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Jef White
Editor
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An Industry Doing Its Part

As shop owners looking to manage your way through the holiday season and welcome a new year, there's reason to feel a sense of pride in all you've accomplished—for your customers and the country at large.

New economic data released by the Specialty Equipment Market Association (SEMA) shows that the specialty automotive aftermarket makes a significant impact on America's economy. While the automotive industry at large may be changing, the desire of car lovers to improve and individualize their vehicles remains strong.

Amid this fall's United Auto Workers strike and other challenges, the SEMA Economic Impact Report provides data showing that the aftermarket is robust and well positioned—even in an uncertain economic environment.

The report, which was conducted by John Dunham & Associates and based on 2023 U.S. economic data, highlights several key findings:

- Nationwide, the specialty equipment industry supports more than 1.3 million American jobs
- More than $104 billion worth of wages and benefits earned by American workers annually are supported by the industry
- The industry accounts for more than $40 billion in taxes, including $24 billion in federal taxes and $16 billion in state and local taxes, which support the development of critical national and local infrastructure
- The industry contributes more than $336 billion to the American economy annually

"We're extremely proud that our industry represents such a key part of America's economy, affecting any motorist who has upgraded their vehicle for a host of needs," says Mike Spagnola, SEMA's president and CEO. "SEMA's 7,000-plus members, which are primarily small businesses, and the more than 1 million workers in the specialty aftermarket, are extraordinary contributors to making the United States and local economies stronger. It's an industry that, one way or another, everyone has a stake in. It provides people with good-paying jobs, and our local, state and federal coffers with taxes that grow our country's economy."

The economic impact study complements the industry's annual market report on consumer trends released earlier this year that showed buyers spent $52 billion on specialty automotive aftermarket products in 2022.

It's nice to know that, no matter where your company is in its life cycle, we're all part of an industry that's doing its part. ***TS***

THE SHOP

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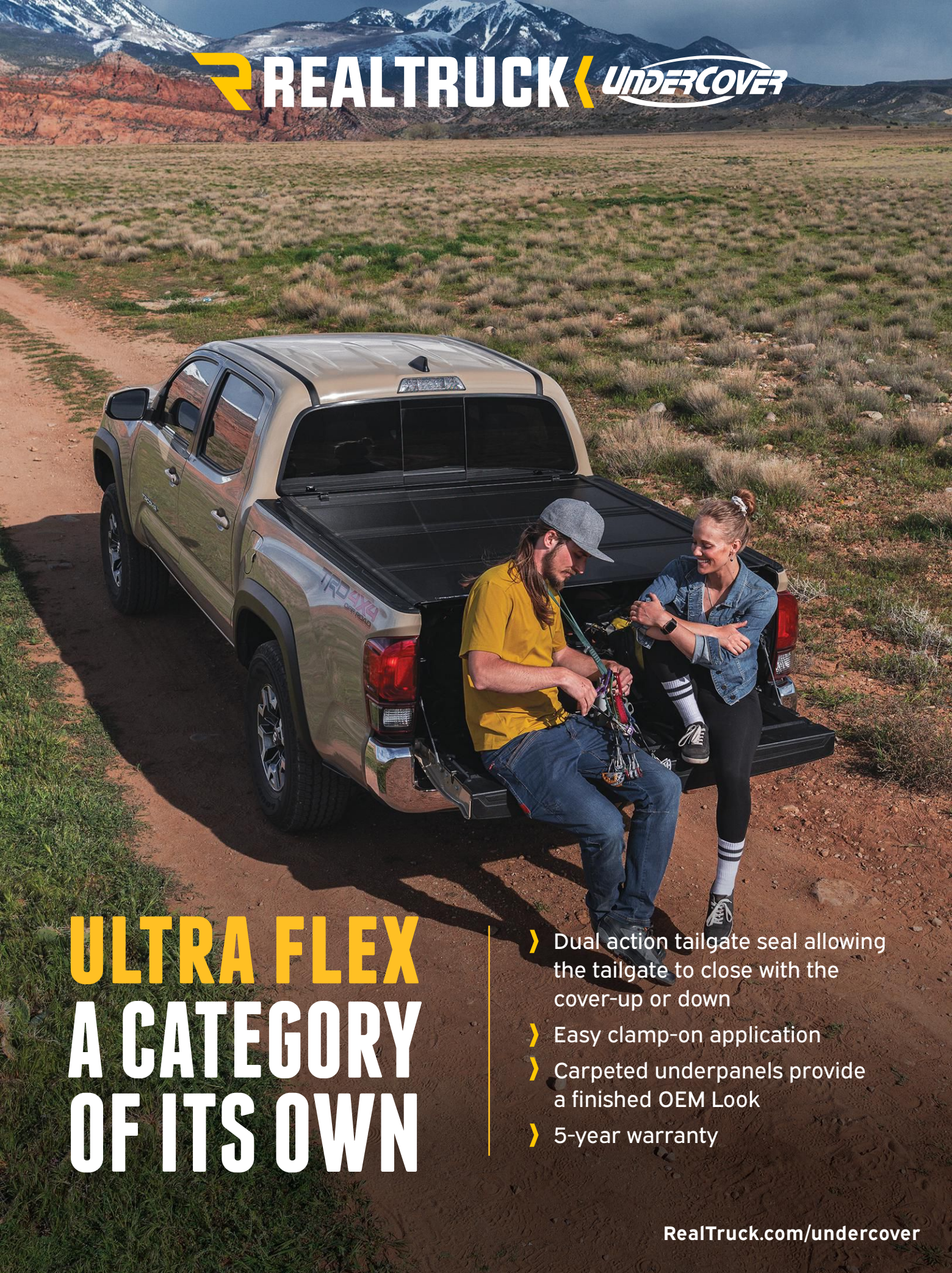
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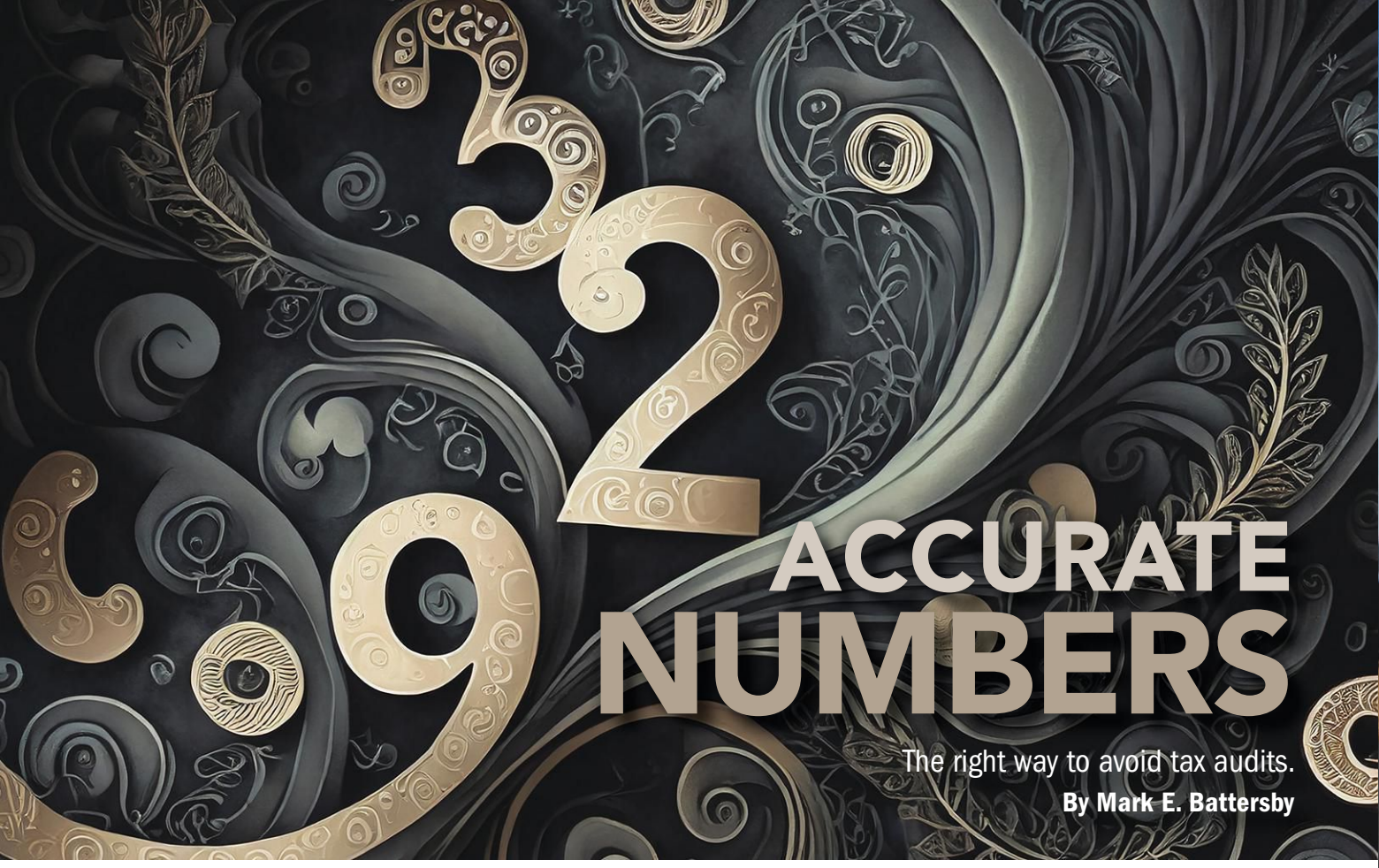
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ACCURATE NUMBERS

The right way to avoid tax audits.

By Mark E. Battersby

Even though the IRS's own figures reveal that, in general, only 1%-2% of all taxpayers actually have their returns audited each year, the threat of an audit continues to strike fear in small business owners. And, that fear increased dramatically late last year with the IRS's reported plans to hire an additional 87,000 workers.

Once a large and inefficient federal bureaucracy, the IRS is changing to become more streamlined and, more importantly, catch more tax offenders. Agents in back offices are being replaced by computers with complex algorithms that cast a wide net—one that pulls many law-abiding people into the chaos of an audit.

Today, the IRS enforces the tax law in a number of ways, including the increasingly more common correspondence (examination by mail) audits and the dreaded field (face-to-face audit) examinations. The result is that many businesses are being scrutinized far more often than the numbers indicate.

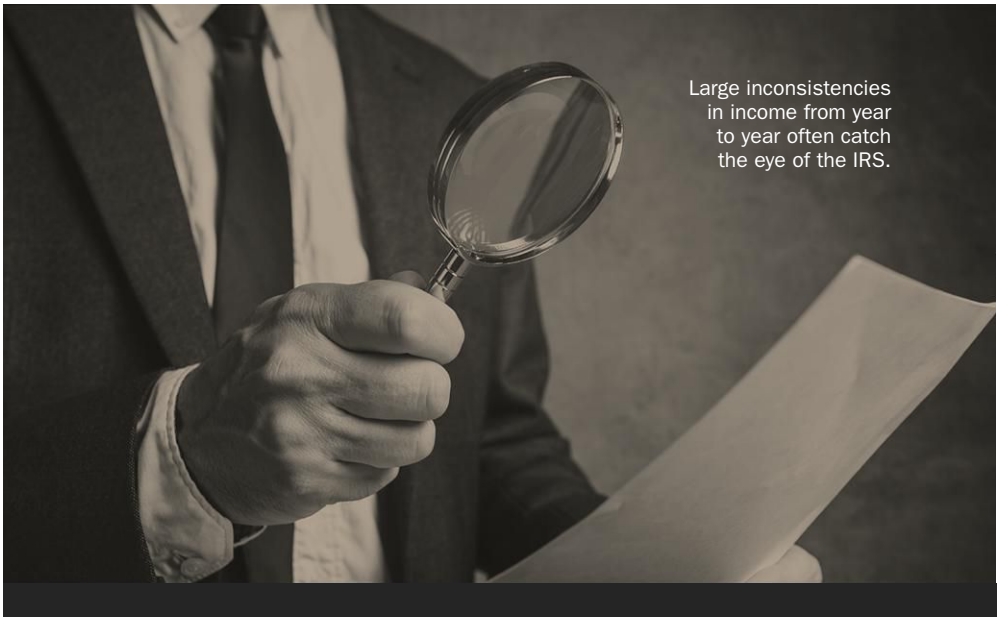
Although the IRS takes a dim view of overstated deductions, something such as a failure to report income can result in penalties. Then there is the fraud penalty—equal to a whopping 75% of the unreported tax.

Fortunately, there are perfectly legal strategies that can greatly reduce that audit threat.

MISTAKES & ROUND NUMBERS

The IRS obviously checks the math on every return, and too many errors will trigger red flags. Incorrect totals for expenses, missing Form 1099s and transposed numbers are all believed to concern the IRS—even if the mistakes are small.

The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 largely



Large inconsistencies in income from year to year often catch the eye of the IRS.

