever alike, notes Parlett.

"Road racing is unique in its demographics compared to other major motorsports in the U.S. Not only is there a wide range of different race series, skill levels and budgets, but there are also a ton more variations of vehicles and classes, from stock vehicles learning the ropes in HPDE programs to multi-class racing at the highest levels," he says. "A one-size-fits-all approach to product development isn't effective—it's why VP Racing has over 65 blends of



The United States Touring Car Championship shows the popularity of grassroots road racing. (Photo courtesy USTCC)



Lia Block made a tribute run in the "Hoonipigasus" at the Pikes Peak International Hill Climb in July in honor of her late father, Ken Block. (Photo courtesy Mobil 1)

race fuel and dozens of engine oil blends/weights, allowing the perfect combination for any application."

STRONG SHOWING

Knowledge, experience and passion can give shops an edge when competing for road racing customers. Here are some areas of focus.

"Vintage Road racing continues to grow and as a result there are cars being raced that are often 50-70 years old," says ARP's Florine. "Fasteners can fail through stress, fatigue or rust. Shops can push replacing old fasteners with our polished stainless steel bolts and studs that are fully 20% stronger than Grade 8 hardware and impervious to the elements."

VP's Parlett recommends getting involved.

"Show up to the track and stock the consumable items like fluids and tires this segment burns through," he says. "The market is engaging a younger audience than we have seen in years. Standalone experiential events like NASA's HyperFest attract very young crowds that are enthusiastic about their own cars and their journey in building them for road racing. Along with those grassroots racers in the driver's seat, there is also a renewed audience interested in the highest levels of road racing, especially as we see a new interest from many big-name manufacturers investing in road racing programs across the globe."

Hawk's Mangune reveals that road racers are often more interested in a product's performance and reliability than in saving a few pennies.

"Sell premium products that will increase the ticket price, and suggest other companion products to increase the ticket," he suggests.

Canton's Criscuolo also pinpoints a premium on reliability.

"Shops can increase sales by enhancing the performance of the oiling system as insurance for the customer's road racing investment," he says. "The need for reliable parts in an age after COVID is a must, since parts availability is inconsistent at best."

Finally, focus on your business so racers know you are someone they can trust, advises Wilwood's Brzozowski.

"Have good contacts in dealer networks to ensure getting the most reliable answers and sell a customer the right parts the first time," he advises. "Also, knowing which high-demand consumables to stock and always having those on hand to sell will attract repeat customers." ***TS***



SEVENTH HEAVEN

By Jef White
Photos courtesy Stellantis

'Last Call' marks Dodge's final gas-powered Chargers & Challengers.



Dodge is celebrating the end of the production runs for gasoline-powered Chargers and Challengers with seven Last Call special editions.

Chevrolet announcing in March that it is halting production of the sixth-generation Camaro in January is another step closer to the end of what's been a two-decade run of success for modern American muscle.

Unveiled in 2004 after years of lethargy, Ford's fifth-generation Mustang helped jumpstart a moribund muscle car industry, leading to a resurgence of street and track builds that proved power and performance never really go out of style.

However, while the Blue Oval has unveiled plans for an updated 2024 Mustang available with a manual and a V-8, it has also tagged its battery-powered SUV as the Mustang Mach-E, offering a glimpse of changes looming on the horizon.

There are similar rumblings in the automotive press regarding a potential return of the Camaro in the not-too-distant future, likely in a different form and powered by anything other than a gasoline internal combustion engine. We'll have to wait and see.

Meanwhile, Dodge has served as the third leg in the modern muscle tripod since introducing its sixth-generation Charger in 2006 and third-gen Challenger in 2008, along with some impressive Hemi-powered SUVs and special vehicles along the way. This year, however, marks the end of availability of gasoline-fueled Chargers and Challengers.

To celebrate, Dodge rolled out seven special models/packages as part of its "Last Call" tribute to these industry stalwarts. Blending modern technology with a nod to the past, the special editions are joined by the return of popular heritage exterior colors B5 Blue, Plum Crazy purple and Sublime green, as well as one modern color, Destroyer Grey.

All 2023 Charger and Challenger models include a Last Call under-hood plaque featuring the vehicle name and silhouette and stamped with "Designed in Auburn Hills" and "Assembled in Brampton."

Furthermore, Charger and Challenger R/T models feature new 345 fender badging, a callout to the 345-ci Hemi under the hood.

Finally, the brand is also expanding the reach of its popular SRT Jailbreak models for the Charger and Challenger SRT Hellcat Redeye Widebody, unlocking exclusive color combinations and related content. For 2023, Jailbreak models are available for the 717-hp Challenger and Charger SRT Hellcat.

Here's a closer look at the seven Last Call rollouts to help say goodbye.

CHALLENGER R/T SCAT PACK SHAKEDOWN



The 2023 Dodge Challenger Shakedown.



As an original Dodge Product Design Office Concept, the Challenger Shakedown special edition matches red and black styling inside and out and is available on R/T Scat Pack and R/T Scat Pack Widebody models.

Exterior highlights include red 392 fender graphics and Shakedown spoiler graphic, Shakedown stripe with red accent, black Challenger grille badge, R/T grille badge (black/red on R/T Scat Pack; black on R/T Scat Pack Widebody), 20-by-9.5-inch low-gloss black Slingshot wheels on the R/T Scat Pack and 20-by-11-inch carbon black Warp Speed wheels on the R/T Scat Pack Widebody, a six-piston Brembo brake system with red brake calipers and a Mopar black hood pin kit.

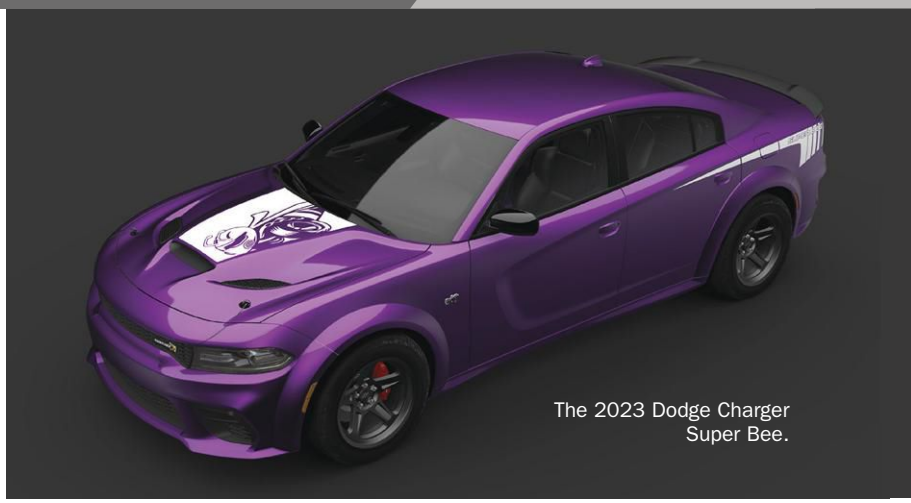
Interior highlights include a Shakedown instrument panel badge, black Nappa leather-trimmed Alcantara seats with red stitching, red interior accent stitching (IP, console, steering wheel and seats) and Demonic Red seatbelts.

CHARGER SUPER BEE

The Dodge Super Bee, first introduced in 1968 and as a Charger model for 1971, reached legendary status in its brief, original four-year run by giving customers an ultra-high-performance vehicle that could serve as both a daily driver and a weekend warrior, says dodgegarage.com.

The 2023 Dodge Charger Super Bee follows in those footsteps with standard drag radial tires and special badging and graphics. A limited production run will see just 500 Charger Scat Pack (in B5 Blue) and 500 Charger Scat Pack Widebody (in Plum Crazy purple) models built.

Unique features include Super Bee exterior badging on the grille and front fenders, Super Bee exterior graphics on the functional hood scoop and rear fenders (blue graphics with B5 Blue, white graphics with Plum Crazy purple), 20-by-9.5-inch knurled wheels with 275 drag radials (Scat Pack) and 18-by-11-inch drag wheels with 315 drag radials (Scat Pack Widebody), adaptive damping suspension with Drag Mode, black Mopar hood pin kit, SRT hood with functional scoop and dual heat extractors, SRT black exhaust tips, red four-piston Brembo brake system, Super Bee interior instrument panel badge and Super Bee seat back logos.



The 2023 Dodge Charger Super Bee.





SEVENTH HEAVEN

CHALLENGER & CHARGER R/T SCAT PACK SWINGER



The special edition 2023 Dodge Challenger R/T Scat Pack Swinger and 2023 Dodge Charger R/T Scat Pack Swinger.

The special edition 2023 Dodge Challenger R/T Scat Pack Swinger and 2023 Dodge Charger R/T Scat Pack Swinger reflect the unique style of the brand's "swinging" muscle car lineup of the late 1960s and early '70s, according to the company.

The original Dodge Dart Swinger was a member of the Dodge Scat Pack club, packing formidable horsepower into a compact package with options such as green-on-green interior/exterior color combinations, gold color accents and wood panel interior touches. The new Swingers carry on the tradition.

Highlights of the 2023 Dodge Challenger R/T Scat Pack Swinger, which starts with Plus Group and Shaker Package content, includes a Gold School Challenger grille badge, Gold School R/T Widebody grille badge, Gold School painted shaker intake, Gold School Scat Pack + Bee spoiler badge, Gold School Bee fender badges, Retro Swinger rear fender graphics, 20-by-11-inch Gold School wheels, black six-piston Brembo brakes, Mod Grain wood-like aluminum interior bezel textures, Nappa/Alcantara seats with green stitching and green Dodge Rhombi logo, green Swinger interior instrument panel badge, and green interior accent stitching on the console and doors.

Meanwhile, the 2023 Dodge Charger Scat Pack Swinger, which "adds retro-inspired features to Plus Group content," says the company, includes a Gold School Scat Pack + Bee grille badge, Gold School Bee fender and decklid badges, 20-by-11-inch Gold School wheels, retro Swinger rear fender graphics, black six-piston Brembo brakes, Mod Grain wood-like aluminum interior bezel textures, Nappa/Alcantara seats with green stitching and green Dodge Rhombi logo, green Swinger interior instrument panel badge, and green interior accent stitching on the console and doors.







CHARGER KING DAYTONA

Dodgegarage.com says the 2023 Dodge Charger King Daytona traces its lineage to a famous monarch of the 1960s and ’70s West Coast drag-racing scene: William “Big Willie” Robinson, who nicknamed his 1969 Dodge Charger “King Daytona” and used it not only in claiming victories at the drag strip, but also in keeping racers on the track and off the streets.

The new King Daytona honors the original by bumping performance to 807 hp and pairing a Go Mango exterior with unique orange interior accents. Only 300 will be produced, all based on the Charger SRT Hellcat Redeye Widebody.

Highlights include satin black King Daytona rear fender graphics, satin black hood and roof graphics, 20-by-11-inch satin carbon Warp Speed wheels, satin chrome exterior badging, orange six-piston Brembo brakes, bright Mopar hood pin kit, satin black spoiler, black Nappa/Alcantara Daytona seats with orange stitching, King Daytona IP badge, orange interior accent stitching on the instrument panel, console, steering wheel and door trim, suede headliner, carbon fiber interior bezels, Alcantara steering wheel, Harman Kardon premium audio system, power sunroof and navigation package.



The 2023 Dodge Charger King Daytona.







SEVENTH HEAVEN

CHALLENGER SRT DEMON 170



The 2023 Dodge Challenger SRT Demon 170.



Dodge saved the power until the end with the race-ready 2023 Dodge Challenger SRT Demon 170. Featuring the first-ever 1,000-plus-hp production Hemi engine, dodgegarage.com says the special edition "is already banned in its stock form by the NHRA thanks to dominating the quarter-mile with a certified 8.91-second ET at 151.17 mph."

A recalibrated powertrain control module optimizes fueling and spark timing for both premium and high-ethanol-blended fuels to unlock the full horsepower potential. With only a red key in hand, horsepower levels are determined by the percentage of ethanol fuel detected, according to the company.

Production will be capped at 3,300 cars, with a variety of options as well as a commemorative Demon decanter set, a custom instrument panel badge and an appearance-mimicking Goodwool breathable mesh car shell available for purchase.