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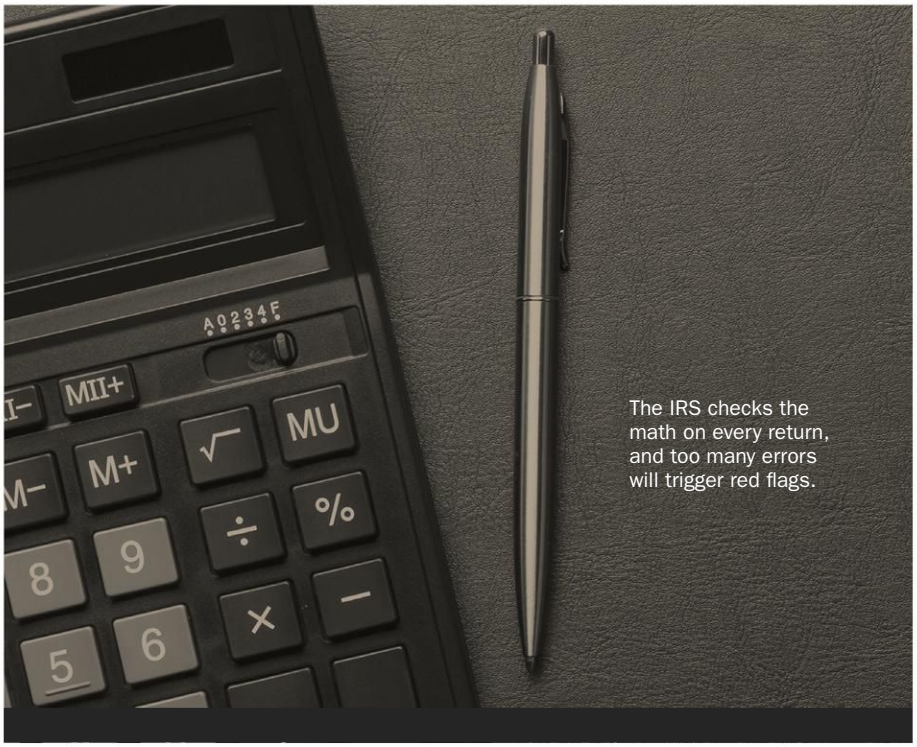
eliminated employee expense deductions as a personal itemized expense until 2026.

The IRS is also reportedly on the lookout for numbers that are "too round." After all, it is unlikely that all of the numbers shown on any return will end in fives and tens or even thousands.

HINTS FROM THE IRS

The IRS offers a few steps that everyone can take to reduce the risk of their automotive aftermarket shop becoming an audit target. These include:

- Be specific about expenses
- Provide more detail when needed
- Be on time
- Avoid amending returns
- Match up all your paperwork
- Don't use the same numbers repeatedly
- Don't take excessive deductions
- Don't report a loss. Never report a net annual loss for any business



The IRS checks the math on every return, and too many errors will trigger red flags.

Obviously, this list favors the IRS and the basic tax law. But keep in mind that no less a body than the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that striving for the lowest possible tax bill is perfectly legal. Thus, the last suggestion of reducing the possibility of an audit by not reporting a loss should be taken with a grain of salt.

BEYOND THE OBVIOUS

While many unexpected and significant swings in income can usually be easily explained, large inconsistencies in income from year to year concern to the IRS. Major changes in the amount of income reported are considered a main indicator of underreported earnings.

Large shifts in income can be indicative of someone hiding income in either the current or past tax years. When taking a closer look at the income earned in different tax years (as well as substantiating documents) the IRS often finds discrep-

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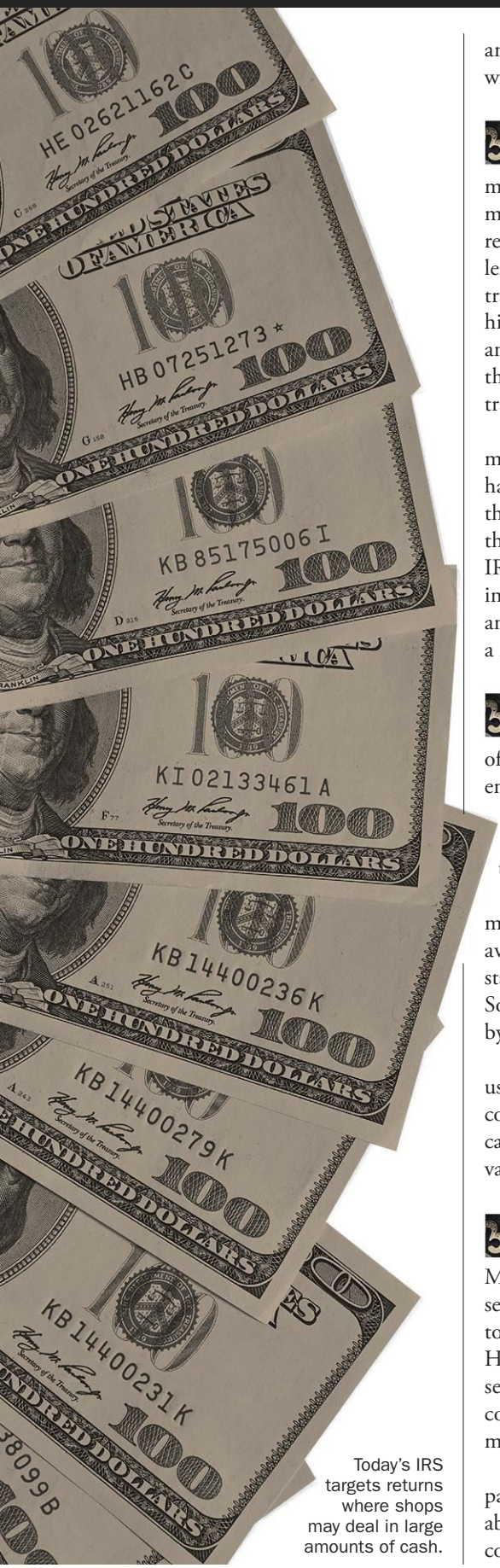
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Today's IRS targets returns where shops may deal in large amounts of cash.

ancies between what a shop earned and what was reported. Areas to watch include:

Cash

Despite the postponed requirement that third-party payers report payments to recipients, cash remains a major red flag because it creates all sorts of problems for the IRS. It is almost impossible to track cash transactions, cash can be easily hidden, it is difficult for the IRS to verify, and, despite new reporting requirements, there are few electronic records to keep track of it.

Cash transactions go unreported by many who still believe that cash doesn't have to be reported or, more commonly, those who figure the IRS will never know that cash was received. However, today's IRS targets returns where shops may deal in large amounts of cash and consider it an audit red flag when a return contains a high probability of unreported income.

Independent Contractors

Hiring a disproportionate number of independent contractors as opposed to employees is more of an audit target today, with states also on the lookout for large numbers of independent contractors used by a business.

An automotive aftermarket shop may use independent contractors to avoid paying payroll taxes—federal and state—including the employer portion of Social Security and Medicare demanded by the Feds.

This doesn't mean the shop shouldn't use independent contractors—just ensure compliance with the IRS's worker classifications and the "worker status tests" that vary greatly from state to state.

Low Salaries for S Corp Shareholders

Many automotive aftermarket professionals set up an S corporation instead of an LLC to avoid the 15.3% self-employment tax. However, while they aren't subject to self-employment tax on distributions, S corp shareholders working as employees must receive "reasonable compensation."

The IRS is on the lookout for S corps paying shareholder employees unreasonably low (or even no) salaries. The IRS will compare compensation to the standard for a similar position in a similar industry.

Failure to provide shareholders/owners with reasonable compensation (as W-2 reportable wages) is an audit flag, often leading to a more comprehensive audit of the entire business.

The Home Office

With many taxpayers shifting to "work from home" during the pandemic, it should come as no surprise that the home office deduction will be under extra scrutiny.

Calculations for home office deductions are based on square footage—but only the square footage used exclusively for business purposes.

Travel & Meal Expenses

Travel (not commuting) and meal costs are legitimate business expenses, particularly if they involve meeting customers or prospects. However, higher-than-average spending in these areas can draw the attention of the IRS.

When writing off travel and meal expenses, proving they are for business purposes is essential. Everything should be documented and receipts retained so, if necessary, a meeting's connection with the business can be proven.

Triggered by the Tax Pro

Far too many professionals and business owners have succumbed to the promise of big refunds when using the services of a particular tax pro. But beware—tax preparers have been a high-priority target of the IRS for years, as have many of their clients.

REALITY VS. TRIGGERS

In reality, no one knows which tax returns will be singled out for an audit by the IRS's computer algorithms. Many so-called "triggers" have been identified through the experiences of professionals.

The proposed increase in IRS auditors may or may not impact the current audit rate that sees fewer than 2% of all income tax returns examined within a year.

The statute of limitations for an IRS examination is three years from the due date of the federal tax return or the date it was filed. This period is doubled to six years if the return reveals a substantial under-

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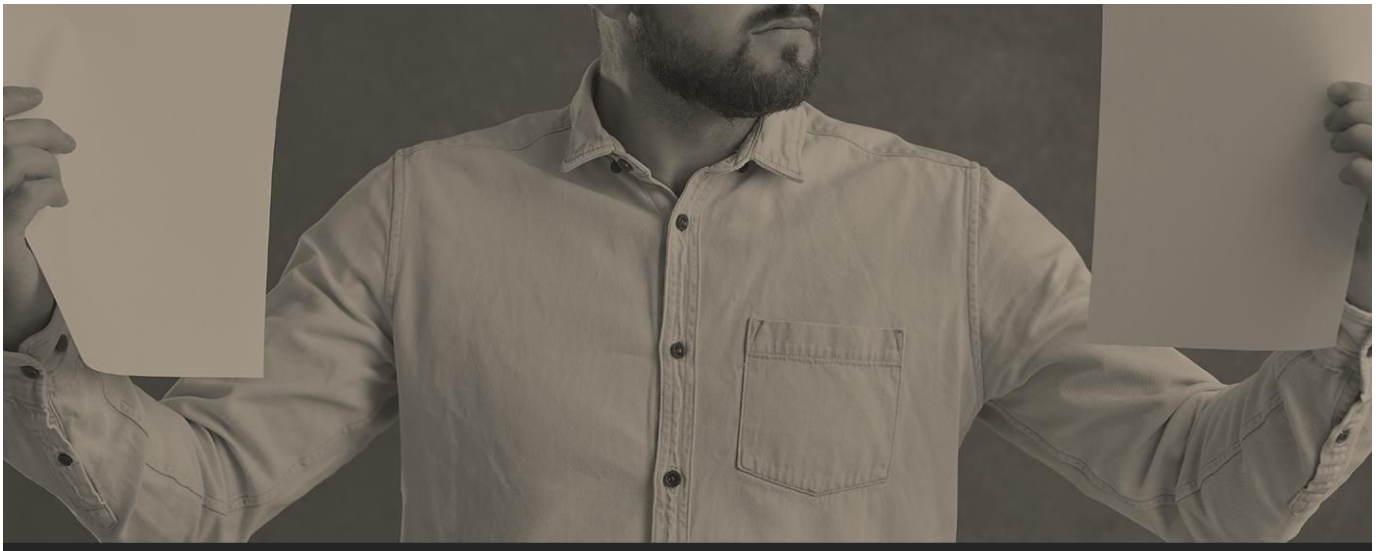


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No one knows which tax returns will be singled out for audit by the IRS's computer algorithms.

statement of income—usually more than 25% of taxable income.

For failure to file a return for a particular year, or if fraud is suspected, there is no time limit.

CAUGHT! NOW WHAT?

If audited, it will most likely be through a correspondence audit. The letter will contain instructions regarding what information must be sent to the auditors.

Should the IRS request an in-person meeting, typically at a regional office, the notice usually contains instructions about preparing for the audit and the particular items being examined. As an alternative, Letter 2205—a shorter version of the audit notice—will request a phone call and usually prefaces a face-to-face meeting.

The Taxpayer Bill of Rights, part of the IRS Restructuring and Reform Act of 1998, requires the IRS to provide a written statement detailing the taxpayer's rights and the IRS's obligations during the audit, appeals, refund and collection processes.

Among the most important rights of every taxpayer whose return is targeted for an audit is whether to be represented by a tax professional or whether to attempt to answer the IRS's questions alone. Another important consideration for business owners and managers being audited is where to hold that meeting.

NOT A LOST CAUSE

While it is impossible to fully inoculate a business or its owner since a portion of all audits are truly random, there are steps that can be taken to minimize the likelihood of receiving that feared notice from the IRS.

Yes, every automotive aftermarket business should claim deductions they or their shop are legitimately entitled to, but there is a need for vigilance and detailed recordkeeping to defend those deductions in case of an audit.

Honesty and clarity go a long way toward preventing or dealing with and surviving an IRS audit.

Naturally, every specialty automotive aftermarket professional should have a strategy for avoiding audits as well as for dealing with an IRS auditor. A fallback position should also be in place, should those strategies fail. ***TS***

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

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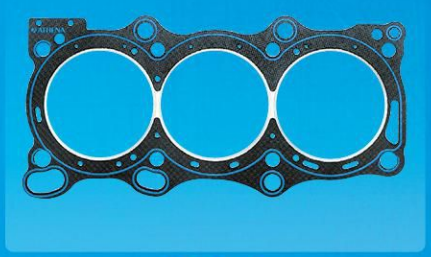
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PERFORMANCE

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Winter is go-time for new builds and rebuilds for the circle track market.

STILL SPINNING

The circle track market remains healthy & strong.

By John Carollo

It's "take it back to the garage and rebuild it" season. These days, countless circle track cars are being torn down and improved for next year's racing season.