Highlights include a 6.2L V-8 supercharged D170 engine, 3.0L supercharger with black lid, SRT Demon 170 supercharger badge, yellow painted engine block, TransBrake 2.0, 3.09:1 rear axle ratio, 240mm rear axle, drag suspension, Brembo black four-piston brakes with yellow logo, forged aluminum 18-by-8-inch front and 17-by-11-inch rear wheels, Mickey Thompson drag radials (245/55R18 front; P315/50R17 rear), Air-Grabber hood, SRT Demon 170 exterior badges, satin black Dodge taillamp badge, rear body flares, SRT performance spoiler, high-intensity discharge headlamp bulbs, DC Illuminated Air Catcher headlamps, cloth driver seat, SRT Demon 170 instrument panel badge, real carbon fiber interior accents, Alcantara steering wheel with red LED, passenger and rear seat seatbelt delete, trunk carpet/lamp delete, sound insulation delete, bright pedal delete, cloth door trim panel with map pocket light, driver floor mat and two-speaker audio system.





CHALLENGER BLACK GHOST



The 2023 Dodge Challenger SRT Hellcat Redeye Widebody Black Ghost.





Modeled after its mighty ancestor from the 1970s, the Dodge Challenger Black Ghost is making a return to the lineup as an appearance package available on the 2023 SRT Hellcat Redeye Widebody. The build offers 807 hp and plenty of interior and exterior appointments.

Highlights include Pitch Black exterior paint, a black Gator Skin vinyl roof, bright Dodge hood badge, white deck lid stripe, Challenger script grille, fender and spoiler badges, Midnight Metallic SRT grille badge, bright fuel fill door, six-piston Brembo brake system with black calipers, 3.09:1 rear axle ratio, 20-by-11-inch satin carbon Warp Speed wheels, Black Ghost Special Edition IP badge, Alcantara/Laguna leather-trimmed seats and door bolsters, Alcantara steering wheel with red LED SRT logo, real carbon fiber bezels and a Dinamica suede headliner. ***TS***





Today's lubricants are more effective, more versatile and more reliable than ever. (Photo courtesy WD-40 Brand)

CANNED RESPONSES

Spray lubricants target tough jobs. ///// **By Jef White**

Stuck on a project? There's a spray lubricant that can help.

A staple of any shop shelf, today's lubricants are more effective, more versatile and more reliable than ever. Use them to break free stuck fasteners, protect metals and resist rust.

While not always top of mind, spray lubricants remain an unsung hero for technicians looking to get jobs done efficiently. Manufacturers offer an update on what's happening in the market and how installers can use them for maximum benefit.

WORTH NOTING

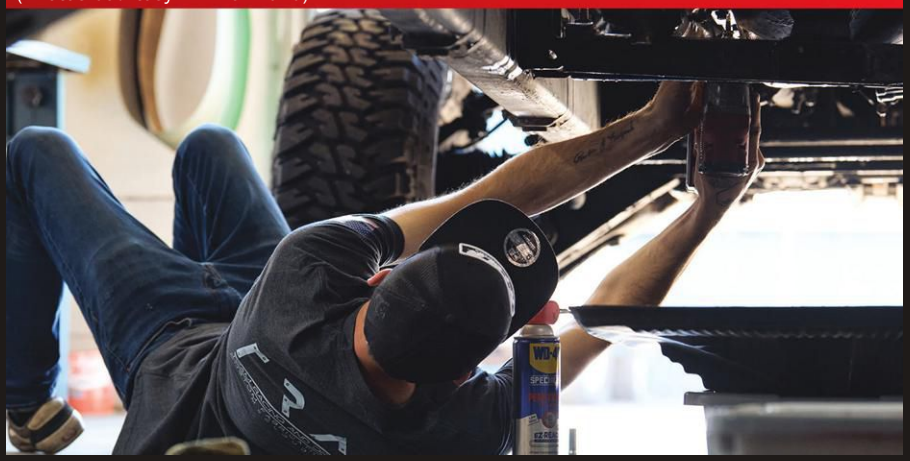
Spray lubricants may seem to be straightforward products, and in most cases they are. But that doesn't mean there haven't been notable innovations along the way.

"The spray lubricant market has witnessed advancements in formulations, delivery systems, packaging, and environmental and safety considerations," says Erin Bala, senior brand and innovation director for WD-40 Brand. "As the market advances, WD-40 Brand has learned that its end users are looking for specialized formulas to meet specific needs."

In response, Bala notes, the company created its WD-40 Specialist Line, a com-



End users are looking for specialized spray lubricant formulas to meet their specific needs. (Photos courtesy WD-40 Brand)





One trend is the growing demand for sustainable and eco-friendly products. (Photo courtesy Gear Hugger)

plete offering of lubricants, penetrants, rust-management solutions, cleaners and degreasers—including Specialist Gel Lube, an advanced solution that uses the brand's formula with a chemical technology built in to allow the formula to thicken once applied to a surface, as well as a Specialist Degreaser and Cleaner EZ-Pods.

Sergio Diaz, founder of Gear Hugger, says professional and household users are also more aware of the ingredients found in the products they choose.

"Over the last 10 years, the spray lubricants market has undergone remarkable changes, mainly due to technological advancements, environmental concerns and changing consumer preferences," he reveals.

When developing his plant-based, biodegradable, all-purpose lubricant, Diaz looked at these factors:

Eco-Friendly Formulation. "One of the biggest trends in the spray lubricant market is the growing demand for sustainable and eco-friendly products. As environmental awareness grows, consumers and industries have sought out lubricants that are biodegradable, plant-based and free of harmful chemicals."

Performance Improvements. "The past decade has seen significant advances in lubrication technology, resulting in improved performance characteristics. Spray lubricants now provide improved performance and can reduce friction and extend the life of automotive parts and machinery."

Smart Packaging & Application. "Advances in packaging methods and applications have made aerosol lubricants more user-friendly and effective—improvements like sprayers with adjustable nozzles, precision nozzles or others for wide sprays."

Focus on Safety & Health. "Health and safety concerns have become paramount. Manufacturers have gone to great lengths to develop formulations that have low toxicity and are non-flammable and non-carcinogenic, ensuring user safety and reducing environmental impact."



The aerosol lubricants market has experienced recent growth and expansion. (Photo courtesy Gear Hugger)

Market Expansion. "The aerosol lubricants market has experienced tremendous growth and expansion. With the increase in industrialization and automobile sales in many parts of the world, the demand for lubricating products has increased significantly."

Accessibility. Online retail and eCommerce platforms have opened up new distribution channels, making it easier for users to find and purchase their favorite lubricants.

Customer needs continue to drive advancements in the spray lubricants market, says Shawn Swavely, senior marketing manager for AMSOIL.



CANNED RESPONSES

SPRAY LUBRICANTS

■ **HOT PRODUCT:**
AMSOIL Metal Protector
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Cuts through rust and frees frozen components; helps protect against rust and corrosion, even in saltwater; displaces water; stops squeaks; lubricates moving parts.

AMSOIL
Shawn Swavely
Senior Marketing Manager

■ **HOT PRODUCT:**
Gear Hugger Multi-Purpose Lubricant
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Plant-based, all-purpose lubricant; restores stuck parts; lubricates moving parts; protects against corrosion; displaces moisture; formulated with plant-based, non-toxic and biodegradable ingredients; free of fossil fuels; adjustable nozzle cap.

Gear Hugger
Sergio Diaz
Founder

■ **HOT PRODUCT:**
Torco Spray Lube
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Unique penetration and setup; formulation is basically Torco Engine Assembly Lube that has been gelled and put into an aerosol can.

Torco International Corp.
Ernie Soliz
Sales Director

■ **HOT PRODUCT:**
WD-40 Multi-Use Product
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
The original WD-40 formula; developed nearly 70 years ago; America's No. 1 multipurpose lubricant; versatile with thousands of uses; protects metal from rust and corrosion; penetrates stuck parts; displaces moisture; lubricates almost anything.

WD-40 Brand
Erin Bala
Senior Brand & Innovation Director



Shops should have specialized lubricants available for specific tasks. (Photo courtesy AMSOIL)



Industry innovation has created a specialized lubrication category. (Photo courtesy Torco International Corp.)

"The pandemic hurt the supply chain, meaning there are fewer product offerings with unique solutions," he says. "We do not use the 'one-size-works-OK' approach. We look at the needs of the market and then formulate a product for the best fit."

Ernie Soliz, sales director for Torco International Corp., has watched as industry innovation has created a specialized lubrication category.

"There are two aerosol lubricant markets—the 'me-too' common aerosol lubricants that are well-stocked at most stores, and then the specialty aerosol lubricants market. Two different worlds," he says. "Do most work well enough for common uses? Yes, and they are inexpensive. But then there are true specialty blends that require a well-thought-out formula. Torco has always addressed more specialized applications where we need the product to work exceptionally well. The only thing that has really changed is that we cannot use various aerosol propellants and components that we used 15 years ago."

STOCK THOSE SHELVES

When the need for a spray lubricant arises, technicians may be in the habit of simply reaching for the nearest can. Bala notes, however, that there are different products designed for different missions.

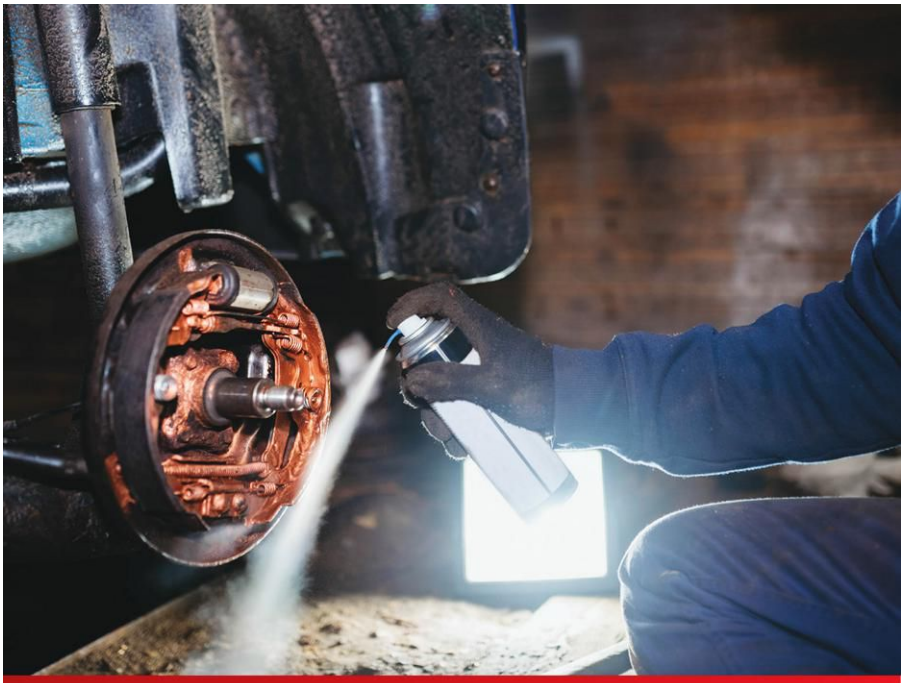
"A common misconception is that spray lubricants are a one-size-fits-all solution," she says. "Rather, choosing the right lubricant for the job will make the lubrication process more effective."

Bala's examples include:

- "When dealing with jobs that require heavy lubrication, it is recommended to use high-viscosity lubricants like WD-40 Specialist Gel Lube or WD-40 Specialist White Lithium Grease. These products create a protective barrier that offers long-lasting corrosion protection, ensuring the durability of surfaces even during prolonged exposure to the elements.
- "For woodworking, carpentry and metalwork, it is best to use a dry lubricant such as WD-40 Specialist Dry Lube. This type of lubricant prevents the accumulation of dirt on the applied surface, keeping it clean and smooth.
- "When faced with stubborn or rusted parts, a thinner, low-viscosity lubricant like WD-40 Specialist Penetrant is typically the most effective choice. This fast-acting penetrant works on contact to free rusted nuts, bolts, threads, locks and chains, leaving behind a protective layer that prevents rust and corrosion from reforming."

AMSOIL's Swavely agrees that shops should have specialized lubricants available for specific tasks.

"A common misconception is that all the products are basically the same, since they are designed to do the same job," he says.



A common misconception is that all spray lubricants are basically the same.

"All metal protectors are not created equal."

Soliz agrees, noting that such thinking can lead technicians to select the wrong solutions.

"I hear it all the time—that assembly sprays, silicone sprays, penetrating sprays, etc. are all the same. Not true."

Diaz explains that today's plant-based offerings are useful choices.

"Derived from renewable resources such as soy oil, cacao butter and canola oil, and other plant-based materials, they are biodegradable, non-toxic and have lower environmental impacts," he says. "While it is true that some early formulations of plant-based lubricants may have had limitations in terms of performance or stability, significant advancements have been made in recent years."

PREMIER PARTNERSHIPS

Spray lubricant brands tend to be high-profile players in their respective markets. As a result, they are often involved in special projects and partnerships showcasing the power of participation.

For instance, Diaz outlines how Gear Hugger and O'Reilly Auto Parts have worked together to highlight the impact of spray lubricants on the specialty automotive aftermarket.

"Gear Hugger offers an environmentally friendly solution, versatile functionality, enhanced performance, easy application and customer support," he says. "This partnership emphasizes the importance of using quality lubricants for improved automotive maintenance and sustainability."

Soliz outlines his company's private label program.

"We have provided private branded Torco Spray Lube for many different manufacturers over the years. We sell it to high-end specialty equipment manufacturers for their production lines," he explains. "I've always said Torco Spray Lube complements the products that those manufacturers are building and selling—there's no other reason why they would purchase it."

Bala explains how WD-40 Brand supports those who make an impact in the industry.

"One of the ways we do this is by empowering and educating the next generation of technicians through partnerships with organizations including Universal Technical Institute and the Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) Education Foundation," she explains. "Through these partnerships, we offer online and in-person learning experiences as well as sampling, with the goal of sharing knowledge on the science of lubrication and providing technical applications that can improve efficiency for those working in the skilled trades."

The company has also collaborated with partners including T.R.A.D. (Team Racing and Development) on projects including a desert racing chase truck that will debut at the 2023 SEMA Show. ***TS***

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Belt-Driven Fans

Derale Performance, Los Angeles, offers Belt-Driven Fans, designed to provide efficient, effective cooling for various vehicles and systems. Also known as mechanical fans, they are powered by the engine's crankshaft through a belt and pulley system, providing consistent airflow regardless of engine rpm. Made in the USA, they are suitable for use in high-performance, heavy-duty and off-road vehicles.

2023 Mustang Mach 1 Supercharger



ProCharger, Lenexa, Kansas, introduces its 2023 Mustang Mach 1 Supercharger System. Engineered to deliver 50%-60% more power, yielding roughly 740-plus total hp, the turnkey system includes a highly efficient P-1SC-1 supercharger and an air-to-air intercooler that provides maximum boost and reliability. The Stage II intercooled system provides a 55%-60% gain, and the High Output (HO) intercooled system (coming soon) provides a 50%-55% gain. Both systems will soon offer an option that utilizes the factory airbox.



BMW Exhaust

Akrapovič, Horsham, Pennsylvania, presents a Slip-On Line Titanium Exhaust System and Sound Kit for 2022-up BMW M240i (G42) models. Constructed from lightweight, high-grade titanium and finished with handcrafted carbon fiber tailpipes to offer noticeable weight savings and a unique finish, the system has been shown to add 9.7 hp. Two valves are incorporated to help tailor the sound, and two acoustic reflectors are fitted on the tailpipes to guide the sound into the cabin to change the driving experience.

Degreaser & Cleaner



WD-40, San Diego, presents new Specialist Degreaser and Cleaner EZ-Pods. The concentrated, industrial-strength EZ-Pods allow users to customize degreasing power when removing grease from automotive parts, breaking down build-up in commercial equipment or cleaning shop floors. The convenient pods are the latest addition to the WD-40 Specialist line that also includes Gel Lube, Dry Lube, Silicone, Rust Remover Soak, Cleaner & Degreaser, White Lithium Grease, Contact Cleaner and Penetrant with EZ-Reach.



Corvette TREMEC T-5 Kit

Silver Sport Transmissions (SST), Rockford, Tennessee, offers a **TREMEC** T-5 Transmission Kit for 1968-79 Chevrolet Corvette applications. Designed to give moderately powered Corvettes a second, more affordable option for an overdrive 5-speed transmission, the kits retain the factory console and include illustrated instructions.



Accessory Stud Kits

ARP, Ventura, California, offers unique Accessory Studs with rounded "nut starters." Available for a variety of applications, kits include specially designed studs for securing bellhousings, carburetors, distributors, headers, timing covers, valve covers and more. Allowing users to accurately position gaskets and hold them in place during the assembly process, the studs are available in polished stainless steel or black oxide-finished 8740 chromoly and are nominally rated at 180,000 psi tensile strength.



Mopar Piston Sets

MAHLE Motorsport, Fletcher, North Carolina, introduces new PowerPak Piston Sets for big-block Mopar engines, including 383/400 flattop and 440 dish applications. Shelf-stocked sets for the 383 and 400 B series and 440 RB series are designed with oversized valve pockets to allow for bigger valves and performance camshafts. The pistons are made of high-strength 4032 alloy with a slipper skirt forging and are dual-coated with GRAFAL skirt coating and phosphate dry lubricant. A 1.5, 1.5, 3.0mm performance ring set allows for greater seal and less friction.

Sound Deadening Products



Dynamat Inc., Hamilton, Ohio, presents its expanded lineup of Automotive Sound Deadening products that now includes new DynaCore and Dynamat Xtreme offerings. DynaCore is a lightweight, flexible and compressible thermo-acoustic self-adhesive sheet that dissipates sound waves and absorbs heat and is available in 1/2- and 1-inch thicknesses. Dynamat Xtreme has a proprietary lightweight, self-adhesive butyl core with a special aluminum layer for vibration damping and sound deadening. The product is easily cut to size and shape.



CJ Front Disc Brake Kits

LEED Brakes, Cheektowaga, New York, introduces Front Disc Brake Conversion Kits for 1943-76 Jeep CJ applications. Designed to fit most stock and aftermarket 15-inch wheels, the kits include a large, two-piston caliper on a 12-inch rotor, Grade 8 mounting hardware and precision CNC-machined mounting brackets. Developed to work with stock and aftermarket lockout hubs, the kits offer simple installation with easy-to-follow instructions. ***TS***



Restyling
AFTERMARKET ACCESSORIES

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HEAD in the Clouds



More and more consumers are discovering rooftop tents' convenience, comfort and versatility. (Photo courtesy Overland Vehicle Systems)

Aiming high with rooftop tent sales. ///// **By Jef White**

More and more travelers are taking a break from the corporate ladder to climb an aluminum ladder to a rooftop tent instead.

With the popularity of camping and overlanding booming, aftermarket shops are finding their own little slice of heaven by offering sales and installation of products for outdoor adventurers. Rooftop tents are a cornerstone of the market.

Available for nearly any camping style and vehicle type, these rugged, lightweight units provide safety and security, with enough available features to create attractive price points for any budget. Make them part of a complete off-road package to become a one-stop overlanding shop.

Manufacturers are eager to share more about rooftop tents, including sales techniques and common mistakes to avoid.

IN-DEMAND PRODUCTS

It's no secret that many people love camping and the outdoors. Rooftop tents enhance that experience.

"The global COVID-19 pandemic pre-

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HEAD in the Clouds





Be mindful of different mounting compatibilities for each tent model. (Photos courtesy OFFGRID Outdoor Gear)

sented the camping industry with unprecedented demand as consumers began to change their travel plans—looking to head outdoors while faced with travel restrictions. The increased number of people participating in outdoor activities following the pandemic has only furthered interest within the rooftop tent market," says Jamie McAvoy, sales and marketing director for Napier Outdoors. "Campers are seeking a comfortable setup, with the added ease and convenience of taking their campsite with them wherever their adventures lead."

And, as adventurers share their exploits with the world, rooftop tents enjoy added exposure.

"Overlanding in general has been steadily gaining steam in the industry over the past few years. With a rooftop tent being one of the key components for overlanding, it's only natural that this market is continuing to grow at an exponential rate," says Jesse Brown, director of marketing for OFFGRID Outdoor Gear.

Those Instagram celebrities posting breathtaking views don't hurt, either.

"More and more influencers are popping up over all platforms. Social media has made the consumer aware of the advantages of owning and using the rooftop tent," says Jeff Doherty, brand manager for Tuff Stuff Overland. "Everyone has the urge to explore, and it is up to Tuff Stuff to provide the best quality product for the right price."

Matt Konkle, category manager for Quadratec, says rooftop tents deliver on their promises.

"Over the past few years, the market has really boomed, and it shows no signs of slowing down," he says. "People love to get away from their busy schedules, pack up their Jeeps and head into the wilderness. And putting a tent setup on their roofs makes most of them feel a bit safer than just a ground solution."

Such product recognition has benefited shops and consumers, says Michelle Bates, marketing manager for Overland Vehicle Systems.

"The recent explosion of the overland category in the U.S. in the last five years has had a significant effect on the rooftop tent market," she says. "As more consumers

continued on page 42

ROOFTOP TENTS

■ **HOT PRODUCT:**
BunduTOP
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Available in the most popular king size; electrical operation.

BundutecUSA Inc.
Jenn Crooks
Sales Manager

■ **HOT PRODUCT:**
Napier Rooftop Tent
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Thick, wall-to-wall foam mattress with washable cover; 6-foot-9-inch adjustable sliding aluminum ladder; three windows and a door for ventilation and breathtaking views; rainfly and cover.

Napier Outdoors
Jamie McAvoy
Sales & Marketing Director

■ **HOT PRODUCT:**
Voyager Rooftop Tent
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Simplicity that allows for a quick and easy setup in just under 2 minutes; comfortable camping experience.

OFFGRID Outdoor Gear
Jesse Brown
Director of Marketing

■ **HOT PRODUCT:**
Sidewinder Rooftop Tent
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Aerodynamic, all-aluminum, low-profile design; maximum comfort; quick deployment—sets up and packs away in less than 1 minute; thick, 2-inch, high-density mattress with anti-condensation mat; side-opening operation for maximum headroom.

Overland Vehicle Systems
Michelle Bates
Marketing Manager

■ **HOT PRODUCT:**
Rough Country Outlander Rooftop Tent
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Quality at an affordable price point; room for three people; sturdy aluminum frame that sits underneath a queen-size mattress; utilizes industry-standard 600D Oxford ripstop fabric; 420D rain fly extension; mosquito netting; 83-inch telescoping ladder.

Quadratec
Fred Konkle
Category Manager

■ **HOT PRODUCTS:**
The Alpine 51 and 61
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
2.75-inch-thick memory foam mattress; blackout coated fabric; 360-degree screen/window system; three entryways; wedge or full double-wedge deployment options; cargo crossbars; interior roof organizer; LED interior light strip; exterior T-slot.

Tuff Stuff Overland
Jeff Doherty
Brand Manager

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FORD DONATES FIREFIGHTING BRONCO TO NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

As the threat of wildfires increases, Ford Motor Co. and the Bronco Wild Fund are donating a Bronco Badlands SUV with Sasquatch off-road package to the National Park Service for use in Bandelier National Monument, where it will operate as a firefighting command vehicle.

The Bronco wildland firefighting command rig follows the Bronco + Filson Wildland Fire Rig Concept and is being donated through the Ford Bronco Wild Fund, which works to increase access, preservation and stewardship of public lands.

Bronco Wild Fund has donated more than $3.7 million to diverse causes, including organizations like America's State Parks, National Forest Foundation, Outward Bound and Sons of Smokey.

"For more than a century, Ford has supported fire response and disaster relief efforts by deploying vehicles to provide emergency transportation and power and deliver essential goods," says Dave Rivers, Ford enthusiast brand manager. "Bronco Wild Fund was created because of our passion for the outdoors, and we're excited to donate the Bronco wildland firefighting command rig to Bandelier to help protect this national monument for generations to come."

The Bronco is the first of two being developed by Darley—a global manufacturer and distributor of defense, fire and rescue vehicles—for donation to the National Park Service.

The rig is equipped with a state-of-the-art government communication system, including satellite and antenna connections. The integrated technology allows firefighters to establish a real-time backcountry command and control position with the crews during emergency operations.

The vehicle also includes a drone with live feed screens on the vehicle, tablet computer and special software providing the first response team with improved aerial reconnaissance, detection capabilities and improved situational awareness.



Ford Motor Co. and the Bronco Wild Fund are donating a Bronco Badlands SUV with Sasquatch off-road package to the National Park Service. (Photos courtesy Ford Motor Co.)

Other specialized hardware includes a grille guard, a factory-installed WARN winch, a set of beadlock wheels and a roof rack fitted with a light bar, search and emergency lights and siren.

The 33,000-acre Bandelier National Monument in northern New Mexico is composed of rugged canyons and mesas that contain petroglyphs and cliffs dwellings. The park has a history of natural fire occurrences and as the fire season grows longer, the park is experiencing more repeated fires in the same landscape.