New cars are being built, too, so shops are plenty busy. And that means everyone is looking for the latest go-fast, turn-left parts and supplies.

Where does your business fit into that nationwide game plan? Spring testing will be here before we know it, so now's the time to check the pulse of the circle track market and find the fastest groove.

Suppliers are happy to help with thoughts on what to watch for and mistakes to avoid.

THE RACE IS ON

Last year was a good one for circle track racing. Car and spectator counts were up by most accounts, there was close competition everywhere and the economy didn't throw any major curveballs.

"Motorsports has been strong across all forms of racing for us. In the circle track industry, it is really driven by the participants," says Mark Beatty, brand director at Red Line Oil. "This group is dedicated to growing circle track racing and its fan base. I see it as a real grassroots effort by so many teams, and it's working."



A powerful grassroots push is helping grow circle track racing and its fan base. (Photo courtesy Red Line Oil)

It's taken local tracks a few seasons to figure out how to bump up car counts, and the numbers now appear to be on a slow-but-steady increase. Of course, favorable conditions never hurt.

"Typically it's weather, but in recent years it's been the supply chain that we've been keeping an eye on," says Graham Fordyce, circle track sales manager for Holley. "Things are improving, but there are still parts shortages."

As the supply chain improves to match past performance and, most importantly, create a return in customer confidence, it will include a big batch of attractive new components.

To prepare, Dave Brzozowski, motorsports/racing manager at Wilwood Disc Brakes, offers areas of focus for professionals as the 2024 season approaches.

"Continued product development based on team/builder feedback, on-track performance and expert tech help for specific markets," he says.

WATCH OUT

With a strong, optimistic forecast, shops still need to watch for mistakes to avoid in this market. One is taking their processes for granted.

"Not getting all the information to correctly sell the customer exactly what he needs can be a mistake," says Brzozowski. "One shoe doesn't fit all."

Most racers know there is more than one way to set up and equip a race car. The trick is finding all the pieces that work together for the specific project at hand.

Beatty praises shops that serve the circle track market, noting the vast majority he's encountered "have smart, qualified

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Work with customers to identify the products they need to succeed. (Photo courtesy Wilwood Disc Brakes)



Recent strong car counts and fan participation have many optimistic about the circle track market for 2024.

employees and they understand their customers' needs."

His one caution is to do what's best for the build every time, even if it takes a little more effort.

"A mistake I see is in some product categories. Shops might use something that is easy to get versus what is right to use for the customer."

Of course, a long-term commitment to doing things the right way is likely to lead to happy, repeat customers, so it's worth it in the long run.

When it comes to the work itself, Fordyce offers one area of frustration.

"Hands down, the biggest installation issue is wiring, and the most common wiring issues are grounds," he observes. "Teams worry about weight and skimp on wire gauge. The other issue is relying on the chassis as a ground plane. For modern digital electronic circuits, the chassis is a horrible ground. If you must use a portion of the chassis as a grounding point, the closer to where the battery is grounded, the better."



Shops can serve as local experts, with the parts and knowledge circle track racers seek. (Photo courtesy Holley)

There should be no welds or welded sections between the battery ground location and the locations for other ground connections, he continues.

"Find a section of chassis tubing that is convenient for all grounds and not near high current electronics such as the starter, alternator or fans," he says.

LET'S GO RACING

It's time to push full-speed ahead in the circle track market, which has managed to maintain its allure while adding options.

"If you follow circle track racing and specifically short track racing, you will see a few new series with limited event schedules and big payouts," says Holley's Fordyce. "These events typically sell out and the pit or garage areas have great car counts. The popularity of crate motors is also growing, as an economic choice and as a means of leveling the playing field."

Beatty from Red Line Oil says the excitement of competition remains high.

"Participation numbers are up and that makes the industry strong," he notes. "Racers need to keep supporting their local tracks and go out and make some memories. Enjoy the moments and don't get hung up on things you can't control."

Wilwood's Brzozowski is also encouraged by the commitment he sees from racers and supporters.

"Car counts continue to grow in all markets, along with the number of fans," he says.

In a year that saw more than its share of tracks closing, this is essential to not only stop any hemorrhaging but also allow growth to continue. We'll see when next year comes, but right now there appear to be plenty of reasons for optimism. ***TS***

CIRCLE TRACK PRODUCTS

■ **HOT PRODUCT:** MSD 8727CT Digital Soft-Touch HEI Rev Limiter
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Recall feature that allows tech officials to verify rpm—displays the highest rpm the engine achieved in the previous 20 minutes of run time and cannot be erased; the same feature is available on the 6427 6 CT Ignition and 6428 6 CT Pro Ignition.

Holley
Graham Fordyce
Circle Track Sales Manager

■ **HOT PRODUCT:** Heavy Shockproof Gear Oil Part #58204
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Film thickness greater than an SAE 75W250, yet with low fluid friction like a 75W90.

Red Line Oil
Mark Beatty
Brand Director

■ **HOT PRODUCT:** XR Race Only Fluid
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Offers the lowest compressibility available, the lowest moisture affinity available and the highest temperature resistance; designed for extreme temperatures; suitable for endurance racing.

Wilwood Disc Brakes
Dave Brzozowski
Motorsports/Racing Manager

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Q&A

TEAM PENSKE ENGINEER LAUREN SULLIVAN



Pursuing her passion, from the wind tunnel to race weekends. ///// **Photos courtesy Pennzoil**

From wind tunnel testing on airplanes to victory lane with Team Penske, Lauren Sullivan's journey is a testament to her pursuit of engineering excellence.

Having done early work with NASCAR's Next Gen rollout and playing a role in Penske's 2022 championship wins in both NASCAR and IndyCar, her impact on the track is undeniable.

A Q&A provided by Pennzoil shines a spotlight on Sullivan's passion and dedication.

Q WHEN DID YOU FIRST FALL IN LOVE WITH ENGINEERING?



Sullivan was interested in engineering from an early age.

LAUREN SULLIVAN: When I was in seventh grade, we were tasked to construct a bridge using a single 8-1/2-by-11-inch sheet of paper where the span between the supports was 12 inches. The catch was that we could not use glue, tape or scissors.

I remember being so frustrated, but once my teacher, Jon Doyle, showed me how to think outside the box, I really enjoyed it. Although the answer wasn't obvious, I could still find it by putting my mind to it and developing the right strategy.

I later realized that problem-solving in this way had a name: engineering.

Q WHAT WAS IT ABOUT THE WORLD OF INDYCAR THAT CAUGHT YOUR ATTENTION AND KINDLED YOUR PASSION?

LS: After almost five years in aerospace engineering with Boeing, I actually became bored with airplanes. I wanted to continue in my field but in a different industry, specifically in an engineering method called wind tunnel testing.

I did some research and learned that race teams use that same testing. I got a job with Team Penske's NASCAR team as an engineer, where my childhood hobby could combine with my education to be a career.

After six years with Penske in NASCAR, I was asked to support an Indy 500 race as an engineer and, although I wasn't as familiar with IndyCar, I absolutely loved the experience, and an unexpected passion was ignited.

Q WHAT DO YOU LOVE MOST ABOUT BEING AN ENGINEER IN THE FAST-PACED WORLD OF MOTORSPORTS?

LS: I love the rapid innovation and quick implementation in the racing industry compared to the aerospace industry.

Within the first couple of months that I joined Team Penske at NASCAR, a design I developed for our NASCAR cars was already on the track. The sport is very fast, no pun intended!

Q WHAT WERE THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES EARLY IN YOUR CAREER?

LS: I struggled with confidence in myself

and my ability. Being a woman in the field, I hesitated to ask questions out of fear of appearing less knowledgeable.

I resorted to finding the answers on my own, which lengthened my learning curve and only made it harder for me to do my job. I realized I was listening to a lie—a lie that told me I was expected to know less because I was a woman.

I was expected to know less, but it was because I was new, not because I was a woman. I wish I would have accepted that truth sooner—asking questions has helped me master new concepts quickly later in my career.

The transition from Boeing to NASCAR was also a big technical challenge. But I soon realized that, at a basic level, aircraft and race cars are the same. They're both lifting bodies with aerodynamic forces at play, just in opposite directions.

Q CAN YOU SHARE ANY KEY DRIVERS—PEOPLE, EXPERIENCES OR INSPIRATIONS—THAT HAVE SHAPED YOUR JOURNEY IN THIS FIELD?



From wind tunnel testing on airplanes to victory lane with Team Penske, Lauren Sullivan's journey is a testament to her pursuit of engineering excellence.

LS: I was always a NASCAR girl; I was part of my family's NASCAR super late model team at Irwindale Speedway in Southern California when I was young. Our team was actually sponsored by Pennzoil!

Being on the track there with my dad, combined with my mom's support of any passion I pursued, were huge factors in my journey.

Middle school STEM activities that I mentioned earlier really began to pique my interest in engineering. Once I was in college studying aerospace engineering, my professor, Dr. Mark McQuilling, helped me

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Q&A TEAM PENSKE ENGINEER LAUREN SULLIVAN



Having done early work with NASCAR's Next Gen rollout and playing a role in Penske's 2022 championship wins in both NASCAR and IndyCar, Sullivan knows success is fueled by talent and hard work.



Sullivan says she loves the rapid innovation and quick implementation of ideas that top-level motorsports provides.

secure my first internship, where I initially fell in love with wind tunnel testing.

Q WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST TECHNICAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN WORKING ON INDYCARS AND OTHER RACE CARS?

LS: I love how IndyCars are designed to go fast, even faster than a Boeing 737 at takeoff. Unlike other series with secondary goals like NASCAR's emphasis on staying stock, IndyCar is all about optimization for speed.

Each component is crafted for peak performance. Thanks to a wealth of data and sensors, we can quickly identify and address any issues a driver might face. It's such an advanced way of racing.

Q WALK US THROUGH WHAT A DAY IN YOUR LIFE IS LIKE ON A RACE WEEKEND.

LS: Each event is unique, but on a typical race weekend, it's right down to business. Everyone from engineers to mechanics to truck drivers works to set up, especially on road and street courses without garages. Once we're settled, my focus shifts to preparing for the next event as they are frequently back-to-back.

I'm creating schedules, coordinating team travel movements and distributing incoming information from the series, vendors and team management. I usually get interrupted by immediate needs for the current event, such as addressing any issues with travel and handling last-minute requests.

When I'm not knee-deep in logistics, I sometimes get to spot for Josef Newgarden. Being a spotter is thrilling. I get to be his second set of eyes so that he can focus on the track in front of him.

Lucky for me, these two jobs don't clash. After the race, I'm right back into the logistics swing, updating schedules and ironing out any travel kinks, especially when we're hopping on commercial flights.

Q BEING A PART OF TEAM PENSKE MUST BE EXHILARATING. CAN YOU SHARE A MEMORABLE RACE DAY EXPERIENCE THAT ENCAPSULATES THE THRILL OF PIT LANE?

LS: Clinching championships in both NASCAR and IndyCar last year was a pretty impressive feat. I led a lot of the wind tunnel testing for the Next Gen rollout before I left NASCAR, so even though I had moved on by the time Joey Logano clinched his win, the groundwork I laid played a small part in his success.

Josef's Indy500 win this year was probably my favorite in the past couple of seasons. From a coordinator's perspective, though, that race was one of the toughest. I worked until 11 p.m. the night we won, coordinating team arrangements for an extra day's stay to celebrate.

It was hectic, ensuring that everyone's plans were in order, but I loved every moment of it.

Q YOU'RE DOING SOME INCREDIBLE WORK VOLUNTEERING TO TALK ABOUT STEAM (SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, ENGINEERING, ART AND MATH) AT DIFFERENT SCHOOLS. WHAT IGNITED THIS PASSION?

LS: I've always been big on outreach in everything I do. Looking back, I had many resources but lacked a consistent engineering path. There weren't opportunities like robotics or STEM activities in my high school, so I didn't truly explore engineering until college.

When I go into schools for an event, students get to be hands-on and build a model race car. They have to work inside a budget and incorporate engineering, so they can see what it's really like.

I want to give young people a word for what they are passionate about, so they can continue to chase it as they want to.

Q WHAT HAVE BEEN YOUR FAVORITE MOMENTS WORKING WITH STUDENTS IN THE STEAM PROGRAM?

LS: My top highlights are always the lasting relationships I build through the program. I have kept in touch with a seventh grader for several years, and since our meeting, she's joined a STEM-heavy high school academy and begun her own engineering journey.

It's so rewarding to hear from past students I worked with who are now on a motorsports engineering path of their own.

Speaking at my high school assembly was a standout moment for me. Initially, one student was visibly disinterested and made a rude comment. But as I shared my journey, I saw a spark ignite in him, and by the end, he was engaged and even asked questions.

It's these moments and connections that fuel my passion. It emphasizes the reality that if we don't make an intentional effort to show these students what opportunities are available, how will they ever know?

Q WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE A YOUNG WOMAN WHO ASPIRES TO BECOME AN ENGINEER IN MOTORSPORTS LIKE YOURSELF?

LS: You are more than simply welcome here; you are wanted here. I often hear people tell women to simply "be more confident," but that puts the cart before the horse.

Confidence tends to come with experience. While it's important for women to know that they are no better and no worse than their male colleagues due to their gender, I think more women need to realize there is actually a seat waiting for them—they just need to take a seat!