"I want to thank Ford for this generous donation. Over the last 20 years, warmer temperatures and stronger winds have resulted in bigger fires that are harder to predict and manage," says Patrick Suddath, superintendent of Bandelier National Monument. "These more resource-intensive fires have a real impact on Bandelier's firefighting corps, and this donation will help us manage fires better. It will also help to minimize impact to the park's affiliated tribes, who have traditionally used park land for cultural, economic and spiritual reasons."

Lost Canyon
PREMIUM OVERLAND GEAR

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PREMIUM OVERLAND GEAR



BUILT TO LAST

Engineered from high strength, lightweight and waterproof 2000mm Oxford fabric, and includes tape sealed double sewn seams and heavy-duty polyethylene floor.



INNOVATIVE DESIGN

Easily fits two adults comfortably and offers protective rain fly for additional weather resistance, as well as interior zipper for power plant access and double zipper rear entrance door to keep bugs away.



STOW & SEE

Features two interior gear pockets for small personal belongings as well as ambient USB-powered LED light strip.



SIMPLE SETUP

Tent installs to truck bed in minutes with provided straps and hooks, and does not require additional modifications or brackets.

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HIMALAYA'S OVERLANDING DEFENDER 130 TRUCK







Himalaya 4x4 recently unveiled a custom silver Defender 130 truck featuring upgrades designed for adventuring. (Photos courtesy Himalaya 4x4)

Vintage Land Rover Defender restoration and restomod builder Himalaya 4x4 recently unveiled a custom silver Defender 130 truck featuring power upgrades and a modern suspension setup made for adventuring.

"Our new Himalaya 4x4 130 truck perfectly encapsulates the capabilities of our production team," says Greg Shondel, Himalaya 4x4 president. "We expertly constructed everything for a client who enjoys outdoor adventures, so they needed a truck capable of taking them anywhere. We incorporated the best of the best in terms of engine, suspension, braking and handling to create the perfect summer rig,"

Upgrades include a robust Cummins R2.8 turbo diesel engine, a custom-built four-link coil-over suspension, Dynatrac axles, Brembo disc brakes, Black Rhino 18-inch wheels and BFGoodrich performance tires.

"Even with all of the off-road build considerations, we take great care to ensure that our vehicles are able to comfortably serve as daily drivers out on modern-day roads," Shondel adds. "Making sure these vintage Rovers are up to the task of serving our clients' needs in modern driving conditions is a key aspect of what we do. Anyone behind the wheel will feel like they're in a modern luxury vehicle, all with a look and feel that represents the very best of the vintage Defender aesthetic."

Limited-slip front and rear differentials shift torque to the wheels with the most traction, reducing slippage. Custom Himalaya 4x4 rock sliders with power folding side steps help protect the custom 130's undercarriage, along with a specially-built wiring harness.

The company also implemented bespoke fender flares, a new front bumper and a winch to add an extra layer of protection and safety while off-roading or overlanding.

The exterior bodywork features sparkling silver paint. Inside the sleek, two-tone leather-wrapped cabin is a custom JL Audio system, Dakota Digital gauges and Land Rover puma-style dashboard.



Rooftop tents deliver the comfortable set-ups campers seek. (Photo courtesy Napier Outdoors)



discover rooftop tents' convenience, comfort and versatility over traditional tents, they are increasingly seen as desirable options for camping trips."

More exposure means more players and more innovation.

"The increased consumer demand has led to an influx of new brands in the industry, providing more options as well as easier accessibility to purchase," says Bates. "This competition has driven down prices while increasing quality, making rooftop tents an even more attractive option for recreational off-roaders, campers and outdoor enthusiasts alike."

It remains to be seen, however, if the market can support more suppliers over the long term.



The market's future looks bright. (Photo courtesy Napier Outdoors)



Understand how your customers intend to explore. (Photo courtesy bundutec-usa.com)

"The market is becoming oversaturated," states Jenn Crooks, sales manager for BundutecUSA Inc.

SMART SUGGESTIONS

All that product exposure may lead to customers thinking they have all the answers. Quality retailers and installers, however, will help overlanders dig a little deeper to ensure the proper product is selected for each project.

"A common mistake would be selling the customer the wrong tent," says Doherty. "A simple fix would be to ask the correct questions and acquire knowledge of the product itself."

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HEAD in the Clouds



Increased consumer demand has led to an influx of new options. (Photo courtesy Overland Vehicle Systems)

Awareness can combat what Crooks calls some shops' "unfamiliarity of the available products."

Doing a little homework on the front end often results in increased sales and happier customers out on the trail.

"One of the biggest issues we've seen is that some resellers are simply not taking the time to educate themselves on the rooftop tents they are selling," Brown notes. "You need to be mindful of different mounting compatibilities for each model of tent that you carry to ensure that you're getting the right tent for your customer's build."

Konkle explains that some setups fit a wider range of vehicles than others.

"While many rooftop tents will work with just about anything, there are some only designed to fit certain rack systems," he says. "Spending time to discover what a customer really wants out of a tent and then matching something that will fit on their vehicle pretty much ensures a happy end result."

Securing and transporting the tent are also important considerations to consider, Bates explains.

"One common oversight made by some shops is not taking into consideration the vehicle rack mounting solution for the rooftop tent," she says. "It is important to have a rack system that is rated to handle the weight of the rooftop tent and its intended users. Both the static and dynamic load ratings play an equally important role in having a proper setup for a positive experience."

EXPERIENCE MATTERS

When it comes to maximizing sales of rooftop tents, nothing beats experience and service.

"Know the product; know your customers," suggests Doherty from Tuff Stuff. "It boils down to product knowledge and being confident in what you are selling."

Ask questions to find clarity.

"To ensure the best match between customers and products, it's important to understand their preferences and how they



Quality rooftop tents will deliver on their promises. (Photo courtesy Quadratec)



Social media has made consumers aware of rooftop tents. (Photo courtesy Tuff Stuff Overland)

intend to explore," says BundutecUSA's Crooks. "Take the time to get to know your customers and their needs."

Inside the shop, hands-on experiences make the products more approachable, adds OFFGRID's Brown.

"If you have the space for it, dedicate a section of your showroom to showcase a tent for display. Train your staff to demonstrate the setup and takedown process," he recommends. "You should also encourage your customers to participate in the demonstrations as well to allow them to experience firsthand the use and functionality of the tent design."

Bates from OVS also explains how seeing is believing.

"A tip for increased sales of rooftop tents would be to have units on display. Providing an inviting environment allows customers to get up close with the product and, combined with providing helpful expert advice, creates an inviting atmosphere to maximize sales," she explains. "Offering a variety of sizes and styles at various price points is also important. It allows the shop to capture the sale regardless of where the customer is on the spectrum of rooftop tents or individual vehicle requirements."

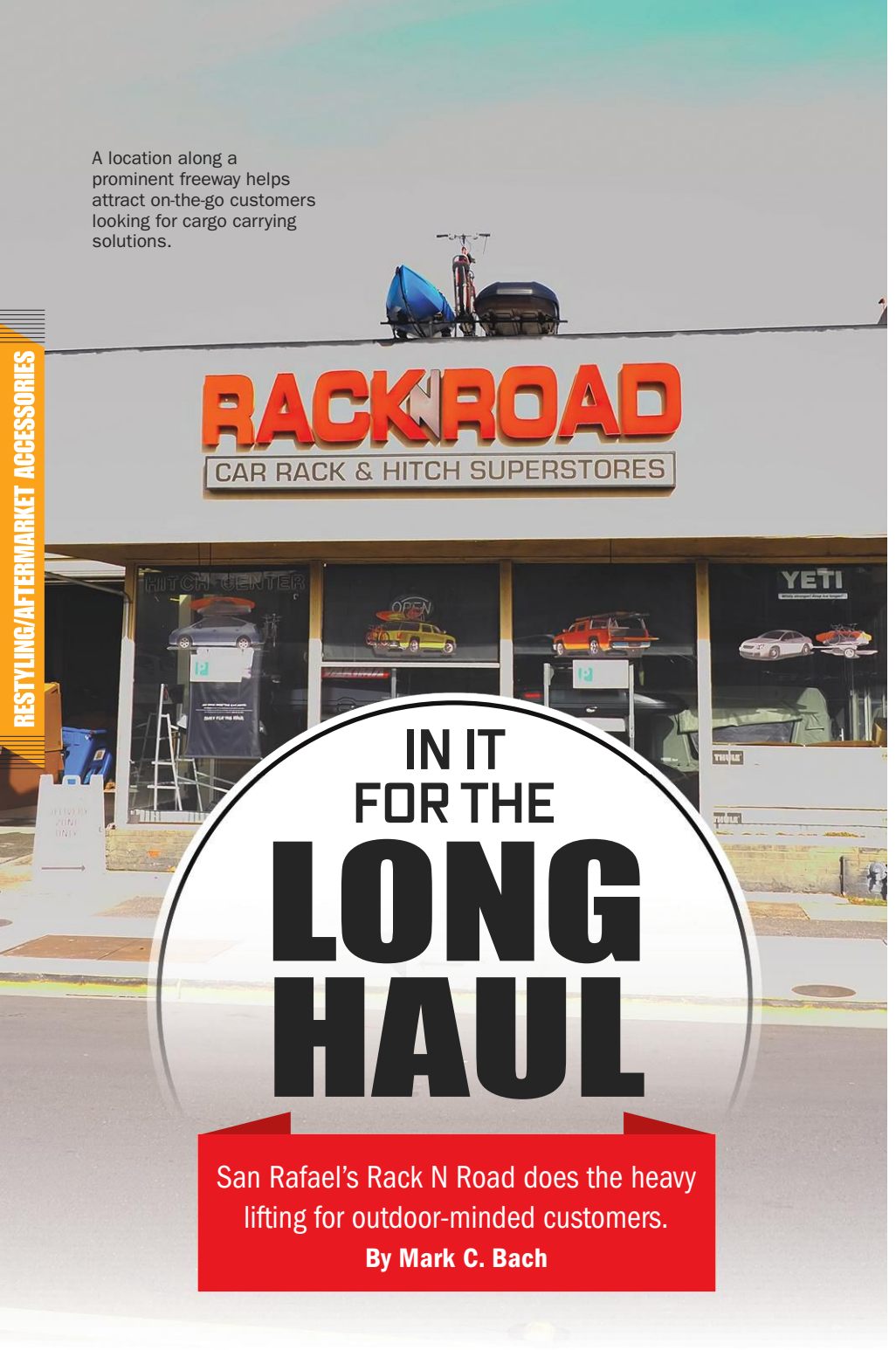
Mixing a love of the outdoors with smart product packaging is a formula for success, says Quadratec's Konkle.

"Offer knowledge, passion, service and affordability. Shop associates should learn the top selling points of each tent and be able to answer questions on why one tent may function better than another for certain customers," he says. "Also, keep an eye on the market and ensure price points are where they need to be while also perhaps offering discounts on accessory items or other overlanding products to increase average dollars per sale."

Add it all up and the products' outlook is bright.

"Once installed, a rooftop tent helps adventurers make the most of their time on each trip," says Napier's McAvoy. "The rooftop tent market is expected to continue to significantly grow between now and 2030." **TS**





A location along a prominent freeway helps attract on-the-go customers looking for cargo carrying solutions.

IN IT FOR THE LONG HAUL

San Rafael's Rack N Road does the heavy lifting for outdoor-minded customers.

By Mark C. Bach



Ryan McCann owns and operates the Rack N Road location in San Rafael, California.

Answering a help wanted post at a "bike shop" led Ryan McCann to the car rack and hitch business. He later helped open three chain stores in the Denver, Colorado, area, oversaw their internet offerings and became the head of marketing.

This involvement allowed him to buy a Rack N Road location in San Rafael, California. In many ways, the story of the Rack N Road business mirrors McCann's involvement in the industry.

THE RACK N ROAD TIMELINE

The founders of Rack N Road, Greg Bauer and three others, recognized that the car rack business was changing. In the 1980s, bicycle shops would offer generic, one-size-fits-all bike racks secured to the vehicle's roof.

But those early racks relied on the roof's rain gutters for attachment. As vehicle manufacturers started removing the gutters from their designs for a more streamlined look, the rack makers had to expand the variety of clips needed to secure the bike racks to various car models.

"That's when it became complicated," says McCann.

For some rack systems, McCann recalls there being 300-400 separate SKUs of door clips for all the various vehicles on the road. This made it difficult for bike shops to offer a quick solution, particularly since their main focus was usually on bike sales rather than installing hitches and racks.