They will quickly realize they are surrounded by people who not only want to see them succeed but will also help them succeed. And that's when the confidence starts. ***TS***



Sullivan volunteers to talk about STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Math) at schools, encouraging students to pursue their passions.



AUTOMOTIVE *Allies*

American builds are sought-after worldwide.

By Tony Thacker



As I travel around the world, I constantly meet people from other nations that have had cars built for them in the good ol' USA.

The more I thought about it, the more I wondered why people would have a car built thousands of miles from home when, quite often, there are excellent shops in their own countries, particularly in Australia, Europe, New Zealand and elsewhere.

This phenomenon first popped up when I was at the Rømø Beach Festival in Denmark and was introduced to Mia Strandgaard Fluck, who was driving a stunning belly tank Lakester built in California by Marc Nelson.

"I actually built the tank for myself," Nelson later explains, "but circumstances changed, and I put it up for sale. Mia's husband, Frank, called from Denmark and after the third call a deal was struck. I took the car down to Kiwi Shipping in Gardena, California, and they forwarded it to Copenhagen. It was a simple deal with no headaches."

However, the next shipment did not go quite so well.

"Frank ordered a roadster for himself, and we sold two other cars to friends of his. I delivered all three cars to a shipper in Fremont, California, assuming all three would go together in the same container. Frank's car arrived safely in 14 weeks, which is two- to three-times the normal shipping time," Nelson recalls. "The second car arrived six months after the first. Not good, but it arrived, which is more than I can say for the third car."

It didn't arrive for two years.

("When it was found it) was obviously forklifted, because the underside was badly damaged, as were the paint and body, which was actually wrinkled."

Somewhere along the way, the car also got re-titled in Texas.

"The shipping company really had no explanation for the re-titling, which is very concerning—(no one seems to know) where the car was for two years or how the damage occurred," says Nelson. "It was a disaster, but thankfully the Danish customer was very understanding that none of it was my fault."

The experience hasn't deterred him from taking on overseas projects.

"Would I do it again, though? Yes. I know a lot more now than I did when I started and I've made some great international friends and the event at Rømø Beach Festival is just fantastic to attend," Nelson says.

INTERNATIONAL CLIENTELE

Also spotted at Rømø were roadsters owned by Pete Fontana and his son Sergio from Switzerland. Their cars were built by Andrew Kohler, owner of Kohler Kustom in Williamsport, Pennsylvania.



Roadsters owned by Pete Fontana and his son Sergio from Switzerland. They were built by Andrew Kohler, owner of Kohler Kustom in Williamsport, Pennsylvania.



"I met Peter at Bonneville when I was the crew chief on the Rolling Bones 532 roadster," Kohler reports. "We've now built several cars for Peter and his friends, and because it is so very difficult to get anything registered in Switzerland we work very closely with Marcus and Thomas at T&M Schilter Speed Shop GmbH of Steinen, Switzerland. We'll do the heavy chassis work and they'll do the final push and finishing to meet Swiss regulations."

How strict are the Swiss rules?

"For example, if the chassis was hot riveted from the factory, it has to be hot riveted, not welded, and if it came with a 4-cylinder engine it can't have a V-8," Kohler says. "Nevertheless, it makes sense to build them here in the U.S., where the raw materials, parts and skills are readily available."

And his seas, so far, have been calm, if not always relaxed.

"Thankfully, we've had no shipping issues. I have shipped cars all over the world to Germany, Japan, Switzerland and the U.K. I personally load all the cars and parts in the container and know they are secure and properly packed. However, the waiting game is frustrating for the customer. For fun I used to send Peter images of cars damaged in shipping, but finally realized that while that might be funny to me, it might not be funny to him, so I stopped."

Someone else building for an international clientele is Jay Dean of Nostalgia Ranch in Fallbrook, California. Dean grew up in England, where he completed a traditional automotive apprenticeship in the family's chain of dealerships. It gave him the best possible grounding for the career that followed and, in 1988 at age 19, he moved to California, where he was soon immersed in the SoCal car scene.

In 2004, Dean felt the time was right to open Nostalgia Ranch, building and racing traditional-style hot rods. In 2019, he met Germans Stefan and Katrin Immke at a friend's tiki party.

"Stefan and Immke were in the U.S. working on a coffee table book and movie, 'Squeezed Up,'" Dean says, "and we hit it off immediately because of our mutual love of hot rods and 'Americarna.'"

Instead of sending cars to them, the two travel regularly from their home in Cologne to enjoy their passion in sunny California. Dean began by rebuilding a vintage rail-style dragster for Stefan, saying, "It belonged to Justin Baas, one of the organizers of the RPM Nationals. I rebuilt the car entirely including the 286-ci flathead Ford V-8."

Stefan reports there are few opportunities to race this kind of car in Europe.

"But we can fly to LA and enjoy events such as the RPM Nationals without having to worry, because Jay takes care of the cars and the logistics."

Katrin was also bitten by the racing bug

AUTOMOTIVE Allies





Mia Strandgaard Fluck's stunning belly tank Lakester was built in California by Marc Nelson.

and for her, Dean tracked down an original barn find race car from the 1940s.

"We traced its history," says Dean, "and you can see from the decklid that Jack Truesdale ran 113.63 mph at El Mirage in 1949 in it. Then, as guys got into drag racing, Dick Hogan raced it at Paradise Mesa, won at Pomona in '55 and won at Riverside in '58. There's a lot of history with this car."

It took plenty of work to resurrect it, though.

"I'll admit it was rough," Dean says. "However, it was 90% complete—the block was missing but the heads, tach, seat, steering wheel and everything else is original. I even scratched down the paint and what you see is exactly how it was painted back in the day. I matched it as closely as I could."

Again, it would be very difficult to enjoy a car like this in Germany.

"There are not many events like the RPM Nationals Barona or the TROG Airport Drags and it suits us to fly in to enjoy our hobby," says Katrin.

OLD WORLD MEETS NEW

"We have one British customer, Geoff Stilwell," says Mick Jenkins, owner of Mick's Paint in Pomona, California, "and after he set a land speed record at 258.569 mph



Geoff Stilwell travels from the U.K. to America to put his land speed racer built by Mick's Paint in Pomona, California, through its paces.





Jay Dean of Nostalgia Ranch in Fallbrook, California, built a pair of nostalgia dragsters for Katrin and Stefan Immke of Germany.

in 2018, we built him a new race car with a 300-mph target. Obviously, building a car of this caliber is very demanding in terms of time and money and, unlike our domestic customers, Geoff is unable to enjoy the build process in person, so we constantly send him photos and communicate—something you have to do with any customer, but it's especially important when your customer is 6,000 miles away."

The car was finished in 2019, but the weather at Bonneville that year was unfavorable, so he didn't get a chance to come over and enjoy it right away.

The pandemic came next, followed by a Bonneville washout in 2022.

"It hasn't been easy," says Jenkins. "However, we did some licensing passes at El Mirage twice and that was very successful. Overall, working with Geoff has been a great experience, even down to the transference of funds, which has not been a problem at all."

For the final word we spoke to Stilwell, who says, "We don't have much land speed racing in the U.K., so if you want to race, this is the place. Racing in the U.S. and working with Mick and his team has been a real pleasure. Despite the weather, we've had a lot of fun and, of course, it is so much more cost-effective to do this in the U.S., where all the parts and the skills are located."

Certainly, building cars for overseas clients adds another dimension to doing business, but with a seemingly endless cache of old vehicles available, as well as a plentiful supply of parts and the necessary skills to build them—not to mention a strong interest from overseas gearheads—it appears that this market segment will continue to grow. ***TS***

The Immkes travel regularly from their home in Cologne to enjoy their passion in sunny California.





Born in England, ***TONY THACKER*** *is an accredited automotive journalist, author and book publisher, and served as marketing director at the famed SO-CAL Speed Shop.*

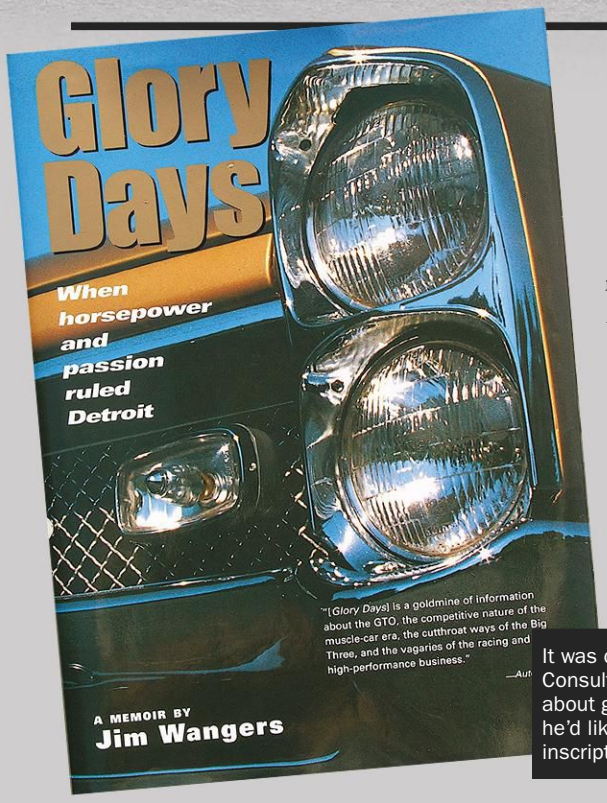


REMEMBERING Jim Wangers



Jim Wangers is best known for his marketing work with the GTO and other Pontiac models. Here he poses with his personal 1969 Grand Prix that replicated the original car he owned back when they were first produced.

A look at the GTO & other classic cars he helped make famous. ///// **By James Maxwell**



Perhaps as much as or more than anybody in the industry at the time, Jim Wangers—the "ad man" for Pontiac and the marketer behind the GTO—understood the importance of creative marketing in the automotive world during the late 1950s and all through the '60s.

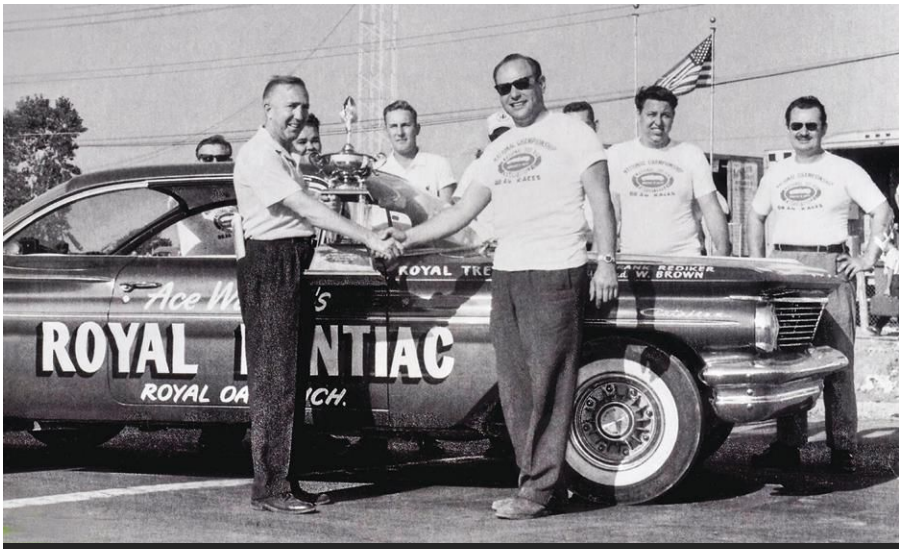
He did much to help elevate the muscle car to its rightful niche in the history of American auto marketing. And, while he didn't "invent" the Pontiac GTO—that credit went to John DeLorean, Russ Gee and Bill Collins—he was mainly responsible for creating its mystique.



It was during a visit to AMCI (Automotive Marketing Consultants Inc.) that Wangers and I had a conversation about general muscle car history, and at that time he said he'd like me to have a copy of his book, and then wrote an inscription with his signature, dated 2001.

THE AD MAN

Wangers' automotive career started in the mid-1950s at the Campbell Ewald ad agency, servicing the Chev-



Wangers, right, drove the Royal Pontiac 1960 Catalina to a big win at Detroit Dragway.

rolet account. He later worked at Chrysler for a short time before his involvement in promoting Pontiac through the McManus, John & Adams ad agency.

One of his biggest accomplishments in bringing attention to the GTO was getting it on the cover of Car and Driver, where the article made the car sound even more exciting than it really was. Part of this was because the test car was a "ringer" of sorts, with a totally tuned 421-ci engine replacing the standard 389—something Wangers only revealed years later.

With his help, Goats were soon everywhere, including as part of a Thom McAn Shoe GTO sweepstakes, with a "GTO" Monkeemobile on TV and through constant car magazine cover stories. The Ronny & The Daytonas song "Little GTO" was basically a two-and-a-half minute commercial for Pontiac.

Wangers' book "Glory Days" is an insider's account of the goings-on in and around Detroit back in the day, and for anyone who wants to learn what it was really like during that era, it's a mandatory read.

(I was lucky enough to receive a personal copy from Jim, allowing me to revisit the excitement of the muscle car era from time to time.)



Wangers started a company in the early 1970s called Motortown Corp. and was asked to add some excitement to Pontiac's version of the Chevrolet Vega, creating the Li'l Wide Track program for the Astre.

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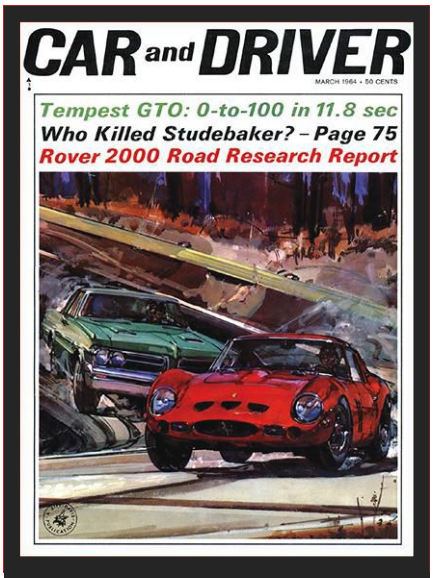
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REMEMBERING Jim Wangers



Early in his automotive career, Wangers was the sales promotion manager at Chrysler. Here's how he described this 1957 Fury magazine ad: "This was the first four-color automotive ad to be released as part of a schedule for Petersen car magazines. I was pleased that the ad dramatized that there were people who cared this much for a production car. I had one hell of a time convincing the ad copy writers that such people existed. The painting of the actual car was reproduced and offered for free; we mailed out over 25,000 prints."



Wangers encouraged the idea of Car and Driver magazine comparing a GTO to a Ferrari.

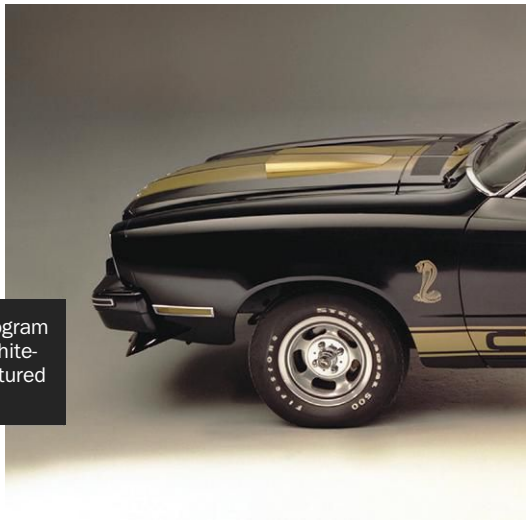


GTO-specific ads appeared in the top magazines of the day.

Of course, Wangers had a long and colorful career in Detroit automotive circles, helping put together specialty cars for various manufacturers over the years. He also spent a few years as a Chevrolet dealer in Milwaukee in the early 1970s.

LIVING HISTORY

After moving to California and starting his own automotive consulting business, he eventually discovered that there was a huge amount of interest in restorations and the large grassroots following of the



Edsel Ford II personally approved the Cobra II program that Wangers' Motortown Corp. put together. A white-hued version of the car with blue stripes was featured on Charlie's Angels.

GTO. In the summer of 1980, he was asked to be a guest speaker at the Pontiac-Oakland Club International convention, which came as a surprise.

"It was hard to believe that just six short years after the GTO expired in the marketplace, I was attending an event where enthusiastic collectors were showing off the famous car," he later recalled. "In the car business, when a model is eliminated, usually you forget about it, replacing it with another model, hoping the public will forget about it, too."

He continued to participate in similar gatherings across the country and overseas in the years that followed, always excited to

Wangers returned to his Pontiac roots later in his career with the creation of the Can Am, based on the LeMans.









REMEMBERING Jim Wangers

Inside the AMCI building was the place to be during the Pontiac Drag Days special 75th birthday event back in 2001. This artwork celebrates Wangers' career and marketing vision.



The GeeTO Tiger! from 1966 was part of a traveling exhibition to promote the Goat.



Wangers was friends with Ace Wilson, who owned Royal Pontiac in Royal Oaks, Michigan. This was the lightweight Super Duty 421 Catalina "Swiss Cheese" car for 1963, as there were huge holes drilled all through the frame rails to reduce weight.

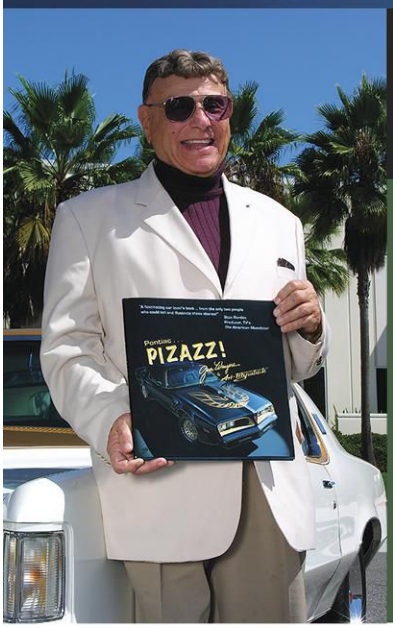
share his Pontiac experiences with anyone who was interested.

Of course, his involvement with the GTO was always top of the list—an opportunity he recognized as special very early on.

"We quickly began to realize that this was more than just another new car—we had created a new kind of Pontiac," he says. "While we had initially thought of the GTO as a 'one shot' promotion for the newly restyled intermediate Tempest/LeMans, suddenly we had much more going. We now had a car aimed perfectly at the exploding baby boomers market."

Even the name had a story. GTO stood for "Gran Turismo Omologato," a moniker which was being used by Ferrari at the time. The FIA (Federation Internationale Automobile) owned the name, but neither





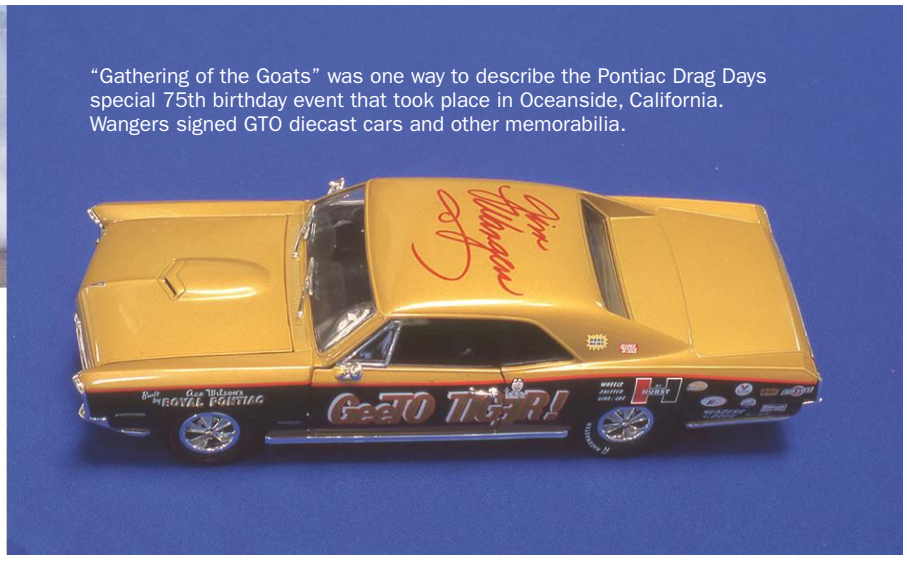
The "Pontiac...PIZAZZ!" coffee table book of 2007 was a collaboration between Wangers and artist Art Fitzpatrick. It offers "insider views" from both men on 15 featured cars, with a forward by Paul Zazarine.





What can be said about the drag racing action that took place at Carlsbad Raceway as part of the 75-year celebration? The Pontiac folks put the pedal to the metal.

"Gathering of the Goats" was one way to describe the Pontiac Drag Days special 75th birthday event that took place in Oceanside, California. Wangers signed GTO diecast cars and other memorabilia.



Ferrari nor Pontiac could copyright it or prevent the other from using it—hence GTOs originating on two continents.

Recent years saw Wangers slow down and sell off his car collection, but for those fortunate enough to get to hear his stories, his vast knowledge and experiences in the auto industry were always a true learning experience.

Among the more candid, interesting seminars he did later in life were his talks on "Who Killed Pontiac?" And a highlight for me was being on hand when he and Pontiac artist Art Fitzpatrick went back and forth debating the advertising presentation of the GTO in photographs and renderings. It was clear their passion lived on.

Fitzpatrick passed in 2015, and Wangers earlier this year at age 97. These photos show a little of his impact on the automotive industry, and his contributions to the look and feel of the original muscle car era. **TS**

JAMES MAXWELL *is an automotive journalist and historian based in Southern California. Contact him at imax3@mac.com.*



Air Oil Separators

K&N Engineering, Riverside, California, presents its Air Oil Separators. Designed for specific vehicle applications as an elegant solution to protect engines and help optimize performance, the separators incorporate large 6-ounce canisters to allow for longer service intervals. Features include built-in baffles that efficiently filter oil from crankcase pressure before recirculating it to the intake tract. The systems effectively reduce carbon deposits from vapors in the intake manifold and valves, providing engine protection and longevity.



Exhaust System Fasteners

ARP, Ventura, California, presents its expanded line of Exhaust System Fasteners, including a series of application-specific and universal kits. Stud kits with specially designed "nut starter" noses accurately position gaskets and guide header flanges into place, and most kits are available in polished stainless steel or black oxide-finished 8740 chromoly and nominally rated at 180,000 psi. A choice of hex or 12-point bolt heads or nuts is offered, and specially drilled "NASCAR" header bolts that facilitate safety wiring are also available.

TRX Intake System

advanced FLOW engineering (aFe POWER), Corona, California, presents its Momentum GT Cold Air Intake System with Dual Filters for 2021-23 Ram 1500 TRX 6.2L pickup applications. The system adds dyno-proven gains of 28 hp and 25 pound-feet of torque and outflows the factory intake by 30%. It incorporates the factory hood inlet scoop and grille inlet. Available in oiled Pro 5R or oil-less Pro DRY S air filter models, Momentum GT is offered in Raising Hell Red.





Competition Diesel Performance Additive

Hot Shot's Secret, Mt. Gilead, Ohio, presents its new ADRENALINE R82+ Competition Diesel Performance Additive. Formulated for competitive off-road vehicles, the additive combines a powerful cetane improver with the company's new ADRENALINE Racing Top Lube fuel lubricant to decrease wear by up to 41% in ASTM testing. The blend provides maximum fuel system protection to the upper cylinder, pistons and rings, and improved combustion for a significant increase in horsepower and efficiency.



Remote Fluid Coolers

Derale Performance, Santa Fe Springs, California, presents its Electra-Cool Remote Fluid Coolers. Offered to help manage and control fluid temperatures in a variety of automotive applications, they can be used for cooling transmission fluid, engine oil, power steering fluid and other fluids that require temperature regulation. The coolers utilize a highly efficient tube-and-fin design that provides maximum cooling performance at slow speeds. They feature copper/aluminum construction and are equipped with a 10-inch electric fan.

Subaru WRX Front Suspension Kit

Air Lift Performance, Lansing, Michigan, presents a new Front Suspension Kit for 2022-23 Subaru WRX AWD models. Designed to provide maximum drop, superior handling, sharp steering response and a comfortable ride on the street or at a show, the front kit includes progressive-rate, double-bellow air springs over a high-performance monotube, with threaded body struts. The shocks feature 30-level damping adjustment, and the setup drops the vehicle 3.7 inches (94mm) from stock. A rear kit is also available.



Vortec Engine Swap Wiring Harnesses



Howell EFI, Marine City, Michigan, presents Wiring Harnesses for Chevrolet 8.1L Vortec engine swap projects. The new GEN III Vortec 8.1L wiring harness (1999-2004) can be used for electronic or manual 4L80E or Allison transmissions with emission connections if needed. For fully mechanical throttle body action, Howell also offers a wiring harness for drive-by-cable with all the appropriate ECM reprogramming. Both harnesses are wrapped with a high-temperature split loom covering and include all components.



Specialized Oils

AMSOIL, Superior, Wisconsin, introduces Premium Synthetic Lubricants with targeted protection and performance benefits. AMSOIL 100% Synthetic High-Mileage Motor Oil is purpose-built for high-mileage engines to help extend vehicle life. AMSOIL 100% Synthetic Hybrid Motor Oil is purpose-built to combat issues common to HEV and PHEV vehicles, including infrequent engine use and increased stop/start activity. And AMSOIL Extended-Life 100% Synthetic Motor Oil promotes cleanliness and prolonged engine life.

Disc Brakes for 14-Inch Wheels



Classic Performance Products (CPP), Placentia, California, offers Tri-Five Disc Brake Kits designed for 14-inch OEM wheels. Kits can be ordered with or without spindles (stock height or 2-inch drop) and with or without steering arms to accommodate a wide variety of installation needs. The kits retain the same track width as factory drum brakes.



Mustang T-5 Shift Lever

California Pony Cars, Ontario, California, offers a T-5 5-Speed Shift Lever for 1965-67 Ford Mustangs. Designed to look stock while adapting to a T-5 transmission, the shift lever is a high-quality reproduction of the original 3- and 4-speed lever and features a nonfunctional reverse lockout handle. Made in the USA, the kit includes mounting hardware. ***TS***



Restyling
AFTERMARKET ACCESSORIES

Towing & Hauling p. 42 / Rocky Top p. 48 / Products p. 52

Bucking THE TREND

Why the new Ford Bronco can't be tamed. ///// **By Jef White**

Introduced in 2021, the sixth-generation Ford Bronco has quickly become an aftermarket favorite. Like any prized stallion, it's equally at home dressed up and paraded through town or ridden hard on backcountry trails.