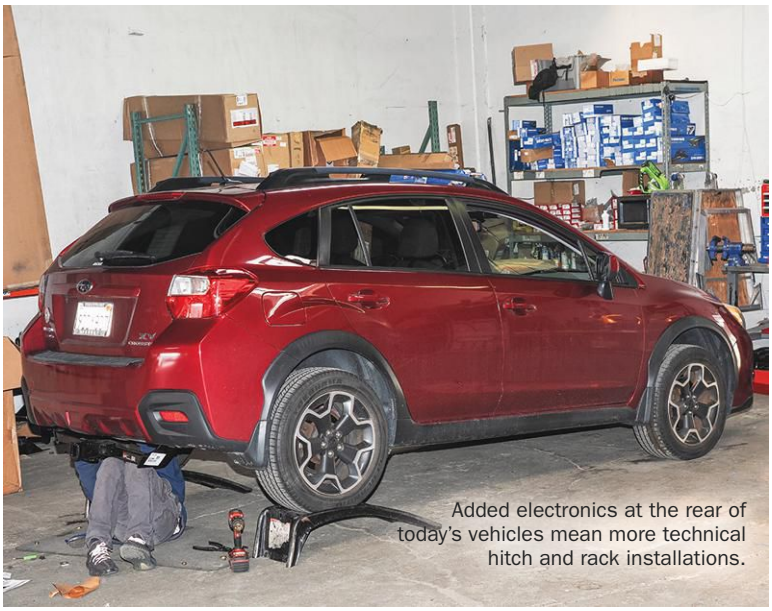
Bauer approached rack manufacturers Thule and Yakima with the concept of a chain specializing in car racks and hitches, and Sports Rack started in Redwood City, California, in 1991.

By 1999, the chain had grown to 16 locations and included a sizable internet-based storefront. McCann notes the business plan often followed the popular outdoor retail chain REI Co-op—wherever REI opened a new store, Sports Rack soon followed.

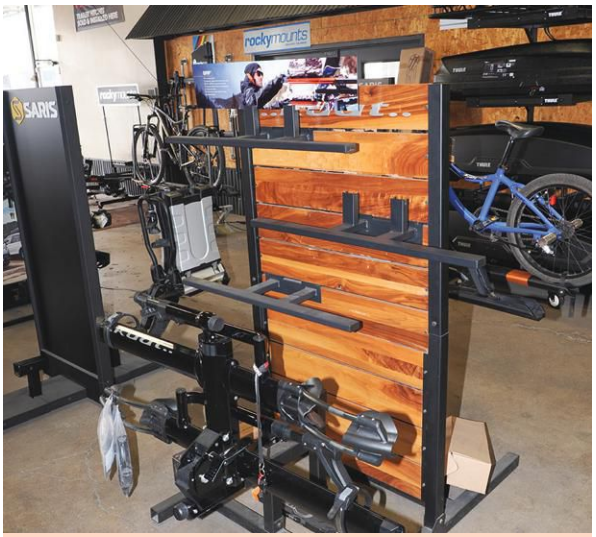
The company also formed its own manufacturing company, BVG, to make bike racks and seven other products, offering them through a private label line. Land Rover was one of BVG's customers, and sensing the popularity of the line, Thule quickly bought out the manufacturing business.

In 2001, the company pivoted, sensing that bike sales and the economy were slowing. It transitioned to Gear on the Go and began offering more baby/family-related products like strollers, pull-behind carts and bike trailers.

As its clientele aged and started families,



Added electronics at the rear of today's vehicles mean more technical hitch and rack installations.



The shop is 4,500 square feet and can handle 10 cars in the install area.

the company changed to reflect the new priorities. Then in 2005, it retooled as Rack N Road, with seven stores in three states.

The company ended up dropping internet sales, as the freight costs for individual deliveries were cost-prohibitive.

"This stuff does not ship. Oh boy, what a mess," says McCann.

In 2015, the owners offered the chain's top management a chance to buy out specific stores, and McCann acquired the San Rafael location in Marin County, north of San Francisco in an affluent section of Northern California.

OWNER'S JOURNEY

When McCann was 20, he was looking for a job and his dad mentioned that a "bike shop" had a help wanted sign. The shop was a Sports Rack store, and McCann was hired full-time at $5.50 an hour.

After a few years he was promoted and helped open three stores in the Denver area. In 2005, those stores were sold to a rival business, and McCann returned home and focused on marketing efforts for the company.

When the offer to buy a store was made, he quickly took ownership of the San Rafael location. The other stores were similarly bought up, and the new owners have since formed a "buyer's group" to coordinate purchases while remaining independently owned and operated.

McCann's store was established in 1997 and is situated along a major freeway near several new car dealerships. He estimates



The store stocks keys and lock cores for major rack brands—typically, five customers a day come in looking for replacement keys. It also inventories small parts that clients often misplace.

business sales are 80% focused on racks and hitches, with 20% devoted to truck accessories, tire chains and other small add-on items.

The shop is 4,500 square feet and can handle 10 cars in the install area. McCann typically has seven employees year-round, and an additional three join in for the summer rush.

The store stocks keys and lock cores for all the major rack brands—typically, five customers a day come in looking for replacement keys, he says. It also inventories small parts that clients often misplace, and McCann's policy is if the customer has a used part that "fits in your hand," he gives them a new one free of charge, helping to build loyalty.

Rack N Road clients typically return every three to five years for a system, once they "buy a new car or learn a new sport," he reports.

ADDED OFFERINGS

Besides sales, the company also rents cargo boxes. The program allows customers to experience the products' versatility and many either become yearly renters or buy one outright to hold their gear.

McCann notes that when he first started in the business, the shop charged $50 to install hitches. These days, due to the advanced sensors and wiring placed at or near the rear bumper of newer vehicles, the price is $650 for the additional time and effort.

IN IT FOR THE LONG HAUL



Some employees have been with the shop since 2016, and McCann adds staff in the summer to handle the warm-weather spike in business.

For instance, many customers don't know they have a feature to open the rear hatch of their vehicle with a sweep of their foot under the bumper. That OE option impacts which aftermarket hitches can be installed.

So, McCann ends up having two hitch options on hand before an installation, because even if the customer insists they don't have that foot-activated "option" they often do and just never realized it.

Customers can generally get a roof rack installed the same day, and a hitch can be ready in a week.

A renewed focus on customer service and inventory was prompted by the pandemic. When COVID struck, deliveries slowed tremendously, and when companies couldn't deliver as promised, customers became upset.

McCann remembers it got so bad that vendors would not provide estimated shipping dates, so orders arrived whenever and wherever.

During the early days of the pandemic the auto business was exempt from shutdown orders, but if an employee felt unsafe and wanted to stay home, McCann encouraged it.

His business slowed a bit in March and April, 2020. However, that May, it skyrocketed as customers wanted to get out of their homes yet still stay socially distanced.

SUNNY SKIES

McCann credits his staff with the shop's strong sales. His advice to fellow business owners is to locate core workers who can help run and grow the company, admitting that at times it's easy to "take your eye off" the basics.

"Staff will think you are a mind reader, but I'm really not," he adds.

The company does a few pay-for-click campaigns on the internet to stimulate new business, but most customers come in thanks to referrals or from having seen the store from the freeway.

The market's future may be in hitch-mounted and related racks, McCann predicts. With more cars, SUVs and CUVs offering larger panoramic windows in their roofs, he believes that roof racks will become less popular. Raising a bike is more challenging and riskier, and the available installation spots become sparser.

He also envisions dealerships and car manufacturers offering more in-house versions of racks and hitches, with some customers opting for OEM products without realizing the many options available in the aftermarket, adding yet another challenge.

Not to be deterred, among the newest opportunities is a rising interest in overlanding, as well as catering to more affluent customers willing and able to pay for feature-rich systems.

Through it all, as long as drivers want to take it all with them, Rack N Road will be there for the long haul. ***TS***

MARK C. BACH *is a well-preserved automotive junkie with 30W oil in his veins who remembers feeler gauges and brake springs. He has a love for all things that move, especially old-school muscle cars. Bach covers car auctions and the automotive scene and writes for a variety of outlets, including Chevy Classics, Round-Up Publications and eBay Motors, and maintains route66pubco.com.*

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THE tie THAT Binds

4 steps toward strengthening dealer relationships. By Josh Poulson

If you ever work with car dealerships, you know that as rewarding as it can be sometimes, it can also have its rocky periods.

It could be a change in leadership at the dealership or a change in philosophy by the dealer principal. Or it could even be an outside influence like competitors or the OE manufacturers that put your business to the test.

You can't control these things, yet you still must watch every step you take to keep the train rolling. Quite frankly, it sometimes feels like even when things are great, they could still collapse with one false step.

So, how strong are your current dealer relationships? How can you maintain and strengthen your business bonds?

Here are four tips to get and keep you on the right track:

1 CONTINUALLY WORK ON YOUR DEALER RELATIONSHIPS

Since the pandemic, the way cars are sold has changed dramatically. It started with heavy discounts after the lockdowns, then transitioned to no discounts and simple order taking, to now actually selling again.

Some of the sales force at your dealerships have never been in this situation before, so they need to be trained, or retrained, on how to sell cars, as well as your aftermarket products.

Don't assume that seasoned salespeople or managers will teach new people how to utilize your services. Take the initiative and start from scratch, educating sales team members on the basics of selling your in-demand products and services.

Also, never take for granted that the relationship is great. As a customer, you and your team should adopt the philosophy that you have to earn the dealership's business every day. Never think you have it all wrapped up or that what you are doing is untouchable.

The moment you get complacent is the day things start falling apart.

Dealer relationships require constant nurturing to keep them strong and healthy.

Think about it—have you ever had a product vendor or manufacturer that you had a great relationship with suddenly start slacking off a little bit and take your business for granted? What could eventually happen?

Exactly—you start to see product offerings from their competitor and you're more inclined to take a second look. Then you might open the door for this new source to do a little business, and next thing you know, you have a new relationship, and the first vendor is wondering what happened.

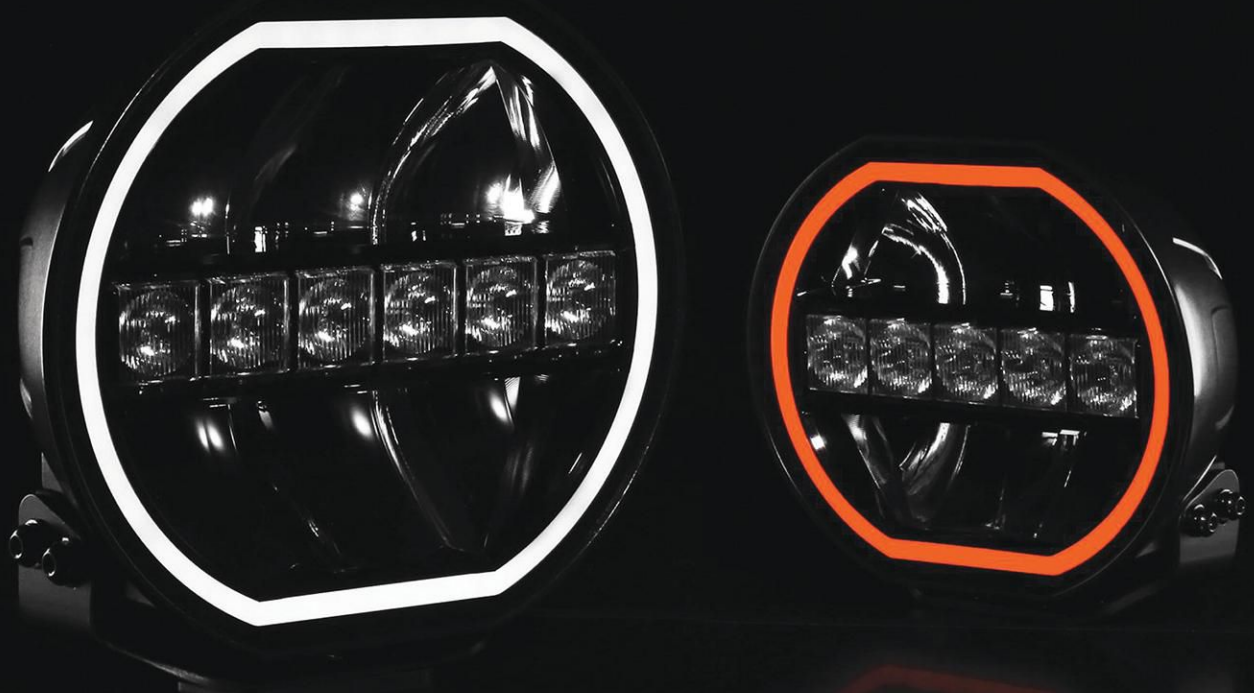
It can happen fast and to any of us. So, don't get complacent, don't take it for granted and work on your relationships with your car dealers every day.

2 SQUELCH POTENTIAL FEARS

We all should be doing our due

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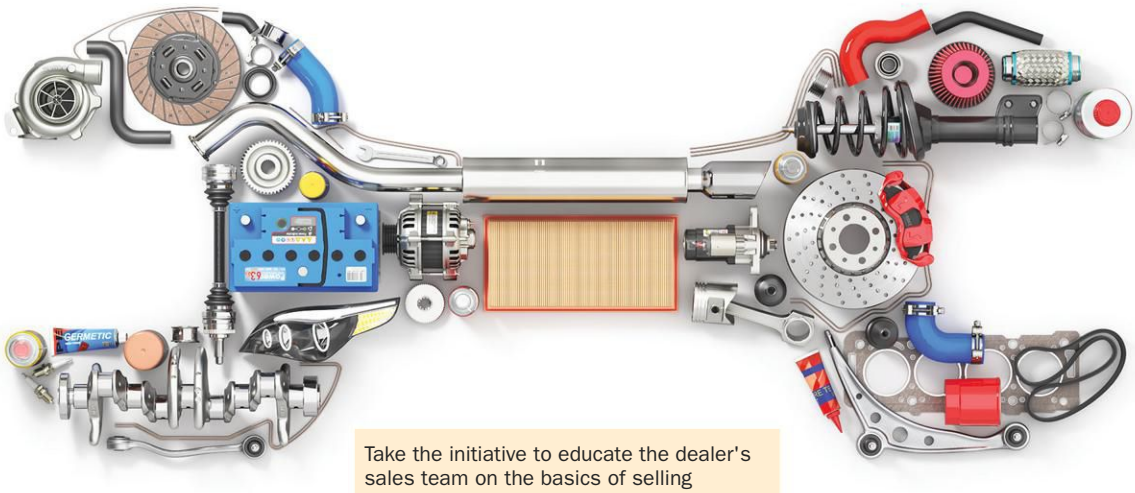


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Take the initiative to educate the dealer's sales team on the basics of selling aftermarket products and services.

diligence continually to make sure that our customers have no valid fears of doing business with us.

Whether it's warranty concerns, product concerns or liability concerns, all of us need to be working with dealerships to make sure those fears don't gain traction. This requires communication and, sometimes, documentation.

When was the last time you dropped off a copy of your insurance liability document to show dealers that you are insured and are offering them protection? Do you simply wait until you are asked for it?

Wouldn't it be better to be proactive and make sure leadership knows they are protected and you have documented it so that if or when an issue arises they can vouch for you instead of coming to you later, asking for the info?

Also, do you introduce new products and lead training sessions so that, again, your products are less likely to be "oversold" by an anxious salesperson at the dealership? Do they realistically know what you or your products can and can't accomplish, so that they are less likely to put you in a spot of overpromising and underdelivering?

Try to think of the fears a dealership might have of doing business with you and then do what you can to address those concerns in advance.



Never miss an opportunity to show you are a willing partner.

3 BE A PARTNER

Yes, they are your customer, and yes, you want to go over and above because they are your customer, but honestly that type of one-sided relationship can get old for the owner of a restyling shop that looks at issues raised as simply loss of income.

When you view going the extra mile as giving your customer a discount, or if you pay for something that's not your fault or do more work just to make a customer happy, and then later add up the dollars associated with it as lost revenue, animosity can quickly build and at some point you could snap and ruin the relationship.

When this happens, even if you are in the right and justified, what did you really gain? Yep, lost sales!

Being a "partner" means that you know going in that you are going to have to work together and that sometimes you will "win" and other times the dealership will "win." The goal is to be successful enough and to do enough that you win a lot more than you lose.



Address any potential fears in advance so dealerships are comfortable recommending your products to car buyers.

The dealer may not look at you as a partner at first, but over time if you are reasonable, willing to help, take a loss at times and then continue to show up and serve them with a good attitude, then you will eventually be looked at as a valued partner.

How do you make it happen? Maybe it's working directly with an upset vehicle owner—even if you did nothing wrong—and appeasing them, even if it costs you time and money.

Maybe it's paying for a broken part on a vehicle that you know your shop didn't break, but someone at the dealership or the customer thinks you did.

Maybe it's discounting something because leadership really needs a win this month and feels comfortable enough to ask you for help.

Whatever it is, never miss an opportunity to show that you are a willing partner. Eventually, it will work to your advantage, and the dealer will be more likely to reciprocate when you need help on something yourself, or business is slow.

Dealers can be tough sometimes, but they are still humans, and they inherently know that a relationship or partnership can't always be one-sided.

4 UNDERSTAND THAT PERCEPTION IS REALITY

How does the dealership view you? How do the managers, salespeople, service techs, business development center (BDS) specialists and parts counter staff view your company?

Remember, perception is reality, so warranted or not, we all must continually work on how we are perceived.

Do whatever you can, as often as you can, to work on your perception. One great way to do this is, when you do help out a dealership, make sure they know it.

This doesn't mean bragging or pounding your chest, but maybe after you've helped a customer who is now happy, ask them to contact the dealership and let them know about the good job you did for them.

It's one thing to tell a dealership that you've helped them out, but it is much better when one of their customers brags about you!

As you can see, whether it's building or maintaining a relationship with a dealer, it takes a lot of work. But, it can be worth it if you are willing to do the little things that not all shops will. ***TS***



Named the 2022-23 SEMA Person of the Year, ***JOSH POULSON*** *is the principal of Auto Additions in Columbus, Ohio, which was named Restyler of the Year, 2012-13. Auto Additions offers a complete line of product upgrades including 12V and appearance packages with a specific focus on the dealership segment. Josh is chairman of the SEMA PRO council.*





Tacoma Steps

Magnum, Hayward, California, presents its new RT Gen 2 Steps, including applications for 2022-23 Toyota Tundra CrewMax models. Featuring a unique angled drop-step design that's 30% longer and wider than the original RT Step, Gen 2 offerings include slotted step areas for grip and drainage and a 500-pound weight rating. The steps are made from cold rolled steel, with a three-stage black powder-coat finish and armor plates to prevent rock chips. They are compatible with Raptor Series 10-inch Universal LED Light Strips that are sold separately.



Tacoma Bumper

Body Armor 4x4, Ontario, California, presents its new HiLine Front Bumper for 2015-23 Toyota Tacoma models. A sleek, low-profile design alleviates clearance issues and improves approach and departure angles while also providing a rugged appearance. A two-stage, light-textured black powder-coat finish offers protection against scratches and scrapes. Highlights include a welded bull bar; fitment for 20-inch, dual-row LED light bars; integrated shackle recovery points; 10,000-pound winch capacity; and a license plate bracket.

Sprinter Van Fender Flares

EGR USA, Ontario, California, introduces Rugged Style Fender Flares in a UV-protected black matte finish for 2019-22 Mercedes-Benz Sprinter van models. CNC robotically trimmed for a precision fit and developed from high-quality virgin material, the flares install easily with no drilling required. Manufactured in the USA, they add tire coverage for customization and protection.





4Runner Lifts

ToyTec Lifts, Denver, a **DPI Off-Road Brand**, offers its 2-inch/3-inch Suspension Lift System for 2010-23 Toyota 4Runner applications. The system includes upper control arms, Aluma Series Boss 2.0 front coil-overs, Aluma Series IFP Rear 2.0 shocks, Superflex rear coils, a front differential drop kit, a rear bump stop drop kit and a **Tuff Country** upper control arm kit.



Bronco Billet Upper Control Arms

ICON Vehicle Dynamics, Riverside, California, presents Billet Upper Control Arms featuring the all-new Delta Joint PRO for 2021-up Ford Bronco applications. Designed to free-up movement to allow maximum travel for performance shocks and coil-overs, the arms are CNC-machined from 6061 billet aluminum and include a satin anodized finish. The lightweight, hybrid H-beam cross-section resists bending forces, and the Delta Joint PRO delivers up to 90 degrees of free articulation to maximize suspension travel without binding.

Ram TRX Sway Bars

Hellwig Products, Visalia, California, presents new Front and Rear Sway Bar options for Ram TRX pickup models that improve stability and comfort for daily driving and while under load without sacrificing maneuverability. Both sway bars are made from solid heat-treated chromoly steel and offer increased stiffness over factory sway bars, resulting in improved handling, comfort and safety for everyday driving and towing/hauling applications.





E-Bike Rack

1UP USA, Dickeyville, Wisconsin, introduces the Xtreme Duty (XD) E-bike Rack. The rack mounts to a standard 2-inch hitch and is capable of carrying up to 150 pounds per bike tray, and up to three bikes with fatter tires. The XD's modular design is compatible with any 1UP Quik Rack Add-On, is 100% made in the USA and comes preassembled. Pair it with 1UP's proprietary new V Style Ramp to go from the box to loaded on the hitch in under 5 minutes.

Centralized Power Control

REDARC, Australia, presents the TVMS Rogue centralized power control system. Providing 10 outputs for easy control of lights, heaters, fridges and more, the setup can be paired with the REDVISION system for control via a phone app. Approximately 75% smaller and lighter than the original TVMS, which is now dubbed the TVMS Prime, the Rogue is particularly suited for use in smaller trucks and SUVs.





CUV Shocks

BILSTEIN, Poway, California, presents its new B8 TerraSport Direct-Fit Shocks for CUVs. Designed to increase ground clearance and improve off-road capabilities, the shocks lift the vehicle by 1 to 2 inches, depending on the application. Patented digressive valving instantly reacts to changing surface conditions for added safely without sacrificing ride comfort or quality. Availability includes 2015-20 Jeep Renegade, 2013-18 Toyota RAV4 and 2013-17 Subaru Crosstrek models.

Rock Lights

PROJECT X, Costa Mesa, California, presents its ROX Rock Light System. Combining a powerful pure white light LED and a fully customizable RGB system in one package, the setup features integrated 4K ultra-high-definition cameras included in two of the units, offering drivers the ability to see obstacles from a mobile device screen utilizing the PROJECT X app.







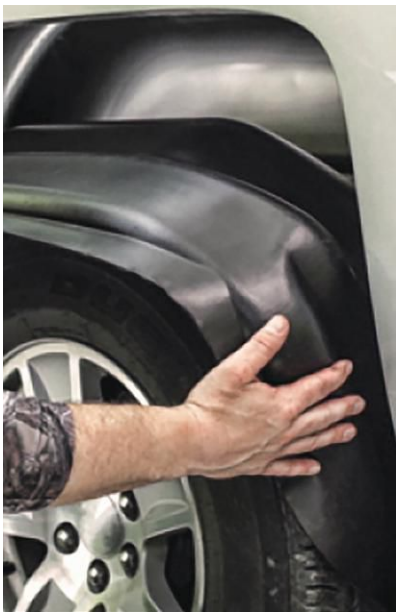
TRX Lift Kit

Daystar Products, Phoenix, a **DPI Off-Road Brand**, presents its made-in-the USA Comfort Ride suspension kits, including an application for Ram 1500 TRX models. The 2.5-inch leveling kit offers performance and appearance enhancements, with an easy-to-install design that eliminates metal on metal contact with no welding required. The kit includes front and rear polyurethane spacers.

Hard Folding Bed Covers



TrailFX, Exeter, Pennsylvania, presents its Premium Hard Folding Tonneau Covers, designed to keep belongings safe and secure. The matte black aluminum covers feature a three-panel design with carpeted underlining and weather-resistant seals. They lock with the tailgate and can be used in three riding positions. Built with quality materials and easy-to-operate mechanisms, the units deliver style and function.



Wheel Well Guards

Husky Liners, Winfield, Kansas, presents its made-in-the-USA Wheel Well Guards for a variety of vehicle models. Designed to repel mud, rocks, snow and salt, the guards leave no room for rust while enhancing the vehicle's appearance.



Hilux Rear Suspension Kit

Timbren Industries, Whitby, Ontario, presents an SES Suspension Enhancement System for 2015-23 Toyota Hilux models. The rear suspension kit, part number TORHLX, mounts to the axle using the OEM U-bolts. It includes zero-maintenance helper spring upgrades that transform the driving experience for customers who tow and haul by eliminating suspension sag and improving ride quality. The system also fits Mitsubishi Triton models.



Hub Centric Wheel Spacers

Synergy Mfg., San Luis Obispo, California, presents Hub Centric Wheel Spacers that increase wheel offset to match larger tires on lifted vehicles. The spacers improve clearance on the axle to allow for some aftermarket upgrades such as larger steering arms. They also help restore correct kingpin angles to larger tires while providing the vehicle with a more aggressive look.