The accessories-friendly SUV can be lifted, customized and outfitted for any off-road adventure, from overlanding to crawling (rock or mall). Mix modern amenities with a classic feel, and it's no wonder why shops are seeing more and more new Broncos come through their bay doors.

With no signs of slowing, the time is right to saddle up and earn your share of the market. Suppliers are happy to help with opinions on the Bronco's appeal and staying power, and suggestions for stepping up sales.

MADE TO BE MODIFIED

The new-gen Ford Bronco seems to be an example of the right vehicle at the right time.

"People have been waiting for something new in the marketplace and Ford nailed it with the new Bronco," says Mike Stickney, vice president of sales for Westin Automotive Products. "Not only did they make it look great, but they made it easy to manufacture aftermarket products for, which opened up opportunities for all of us to customize the vehicles the way the customers want. In addition, Ford made the Bronco extremely off-road-capable, which has allowed manufacturers to build a wider array of products to support multiple customer needs."

Apparently, the more things change, the more they stay the same.

"I think the Ford Bronco crowd has been wanting this for a long time. Ford paid attention and built a platform that lends itself to adding custom

The Ford Bronco instantly connected with fans old and new. (Photo courtesy Westin Automotive Products)



BRONCO PRODUCTS

■ **HOT PRODUCT:** Bronco Steering System
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:** Greaseable, rebuildable inner tie rod end; billet double-shear knuckle bracket for outer tie rod end; billet outer tie rod housing 3/4-inch, Teflon-lined FK Heim joint; heat-treated 4140 moly-coated tie rod; less than half the stock extended travel toe change.

Carli Suspension
Dan Tourino
Vice President

■ **HOT PRODUCT:** LUCID VSL Lights
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:** For full-sized Bronco models; increase safety with integrated turn signals; improve visibility when rock crawling, overlanding, on a rescue mission or changing a tire.

D&C Designs
Danny & Chris Wehunt
Owners

■ **HOT PRODUCT:** HAVOC Offroad HD Tire Carrier Kit
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:** Forward-thinking design that strengthens a known weak link with the OE hinge; stronger wheel mount holds custom wheel offsets and oversized tires; retains use of the factory back-up camera; moves the third brake light up and over a larger wheel and tire.

HAVOC Offroad
Klay Roche
Product Design Engineer

■ **HOT PRODUCT:** Gravity LED Pro6 50-Inch Light Bar Kit
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:** Combines the timeless appeal of larger round lights with the highest-end modern technology; uses factory-designed mounting locations and hardware; delivers a classic look with modern technology; not recommended for soft top models.

KC HiLiTES
Randy Wimenta
Marketing Activation Manager

■ **HOT PRODUCT:** Oculus Bi-LED Headlights
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:** Available in a Color-SHIFT RGB+W Color-Changing version; advanced focused LED projection; 5,200 lumens provide enhanced driver visibility in all weather conditions; high-precision sharp cut-off lines; plug-and-play using factory hardware.

ORACLE Lighting
Justin Hartenstein
Director of Development

■ **HOT PRODUCT:** XTS Front & Rear Bumpers
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:** Integrated lightweight, 10-gauge steel shell and 4-gauge steel winch tray; compatible with all factory sensors including adaptive cruise control; accommodates most winches up to 12,000 pounds; two heavy-duty recovery points; optional skid plate.

Westin Automotive Products Inc.
Mike Stickney
Vice President of Sales

HENNESSEY VELOCIRAPTOR 500 BRONCO RAPTOR

Texas-based high-performance vehicle creator Hennessey has begun customer deliveries of its new VelociRaptor 500 Bronco Raptor.

Hennessey's engineers applied their expertise to the SUV's twin-turbocharged, 3.0L V-6 engine to boost power and heighten drivability. A new high-capacity intercooler and proprietary engine management system tuning improve charge cooling and increase intake boost to enhance output, according to the builder.

The team traveled to Colorado for low-temperature, high-altitude testing in the Rocky Mountains, where snowstorms and freezing temperatures reportedly posed no problems for the upgraded 4x4, fitted with Hennessey's unique 20-inch alloy wheels and 37-inch off-road tires.

"The VelociRaptor 500 Bronco is one of our most agile and capable off-road offerings—it's nearly unstoppable off the pavement," says John Hennessey, company founder and CEO. "Our 500-hp upgrade pairs perfectly with Ford's rugged Bronco Raptor 4x4 as we improve upon the factory's high-performance offering and enhance it with more power and a more aggressive appearance."



The new Hennessey VelociRaptor 500 Bronco Raptor is now available.





The new Bronco lends itself to adding custom and personal touches. (Photos courtesy HAVOC Offroad)

and personal touches," says Klay Roche, product design engineer for HAVOC Offroad. "People have been customizing Broncos for quite some time—the early 1966-77 Broncos have a huge following with all sorts of aftermarket support, and new Bronco customers seem to be heading in the same direction."

Retro-inspired modern off-road vehicles are a strong trend, notes Randy Wimenta, marketing activation manager for KC HiLiTES.

"There was a waitlist for the new Ford Bronco when it first came out and now they're on the streets. Many new Ford Bronco owners want to work with shops to personalize their prized off-road beauties."

So, what are some new-gen modification highlights?

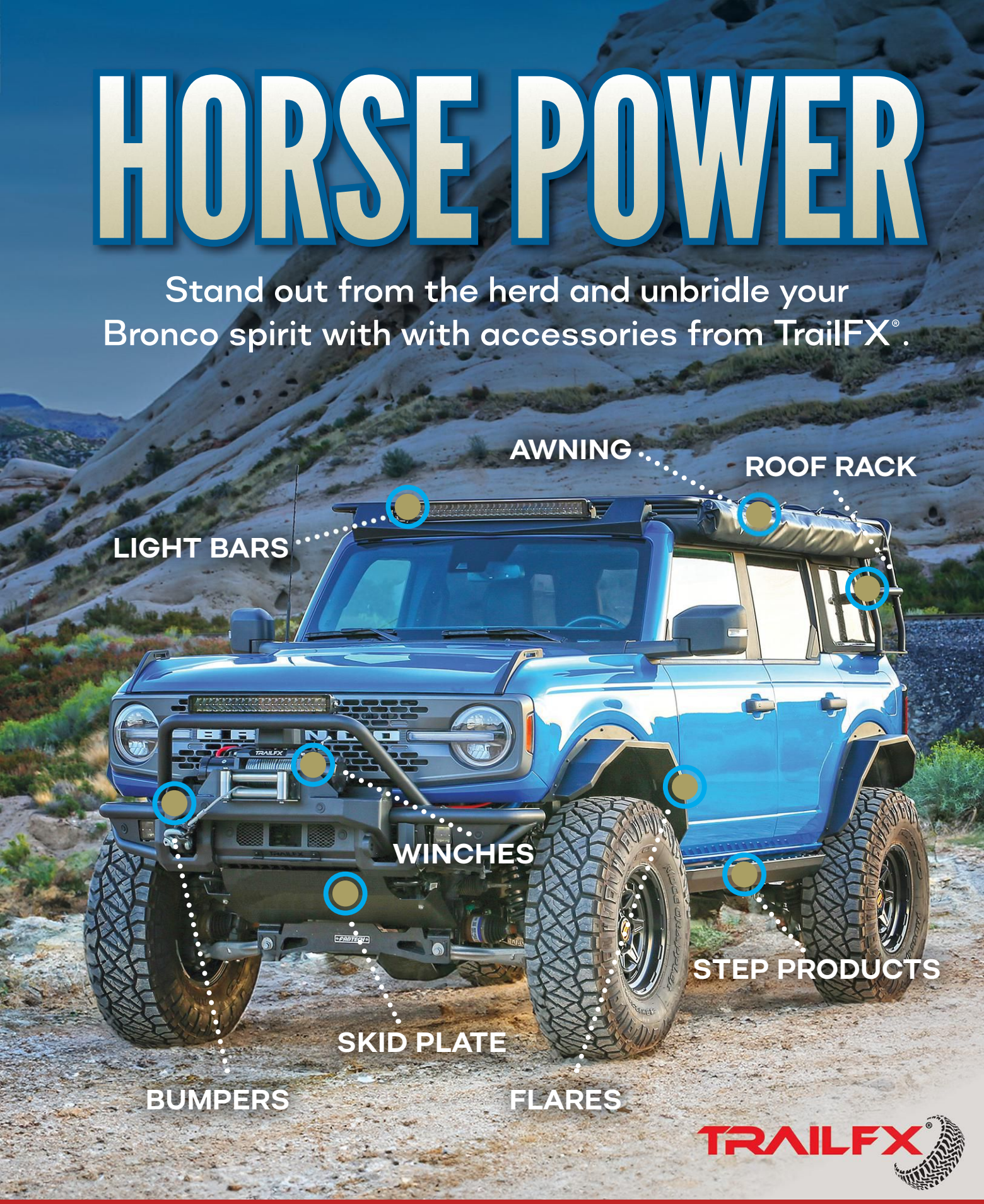
"The rear quarter panels are easily replaceable, the fender flares are really easy to replace, the bumpers are also very simple to remove and replace, and the wheel wells



Aftermarket offerings are plentiful. (Photos courtesy Carli Suspension)

HORSE POWER

Stand out from the herd and unbridle your Bronco spirit with with accessories from TrailFX®.



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View the Bronco as a blank canvas for accessorization. (Photos courtesy D&C Designs)



New Bronco products mix classic looks and modern performance. (Photo courtesy KC HiLiTES)



Supplier support will help shops take full advantage of the trending market. (Photos courtesy KC HiLiTES)

are large and lend themselves to oversized tires with small amounts of lift," Roche notes.

In other words, it's a toy for grownups.

"The Bronco is essentially a glorified LEGO kit," says Danny and Chris Wehunt, owners of D&C Designs. "Owners can do whatever they want with them, turning a standard production vehicle into something that's an expression of themselves, whether for utility purposes or simply because they think it looks cool."

All it takes is a quick look around a local show or trailhead to recognize that the new Bronco is accessory-friendly.

"Ford designed them with the enthusiast in mind," says Dan Tourino, VP of Carli Suspension. "Being as capable a platform as it is from the factory, it's no surprise people and manufacturers are excited to see just how much performance they can squeeze out of it."

And aftermarket products seem to fit it with ease, adds Justin Hartenstein, director of development for ORACLE Lighting.

"Ford really thought about the end-user when designing the vehicle," he agrees. "With the simplicity of replacing parts, even to running wires to the factory auxiliary switches for aftermarket light bars, they designed this vehicle with the intent of modifying and creating simplicity for the customer, in what was a genius move."

THE ROAD & THE TRAIL

Did the Bronco offer any surprises when it was first reintroduced?

"It's on-road prowess," says Tourino. "The Bronco marketing pointed the various models to the rocks and the desert. We anticipated the off-road capability would come at the cost of on-road stability and handling. Much to our surprise, the on-road manners are civil, and the Bronco holds a lane as well as an F-150 while running circles around it off-highway."

Roche has a similar impression.

"The Bronco drives really well, and if lifted correctly will maintain that ride quality," he says.

Stickney notes the SUV is equally at home on pavement or dirt.

"We do a lot of off roading in the desert—sand dunes, trails and rock crawling—and the new Bronco has surprised us at every turn and obstacle as to how capable it is."

The 4x4 also blends the best of both worlds when it comes to styling and appearance.

"The Bronco surprised us by so accurately keeping the 'classic' Bronco look, while incorporating modern day technologies and comforts that let you take a comfortable daily driver and still go explore and wheel where others can't," say the Wehunts.

Ford's marketing of the Bronco's on-trail advantages has encouraged customers to modify their vehicles, says Hartenstein.

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Bucking THE TREND



On-trail advantages have encouraged Bronco drivers to modify their vehicles.
(Photos courtesy ORACLE Lighting)

"A big reason the new-gen Ford Bronco has been such a success for new accessories is really thanks in part to Ford showcasing it as the ultimate off-road vehicle," he says. "The community views it as a superior overland vehicle, which, in turn, has allowed aftermarket companies like ORACLE to create products that are specifically designed for the end users' needs."

Updated technology also helps with accessorization, Wimenta notes.

"If the new Ford Bronco owner has a Ford Upfitter Switch System, the installation will be a lot easier for shops."

SALES AT A GALLOP

Shops looking to increase sales of Bronco-related products don't have to go far to find something of interest to owners.

"For every available factory modification, the aftermarket has its rebuttal," says Carli's Tourino.

Solutions can appeal to all types of drivers.

"Advertise the Bronco as a blank canvas to become an extension of the owner's personality and lifestyle," recommend the Wehunts from D&C.

Carrying a wide variety of products is going to spark ideas for personalization, agrees Hartenstein.

"Many new Bronco owners may be new to the accessories marketplace as well, so shops have a great opportunity to highlight that they have many offerings for Bronco customers and showcase all available products," he says. "Bronco users are ready to modify—we just need to put the parts in front of them."

In fact, you may want to put your shop in front of them as well by joining in on their next adventure.

"Be an enthusiast—get into your local club and go wheeling," advises Roche from HAVOC. "If you have wheeled, broken and then fixed issues, you will understand your customers' needs. This goes hand in hand with sales and builds."

When it comes to sales, Roche identifies an important starting point.