Solar Panels

Sunflare Co., La Verne, California, presents the XPLOR Solar Series of durable solar panels, designed and engineered for off-grid travel. Available in Weekend (105W), Adventure (126W) and Expedition (180W) models, the solar cells are light and flexible. Bypass diodes on each individual solar cell eliminate shading issues, and the panels are laminated with industry-leading **3M** plastics. The XPLOR Series installs easily with double-sided adhesives.





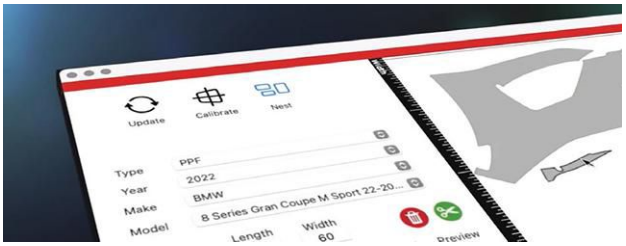
Commercial Print Wrap Film

3M, St. Paul, Minnesota, introduces new Print Film and Overlaminate for commercial vehicles. Created for impactful installation and performance, 3M Print Wrap Film IJ280 with 3M Comply v4 Air Release and 3M Gloss Wrap Overlaminate 8428G combine to promote efficient installations with less rework, helping save time and money. Installers can confidently wrap commercial vehicles with less effort without sacrificing quality.

Tailgate Gap Cover

Ecoological, Rocklin, California, presents the GapShield Tailgate Gap Cover, a simple solution to prevent rocks and other debris from falling in and becoming trapped in the tailgate gap. Easy to install, the cover offers additional protection in areas where traditional bedliner sprays don't reach and helps seal the bed from moisture and dust intrusion.





Cutting Software

Fellers, Tulsa, Oklahoma, presents newly updated DIGI-CUT easy-to-use Tint and Paint Protection Film Software. The system features a comprehensive library of accurate templates, VIN number search capability, and the ability for installers to use any film type, with plans to further expand to full vehicle paint protection patterns soon. The DIGICUT software is a month-to-month subscription and does not require a long-term contract.



Toyota RAV4 Components

Ironman 4x4, Sherwood, Oregon, introduces a new line of Aftermarket Accessories for Toyota RAV4 models including the Ironman ATS Suspension, ATS X Bumper Guard, Atlas Crossbars and Uberlight Tent. The Ironman 4x4 ATS Suspension utilizes vehicle-tuned shocks and heavy-duty coil springs to improve clearance and ride and expand tire options. The ATS X Bumper Guard incorporates a steel skid plate and allows for seamless installation of light bars or individual light pods. ***TS***



END TO END COVERAGE

A roundup of recent wrap & film happenings.

From tint and paint protection to vinyl wraps and graphics, there's always plenty going on in the world of automotive films. Here's a roundup of recent film-related projects, announcements and introductions.

NOW YOU SEE ME ...

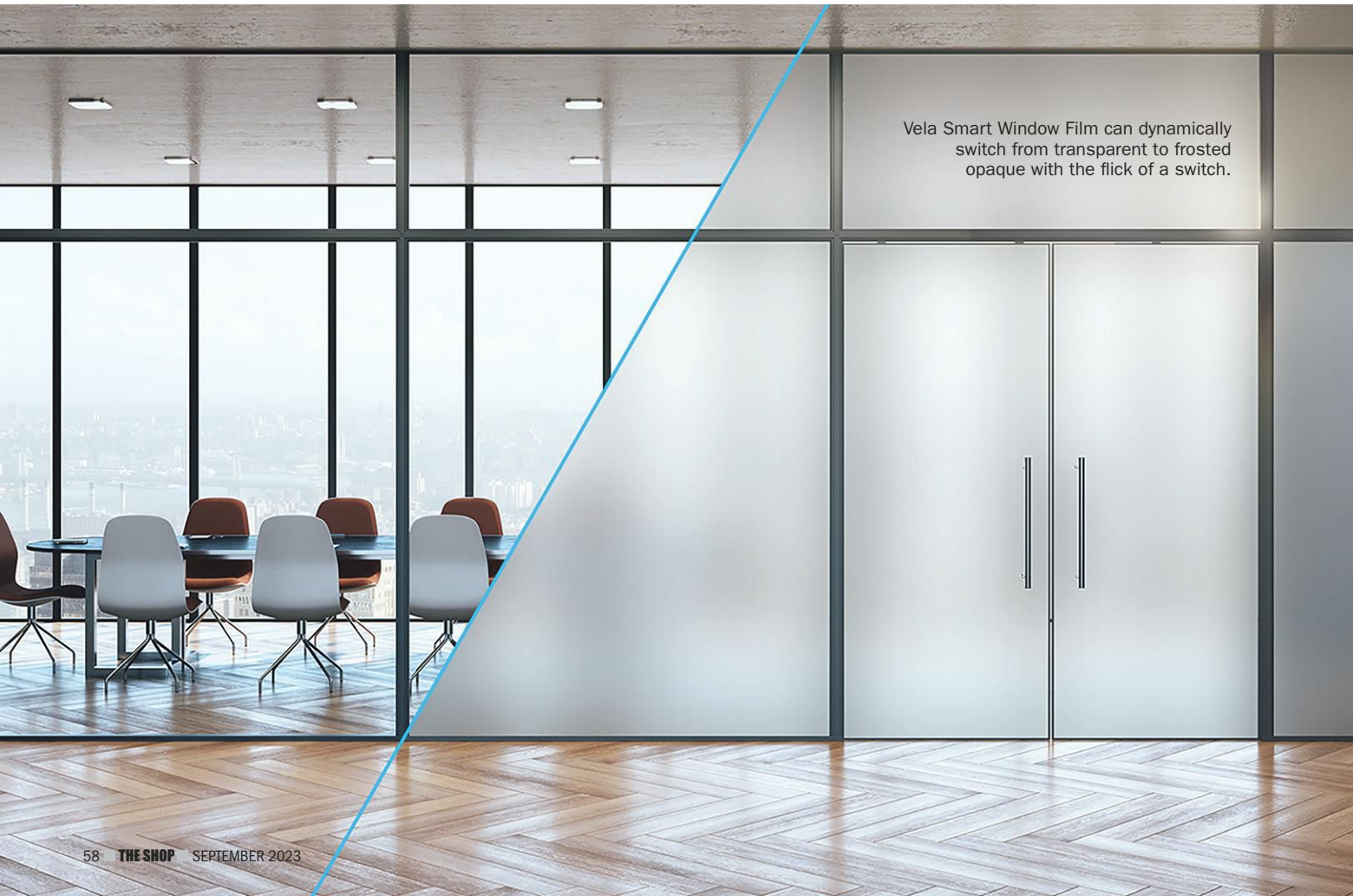
Avery Dennison switched gears from its automotive line to highlight a pair of architectural products that could help shops broaden their horizons.

The company's Vela Smart Window Film can enhance the appearance and functionality of interior spaces by dynamically switching from transparent to frosted opaque with the flick of a switch. Plus, in its fully opaque, turned-off state, Vela smart film can double as a whiteboard surface that can be written on and erased.

"While the product was introduced to the market in 2021, this innovative film technology is still new to the architectural market," Avery Dennison officials note. "Awareness of smart films is increasing, as these specialty and decorative films offer a way to transform commercial, retail, hospitality and healthcare spaces with smart and connected technology—offering privacy and projection, and whiteboard surfaces."

Vela is designed to be applied to almost any interior glass and engineered for easy maintenance, according to the company.

Meanwhile, Avery Dennison added Modular Poly Clear 2-mil Window Film to its portfolio in June. The stackable film adheres to rigid plastic substrates and is designed to be combined with interior or



Vela Smart Window Film can dynamically switch from transparent to frosted opaque with the flick of a switch.



Stackable Modular Poly Clear 2-mil Window Film adheres to rigid plastic substrates and can be combined with interior or exterior solar or decorative films intended solely for glass surfaces.

exterior solar or decorative films that are only intended for glass surfaces.

"The key advantage of Modular Poly Clear 2-mil Window Film is its stackability," the company says. "Another added benefit is that it does not require any cure time when stacking."

Installers can use it in conjunction with other films to create custom solutions for rigid plastic surfaces, including combining it with a solar window film for increased solar protection or combining it with a decorative window film to create privacy and added aesthetics.

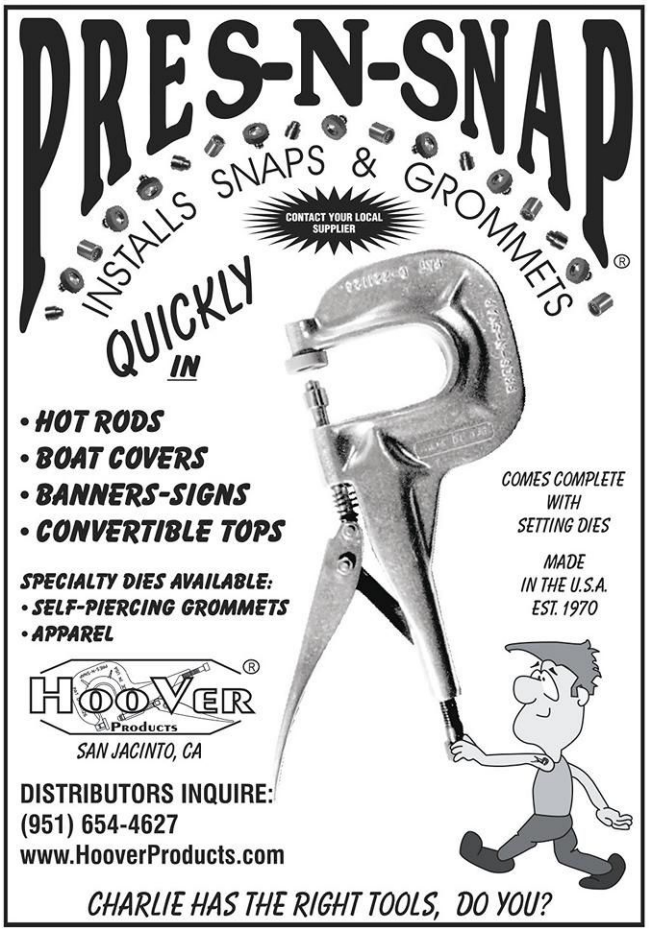
ADAMS STEPS DOWN FROM XPEL BOARD

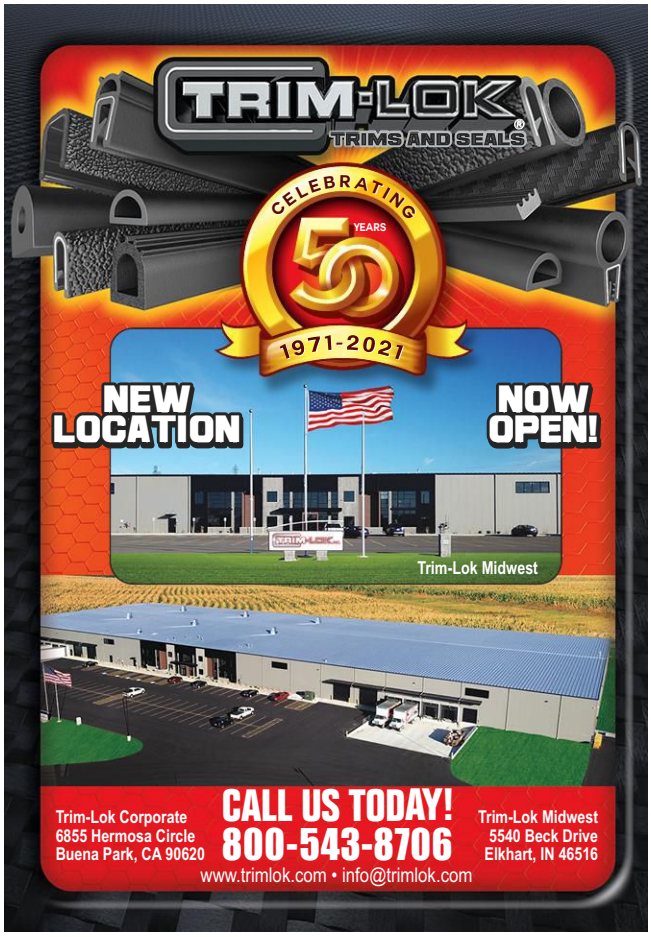
Mark Adams retired in June from the board of directors of global protective films and coatings provider XPEL.