"In reference to builds, the first question I ask customers is, 'What size tire do you want to run?' Everything revolves around this question and gives you a good idea on what your customer wants out of their vehicle," he says.

Because these vehicles are often put to the test both on- and off-road, it's important that shops partner with suppliers they can count on, Stickney says.

"Stick to brands like Westin that support you day-in and day-out with top-quality products that fit and function the way customers expect," he suggests. "Brand and quality matter when it comes to aftermarket products."

Supplier support is crucial, Wimenta concludes.

"Get to know our product offerings. We have a lot of marketing content to educate your team on all of our new Ford Bronco products. In addition, if you have a new Ford Bronco as a display vehicle, we offer a program that will help you showcase your display Bronco with KC lights." ***TS***

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Join+Together

By Jef White

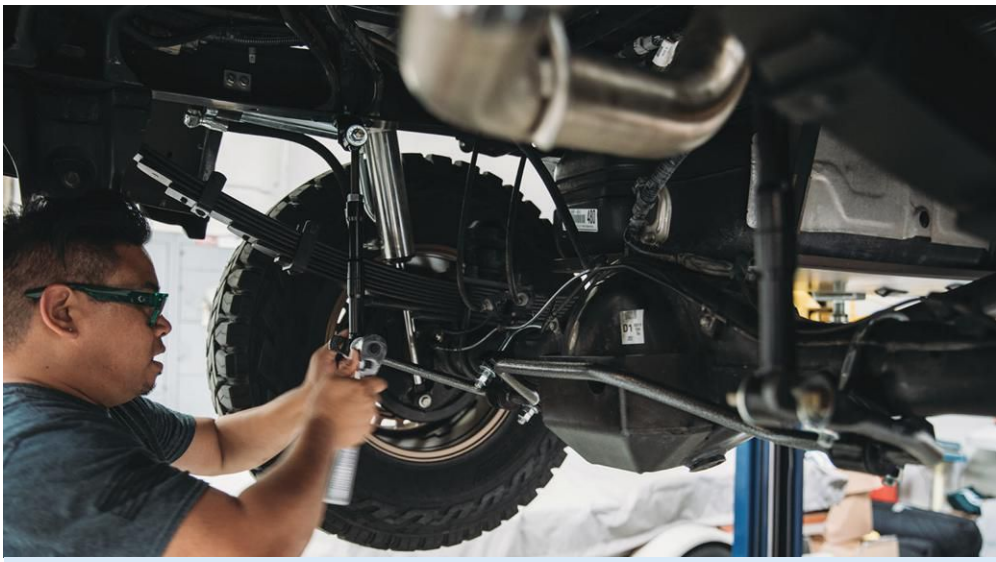
The towing & hauling market is all about matchmaking

From peanut butter and jelly to rhythm and blues, some things are just meant to be together. The same can be said for your customer's tow vehicles and trailers.

A healthy market that only seems to be growing, towing and hauling is all about making the right connections. And with a wide variety of products available, and an important safety aspect that shouldn't be overlooked, customers are turning to professional shops to create the proper systems for their specific plans and goals.

Become an industry matchmaker by offering the parts, service and knowledge required to do towing right. Suppliers are happy to help with observations on the market, trends to investigate and new products to examine.

Now's the time to join together to turn your customers' towing dreams into reality.



When it comes to outfitting tow vehicles, it can be best to think of them as complete systems. (Photo courtesy Hellwig Products)

CALL OF THE WILD

The secret is out—many consumers are looking to get away from it all.

"The biggest outside factor affecting the towing and hauling market is the drive for people to spend time outdoors and recreationally," says Melanie White, CEO of Hellwig Products. "There's a big push for that right now and a huge opportunity to sell into this market."

It turns out that customers just want to have fun.

"With side-by-sides, toy haulers and travel trailers being more prevalent and accessible, recreational enthusiasts have some type of trailer that needs towing," says Loc Nguyen, project manager – electronics for aFe POWER. "Couple that with the growing truck segment of newer vehicles on the road and the aftermarket world is booming, with the constant need for more power and capability from your work-and-play truck."



Educate drivers on the additional accessories and attachments that are available. (Photo courtesy GEN-Y Hitch)

With the clientele in place, it's time to make hay while the sun shines, says Chanakya Thakkar, marketing specialist for Timbren Industries.

"Seasonality affects consumer demand. The hotter it gets, the more sales you make."

Despite their desires, however, disposable income can limit customers' projects.

"Inflationary/recession economics play a factor as it relates to discretionary spending by households and the ability to travel, recreate and vacation," notes Russell Brzezinski, senior group manager – product management for Draw-Tite, part of the First Brands Group.

Uncertain economic times direct consumers to efficient, durable products that are worth the price, says Justin Coulter, director of sales for SuperSprings International.

"You can't ignore the colossal impact of the economy on the towing and hauling industry over the past few years. Limited access to materials, chassis and trucks, and added external factors have sent shockwaves through the industry, compelling enthusiasts to squeeze every ounce of utility from their existing trucks and trailers," Coulter says. "Due to this, maintenance has become an area of interest for many owners, especially concerning their vital suspension components. Resilience and resourcefulness are keys, as enthusiasts and professionals alike navigate this uncertain market."

What is certain is that, as the industry grows, input from end users is helping manufacturers build better towing products.

"Customer demand is what pushes the production of new and innovative products and is improving the towing and hauling market as we know it today," says Donna

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TOWING PRODUCTS

■ **HOT PRODUCTS:** aFe Scorcher HD & Scorcher BLUE Power Modules
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:** Provide extra boosts in horsepower and torque to meet the higher performance demands that are placed on trucks while towing; minimal effort required for installation with no programming or flashing of the ECU required; four power outputs; in-cab and app control.

aFe POWER
Loc Nguyen
Project Manager-Electronics

■ **HOT PRODUCT:** WirelessOne Tank + EZ Mount Compressor System
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:** Monitor and control air pressures in the load support air spring kit; system includes a heavy-duty air compressor and a 2-gallon auxiliary air tank; delivers on-board air to fill tires or inflatables or run small air tools; wireless controller and mobile app.

Air Lift Company
Laurel Brown
Southeast District Sales Manager – National Team Lead

■ **HOT PRODUCT:** True Course Electronic Sway Control #51202
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:** Advanced sway control system acts independently of the driver to limit trailer sway in emergency maneuvers, heavy winds or poor road conditions; acts before a driver can react for peace of mind and an overall safer towing experience.

CURT
Kristi Feeney
Marketing Manager

■ **HOT PRODUCT:** Draw-Tite Hidden Hitch
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:** Hidden mounting design with detachable receiver that returns your vehicle to a factory appearance; reinsert the receiver to accept a device when it's time to tow or attach a carrier/bike rack; a hitch only when you need it.

Draw-Tite
(Part of the First Brands Group)
Russell Brzezinski
Senior Group Manager – Product Management





Educate and assist customers on the best products. (Photos courtesy aFe POWER)



Seasonality can affect consumer demand in the towing market. (Photo courtesy Timbren Industries)

Schmucker, marketing director for GEN-Y Hitch. "By listening to the feedback of our customers, we learn so much about what the market needs."

And those products fit a wide variety of vehicles.

"The availability and pricing of new vehicles continues to be a factor. In some cases, this may mean the customer has to 'make do' with what they have or buy an older used vehicle that they might not have previously considered," says Laurel Brown, Southeast district sales manager – national team lead for Air Lift Company. "We continue to see strong sales numbers around our older applications as second owners upfit used vehicles and commercial fleets repurpose trucks they already own."

MORE TO ADD

When it comes to outfitting tow vehicles, it can be best to think of them as complete systems.

"The biggest mistake we see is that shops only sell the customer the product they come in asking for," White says. "There is a huge opportunity to educate and sell the customer on additional aftermarket products that will make their towing experience better."

With so much to choose from, drivers will trust your knowledge and experience. There are cases, however, when you can take things too far.

"Sometimes shops get too much in the weeds about technical features rather than talking about how the product helps solve people's towing and hauling issues," Thakkar observes.

This includes factoring in the essential maintenance needs and comfort of the driver, Coulter adds.

"It's not just about slapping on a hitch or beefing up suspension components—the key is to assess how rigorously the truck or trailer will be tasked with towing duties versus its regular driving demands," he explains. "Striking that delicate balance

between towing prowess and everyday comfort can make or break the customer's experience, and it's a pitfall that shops should steer clear of at all costs."

At the same time, it's also important for shops to refrain from overselling, says Schmucker.

"For instance, recommending customers install a weight distribution system. Customers seem to feel safer with a weight distribution system attached, but many times it's unnecessary for their setup," she notes. "It's thought to be safer but is not necessary for heavier-rated tow vehicles and lighter loads. It's only needed for lighter-duty vehicles to prevent them from squatting with heavier loads."

It therefore helps to know the exact type of vehicle you're dealing with.

"It is important to ask for specific details about any additional aftermarket items already installed on the truck and review the VIN or put eyes on the vehicle prior to ordering parts," says Brown. "A customer may say they have an F-350 flat bed, but when it arrives for parts installation, you might discover that it is an F-350 standard chassis with a bed delete versus an F-350 cab chassis vehicle, which often requires different part numbers."



Higher-quality products often drive increased revenue. (Photo courtesy Draw-Tite)

Regardless of the system or setup, shops will want to trust the products they offer. It starts with building strong supplier relationships.



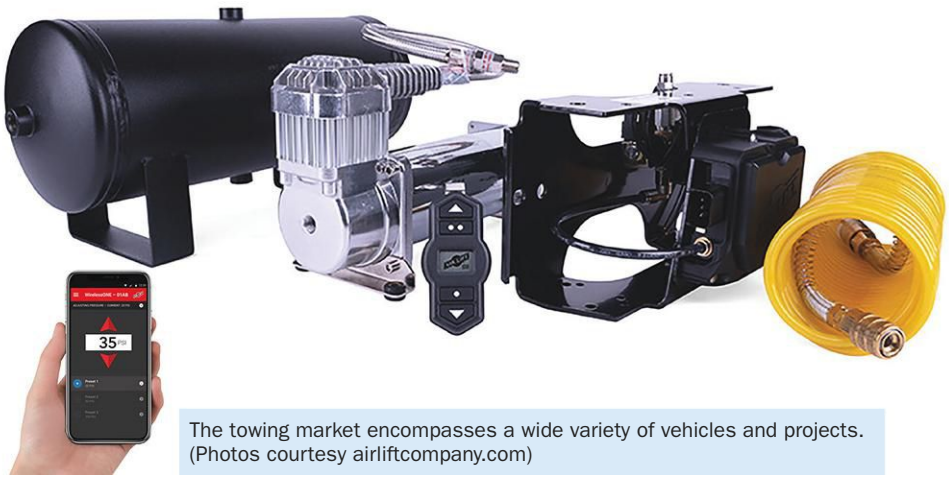
TOWING PRODUCTS

■ **HOT PRODUCT:**
MEGA-DUTY Drop Hitch
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Fully adjustable and heavy duty; offered in multiple shank and drop sizes; can be flipped upside down in the truck receiver; can tow a bumper pull or a lunette ring trailer; offered between 10,000-32,000 pounds of weight capacity; made in America.
GEN-Y Hitch
Donna Schmucker
Marketing Director

■ **HOT PRODUCTS:**
Sway Bars
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Our best hidden secret; subtle installation that you feel drastically as the driver; help drivers feel more confident and in control because the vehicle is easier to handle; the added stability is a true night-and-day difference.
Hellwig Products Co. Inc.
Melanie White
CEO

■ **HOT PRODUCTS:**
TSS-107-47 Trailer SumoSprings
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Offer stability, control and adaptability; progressive spring rate delivers a smoother ride and helps reduce G-forces and vibration by at least 68%; ease of installation makes it an easy choice for DIY enthusiasts; integrates with the RV's factory setup.
SuperSprings International
Justin Coulter
Director of Sales

■ **HOT PRODUCT:**
GMRCK25D SES (Suspension Enhancement System)
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Reduces sag, sway and roll when towing and hauling; comfortable ride, loaded or unloaded; DIY installation; zero post-installation maintenance.
Timbren Industries Inc.
Chanakya Thakkar
Marketing Specialist



The towing market encompasses a wide variety of vehicles and projects. (Photos courtesy airliftcompany.com)

"Don't have the mindset that a 'hitch is just a hitch,'" says Brzezinski. "There are many different attributes that influence the product and price positioning of manufacturers and brands. Appreciate the legacy of companies that have been in the towing business for 80 years or more."

Familiarity will bring consistent results, says Nguyen.

"Shops can still make mistakes when installing a new device that they are not familiar with. In the case of our products, as with any electronic device, the issue can be solved by the process of elimination, such as: Did the ECU power down fully when disconnecting sensors? Were there any steps in the installation that we missed? Did all the connectors click into place? Most issues can be remedied by calling the manufacturer and obtaining support instead of deeming the product defective."

EXPERT SUGGESTIONS

Education is often the key to a successful sale, which means shops must be patient with their customers and explain what's available and why it's important.

"There is always an opportunity to introduce new products to a customer as our industry continues to develop new technology," says Air Lift's Brown. "You as a dealer and installer of towing and hauling products are trusted as the expert, which is why customers come to you versus buying products elsewhere."

Shops should recognize that customers may not be familiar with the complementary products available to assist them with their towing needs.