"We thank Mark for his many years of service on the board and his role of lead independent director," says Ryan Pape, XPEL board chairman and CEO. "Mark has made many meaningful contributions to the company over the years. We wish him all the best as he steps away from the board."

The company is working to expand the board from five to seven members and will replace Adams from among candidates identified through an ongoing process, according to a press release.

"I am very proud to have served as the board's lead independent director and to have played a small part in the extraordinary success story of XPEL these last 13 years," Adams says. "Serving on this board has been my distinct honor and privilege, and a highlight of my business career."





LLUMAR EXTENDS HENDRICK SPONSORSHIP

Eastman Performance Films, under its LLumar brand of window and paint protection films, has extended its sponsorship of Hendrick Motorsports, 2020 NASCAR Cup Series champion Chase Elliott and the No. 9 Chevrolet Camaro ZL1 team for three additional seasons, the company recently announced.

The sponsorship will run through 2026. LLumar will be a primary sponsor of Elliott for two races each season and a major associate sponsor in all other Cup Series events.

"We are excited to extend our sponsorship with Hendrick Motorsports and the No. 9 team," says Erin Bernhardt, general manager of Eastman Performance Films. "This sponsorship has helped increase awareness of the LLumar brand and the benefits of window tint and paint protection film for drivers and homeowners."

As part of the extension, LLumar will be the primary sponsor on the No. 9 Chevrolet for two upcoming races this season—the Aug. 26 regular season finale at Daytona International Speedway and the Oct. 1 event at Talladega Superspeedway, where Elliott is the defending race winner.

LLumar will also be the primary sponsor at the Oct. 15 Las Vegas Motor Speedway race as previously announced, the company adds.



LLumar has extended its sponsorship of Hendrick Motorsports and 2020 NASCAR Cup Series champion Chase Elliott.

"We're delighted to extend our program with Eastman and the LLumar brand," says Rick Hendrick, owner of Hendrick Motorsports. "LLumar offers tremendous products that we stand behind through the No. 9 team and in our Hendrick Automotive Group car dealerships across the country. It's been rewarding to see them win races with Chase, translating to even more success off the track. We look forward to the future and continuing to grow our relationship together."

TINT WORLD PARTNERS WITH ZZ-2

Window tint and accessory franchise Tint World Automotive Styling Centers is partnering with ZZ-2, an engineering and manufacturing provider specializing in OEM technology integration.

ZZ-2 provides premium Apple CarPlay, Android Auto and video integration solutions for the automotive market, connecting the latest entertainment, convenience and safety technology with factory OEM systems. With more than 15 years of experience in the 12V industry and five years serving North America, the company offers products that drive new market opportunities for automotive service and aftermarket retailers.



Tint World Automotive Styling Centers is partnering with ZZ-2, an engineering and manufacturing provider specializing in OEM technology integration.

"Working with Tint World offers a unique opportunity for us to reach customers with our high-quality products and continue driving growth in the North American market," says Tiago Sperandio, vice president of ZZ-2. "This partnership elevates both brands and empowers each company to continue delivering extraordinary products and services to drivers throughout Tint World's growing market."

Since 1982, Tint World has offered automotive aftermarket styling solutions including premium window tinting, protective films, nano ceramic coatings, vehicle wraps, advanced driver assistance and security systems, car and truck accessories, and custom wheels and tires.

"ZZ-2's technology integration products are unmatched in quality and reliability," says Charles J. Bonfiglio, president and CEO of Tint World. "It's an ideal partnership—two fast-growing industry leaders driving success through quality and innovation. We're committed to providing the largest selection of category-leading brands, and this ensures we're giving our customers the quality and choice they expect."

WRAPMATE INVESTS IN WRAPIFY

Wrapmate has completed a strategic majority investment in Wrapify, a leader in measurable rideshare advertising and a three-time Inc. 5000 company.

Together the two companies will leverage their operational synergies, technology platforms and buying power while supporting a combined network of nearly 2,000 car wrap installers, according to an announcement.

The partnership will offer premium vehicle wraps produced on high-quality 3M wrap films.

"With its patented technology and years of serving some of the largest brands on the planet, Wrapify is a pioneering company that brings scale and measurement to the Moving Out of Home (MOOH) space," says Chris Loar, CEO and founder of Wrapmate. "The addition of Wrapify's team, customer base and world-class technology strengthens and accelerates our overall mission of modernizing the historically overlooked and archaic vehicle graphics industry."

A goal for both organizations has been to streamline the process of wrapping vehicles on a national scale. Wrapmate connects wraps buyers with companies that produce and install graphics, while Wrapify's Boost creates actionable audiences from the exposure to branded vehicles for online digital remarketing, in-app and Connected TV (CTV).

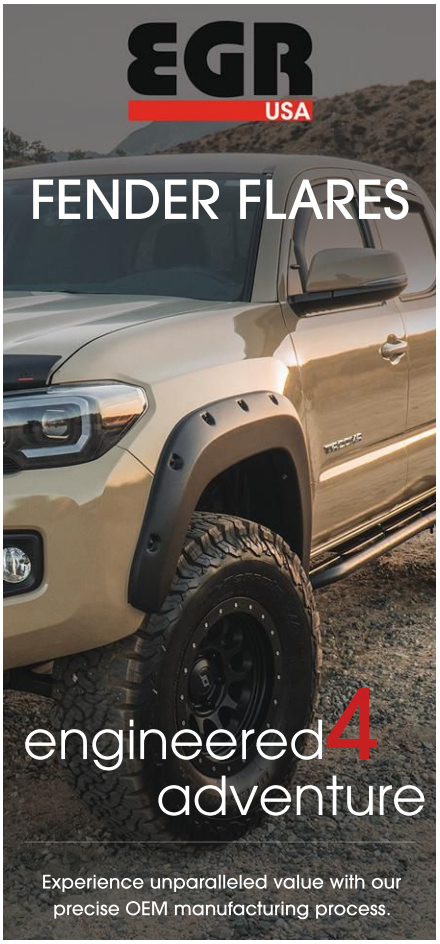
"Wrapmate has done an incredible job over the last four years leveraging technology to change how people buy and sell vehicle wraps," says James Heller, CEO and founder of Wrapify. "Our team has known Chris and Wrapmate for years, and we've focused on similar operational obstacles. Now we can make better use of the 12-plus years of combined experience to delight our customers."



Wrapmate has completed a strategic majority investment in Wrapify, a leader in measurable rideshare advertising.

Some of these items originally appeared on theshopmag.com. Visit today and sign up for the free daily eNewsletter. **TS**





THE
BACK SEAT
IS NOW THE
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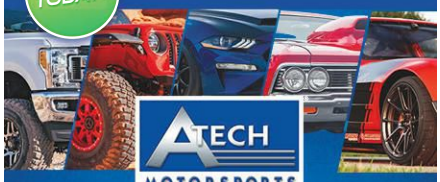
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Restoring the Restoration Workforce

Many automotive businesses are in dire need of skilled workers. One vehicle builder is looking to do something about it.

Velocity Modern Classics in Pensacola, Florida, has launched a new apprenticeship program aimed at training the next generation of restoration professionals. In response to an ongoing shortage of skilled labor in the automotive industry, the program is part of a commitment to American manufacturing and an investment in technician education, according to Velocity officials.

Are potential employees interested? The first paid apprenticeship program received more than 400 applications, the company notes, with promises to teach students body fabrication, painting, engine assembly and other specialized mechanical skills.

"Everyone is having staffing issues of some sort these days, but the classic automotive industry as a whole needs more skilled labor," says Jeremy Hans, CEO of Velocity Modern Classics. "We saw a huge opportunity to foster local talent and show them the way we do things at Velocity."

The three-month program was built from the ground up and is designed to accept applicants with no prior experience, Hans notes. While most trade schools charge to take classes, Velocity pays each apprentice while they learn.

Specialized automotive skills courses include three weeks of classroom learning and three weeks of on-the-job training. Each class takes a deep dive into one stage of Velocity's restoration and assembly process, according to the company.

The program accepted its initial round of applicants in February, focusing on paint, bodywork and fabrication techniques, and was held at Velocity's 135,000-square-foot facility.

Participants also gain hands-on experience working in a state-of-the-art restoration shop. Velocity has already expanded the program to include assembly and metalwork training and plans to add classes related to all portions of its assembly process.

"Our team put a lot of work into the curriculum, and we're seeing great results already," Hans says.

The Florida-based vehicle specialist began restoring Broncos and Scouts in 2011 and recently expanded its offerings to include F-series trucks and other classic vehicles.

"With a workforce of over 120 passionate automotive artisans, Velocity has perfected the production restoration process and builds every vehicle completely in-house with a 14-week turnaround," the company notes.

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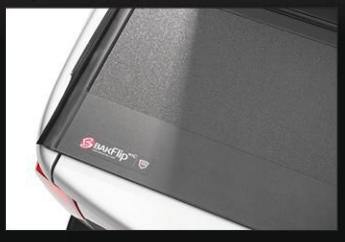
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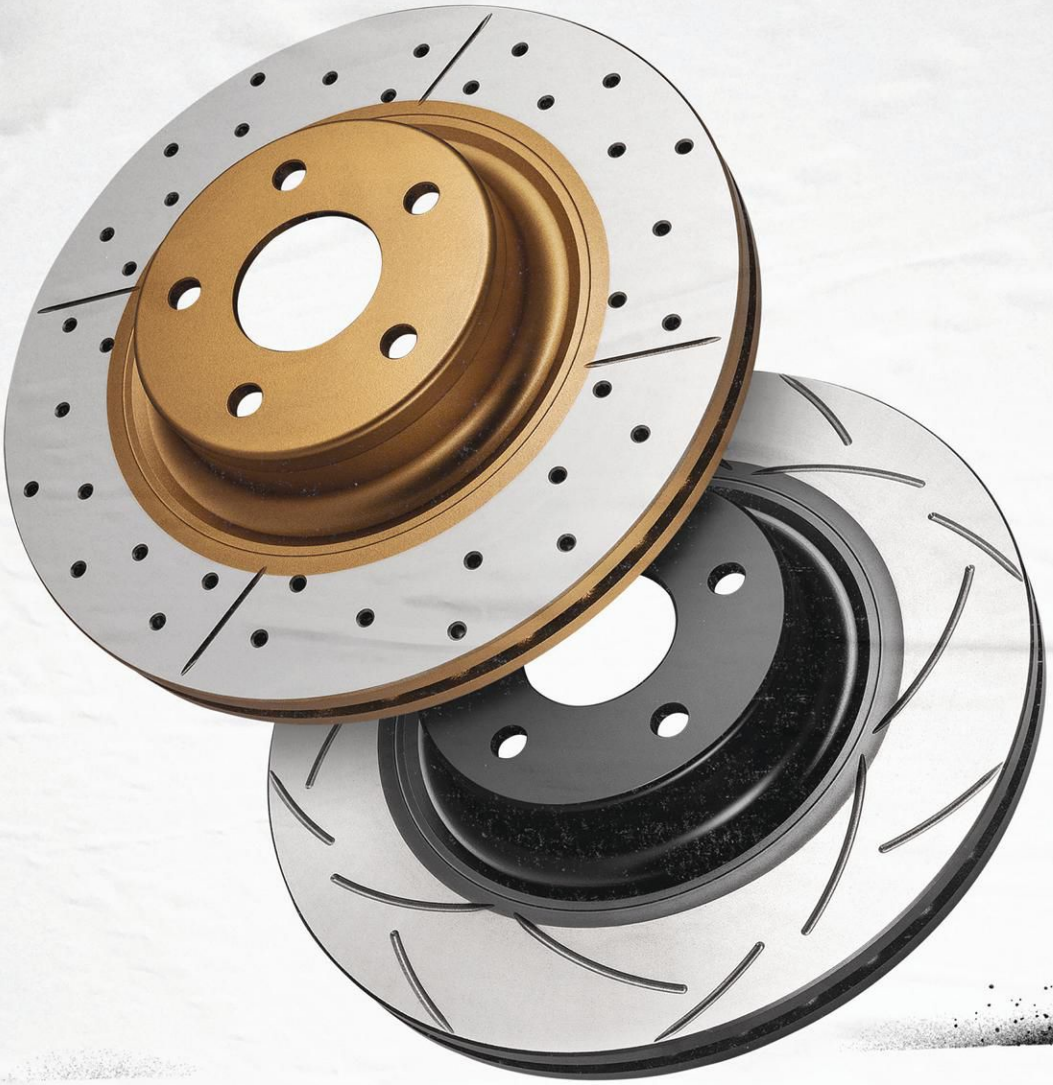
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