"It can be as simple as asking if a customer has considered supplemental load support when they call about any hitch installation, but especially a fifth wheel hitch installation," Brown notes.

GEN-Y's Schmucker agrees with the importance of educating drivers on the additional accessories and upgrades available.

"Many times, a simple attachment could be the solution to an issue the customer is experiencing, or it could be an easy sell," she says. "There's a variety of additional accessories such as locking pins, hitch steps, hitch tighteners and more."

As the professionals in these conversations, it's on you and your staff to help customers build a safe, reliable tow package.

"Think about complementary products and make an additional sale," says Hellwig's White. "For example, if someone comes in for a rooftop tent, they will now have extra weight and will need sway control as well, so there is an opportunity to sell helper springs and sway bars. Or, if someone comes in to buy a hitch then they will be towing, so there is an opportunity to make sure their vehicle is fully set up for that. And make sure they have both load and sway control products."

Lock down the driver's plans and goals for the system in advance, advises Nguyen from aFe POWER.

"Communicate and confirm what the customer's main expectations and concerns are. Offer a list of products that are best recommended based on their needs and educate and assist with the decision-making process. It is mutually beneficial when the customer's needs are met and they are satisfied with the outcome. This reduces refunds and gains a long-term, repeat customer."

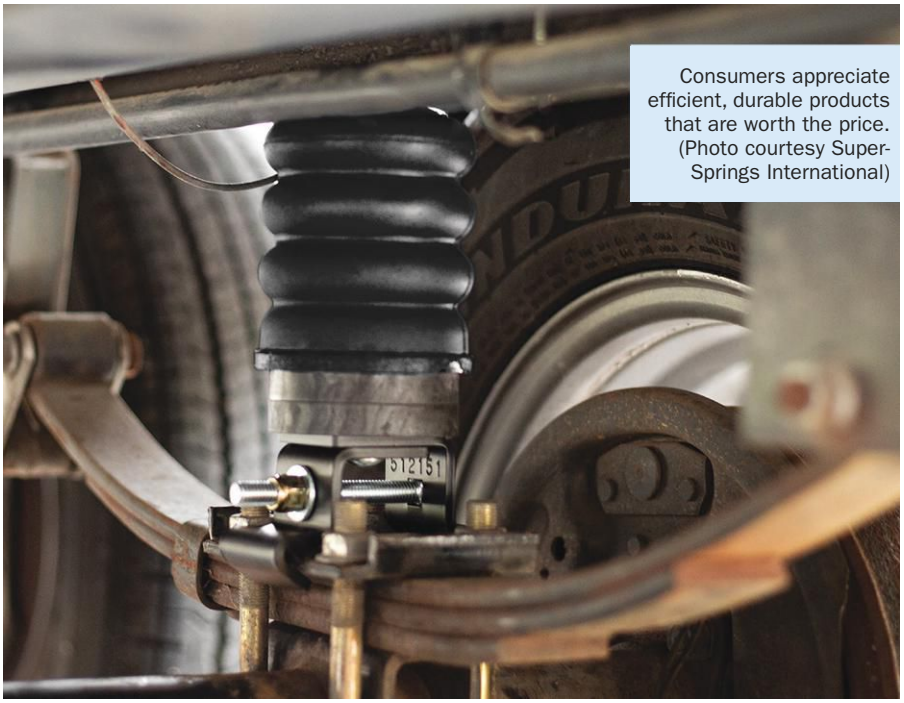
When it comes to products, remember

that top quality will drive increased revenue, says Brzezinski.

"Upsell the higher towing capacities offered through brands like Draw-Tite, such as the higher tongue weights to allow for more 'at the receiver' weight carry for bike or cargo carriers, and increase profits by offering the Hidden Hitch line of receivers, where profit margins are high."

To help your sales team, Timbren's Thakkar provides simple steps when selling towing products:

- Focus on great customer service
- Offer robust products that include strong warranties
- Focus on consumer education



Consumers appreciate efficient, durable products that are worth the price. (Photo courtesy SuperSprings International)

Coulter from SuperSprings calls it the art of pursuing "supplemental sales."

"Picture this scenario—a customer rolls into your shop seeking suspension upgrades for their trusty tow vehicle, but don't stop there. Suggest complementary enhancements for their trailer, RV or whatever they're towing," he says. "Imagine the possibilities—optimizing the rear suspension of the tow vehicle for added stability while simultaneously amping up the front suspension to ensure a smoother ride and diminished body roll when hauling hefty loads. By seizing these supplemental opportunities, your shop can not only elevate profits but also have customers towing in style and confidence." ***TS***



TOP OF THE TRAIL

Rocky Top Customz enjoys its off-road success.

By Maura Keller



The shop often hits the trails with customers to test products, build a community and have fun. (Photo by Tom Patterson)

Located in Knoxville, Tennessee, Rocky Top Customz is a full-service off-road shop that provides everything needed to fully outfit rugged vehicles. Popular items include lift and leveling kits, wheel and tire packages, gear installations, bumpers and armor.

The shop also offers full custom fabrication and complete engine swaps, and even does its own in-house alignments. The showroom is stocked with a variety of lighting and related aftermarket truck and Jeep accessories, and includes a section dedicated to RC Rock Crawlers.

"Coming from a background as a union electrician by trade, the off-road side of life was always just a hobby that allowed me to express my creative side through bending tubes and building one-off projects for myself and my friends," says Jason Willis, owner of Rocky Top Customz. "I never thought it would lead into a business, let alone one I have been doing for the better part of 25 years now."

Willis first gained attention from his friends with a custom Suzuki Samurai build. When he appeared at the local off-road park, people were intrigued and asked questions.

"'Why did you build this?' 'How did you do that?' Through trial and error, I realized that I had a skill and could offer people a service that wasn't available in the area," Willis recalls. "And that is how Nobbies Off-Road, a little airplane hangar behind my house and my first shop in Joliet, Illinois, came to be."



Located in Knoxville, Tennessee, Rocky Top Customz is a full-service off-road shop that provides everything needed to fully outfit rugged vehicles. (Photo by Evan Patterson)



Popular items include lift and leveling kits, wheel and tire packages, gear installations, bumpers and armor. (Photo by Evan Patterson)



The shop also offers full custom fabrication and complete engine swaps, and even does its own in-house alignments. (Photo by Evan Patterson)

In 2015, after falling in love with a Tennessee transplant and former high school friend, Willis made what would be one of his life's biggest decisions. He sold off everything he had, left his job and headed south.

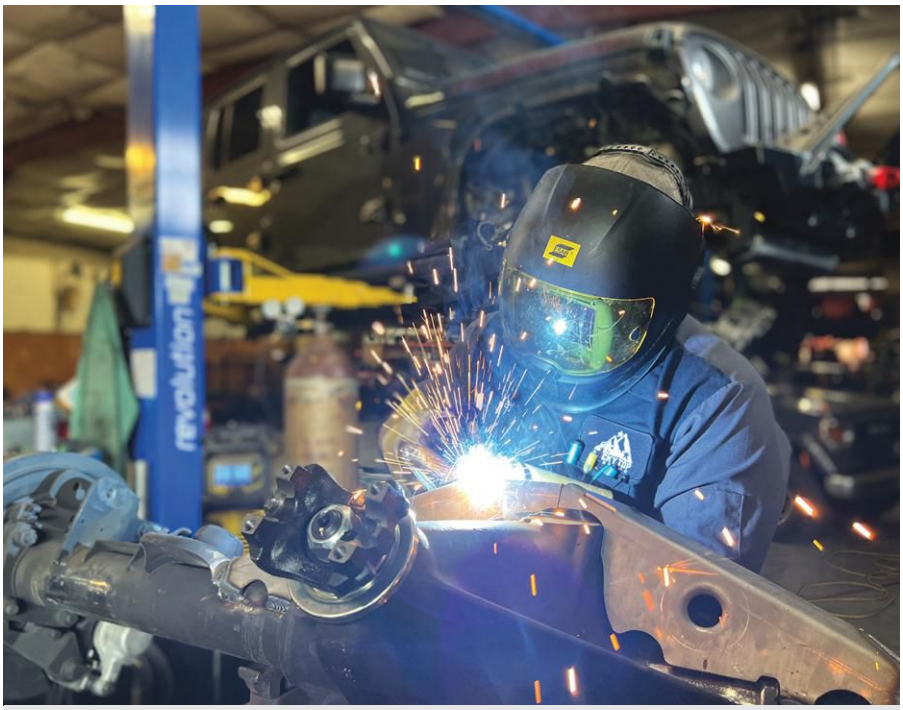
"With a few plans for work and a few job opportunities lined up, and after hanging out around the area for a bit, I could tell I was missing something. I also believed that Knoxville was missing something as well," Willis says. "I knew a full-service off-road shop needed to happen, and I felt it was my calling to be able to provide that. Now that the idea was there, I just needed a name for it. 'Nobbies' was great back home (in Illinois), but it had its place, and it was time for something new."

It wasn't until Willis was sitting behind the goalposts at Neyland Stadium, listening



TOP OF THE TRAIL

The showroom is stocked with a variety of lighting and other aftermarket truck and Jeep accessories, and includes a section dedicated to RC Rock Crawlers. (Photo by Evan Patterson)



Rocky Top takes a customer's vision and creates something they can be proud of for years to come. (Photo by Evan Patterson)

to the University of Tennessee's Pride Marching Band perform before a game, that inspiration for a new name struck.

"This one song, 'Rocky Top,' just stuck with me that day. Was it the song or the numerous times it was played throughout the game? Or was it the passion that those fans sang with every time the band started? No one will know, but that name kept coming back to me," Willis says. "*Rocky Top. Rocky Top. Rocky Top*. A quick search for 'Rocky Top Customz' came up with no history, and that fall day was the beginning of Rocky Top Customz."

VISIONS TO REALITY

In January 2016, Willis officially opened the doors to Rocky Top Customz in a 5,000-square-foot building in West Knoxville. It wasn't long before business was booming.

"With the community's help and an outpouring of love from our supporters, our once 'large enough' building was no longer large enough to house the needs of our everyday projects. In November 2019, we officially moved into what we hope will be our forever home, an 18,000-square-foot building with five lifts," Willis says.

East Tennessee is a very hard-working area and, as Willis points out, Rocky Top Customz is in the business of rewarding that work ethic by creating vehicles that customers have earned.

"We pride ourselves on taking your vision and creating something you can be proud of for years to come," Willis says. "If you need anything—a quick alignment after an install, a new set of wheels and tires, a

full-blown lift kit with new gears, an engine swap, fully custom fabricated bumpers and lighting—we can serve you promptly and professionally."

It's not just about making a vehicle stand out in a parking lot, he continues, "but building something that our customers can take their families in safely and securely to explore this beautiful country and places that not every tourist can see."

Recently, the team at Rocky Top Customz finished a 2018 Jeep Wrangler Unlimited Rubicon. It was the first JLU the team had worked on, rebuilding it from the ground up with new axles, a long-arm coil-over suspension setup, hydraulic assist steering, 40-inch tires and bead-locks, and more.

"What was special about the build was that we finished it up on a Thursday evening, the customer came back for a final check on Friday, and then he loaded it on a trailer and went (with us) to wheel some of the hardest terrain in the Northeast at Rausch Creek and AOAA at an event called Krawl America," Willis says. "The coolest part was having people ask him about the build, and him pointing over and telling them it was less than a week old and we were the ones who built it."

A GROWING COMMUNITY

Rocky Top Customz sees a vast array of customers walk through the doors, many looking for a lift kit and a quality set of wheels and tires.

"That's not to say we haven't lifted a Prius or a smart car, or lowered a truck to help an elderly couple get in and out of it better. If it is doable, or has been done, there is a good chance at some point in time we have done it," Willis says.

The company currently has eight employees, including Willis. Three technicians perform installations and fabrication in the back, oftentimes aided by an alignment technician.

Up front, a sales associate and a general manager handle sales, while a marketing director oversees the shop's social media and videography needs.

When setting prices, Willis and his team analyze the local market to stay competitive while increasing the value of the experience to their customers. The goal is to stay competitive with online pricing, including pulling pricing directly from manufacturers' websites when available.

"Being in Knoxville, what we have realized is that people like to see you. People like to talk to you. People want to interact," Willis explains. "The best exposure we can get is getting out in the community, going to shows and events and showcasing our brand. We have a very unique skill set when it comes to jobs that we can do, and the best way to show that off is to do exactly that—show it off."

Social media has become a transformative platform for businesses over the past 10 years, including at Rocky Top Customz (rockytopcustomz.com). The main focus of its social media is to showcase the day-to-day business of what is coming in and going out of the shop.

As Willis explains, the company also utilizes social media for interacting with customers on a more personal level, as well as providing pricing and information to potential customers.

"We capture our trips and events in a light that really draws the consumer in and makes them want to come back and see more," Willis says.

The biggest challenge Rocky Top Customz runs into on a shop level is staffing.

"While we are a tightknit group of employees turned friends, we always love to see each other succeed. Selfishly, I want to keep everyone here, but I know that is only sometimes the case," Willis says. "Seeing someone leave to better themselves, whether it is to start their own company doing something they've learned here, pursuing a new passion or even just spending time doing something else they love, is truly rewarding. But on the back end, our puzzle lost a key piece that needs to be replaced."

Willis says the best part of being an off-road business is knowing that, at the end of the day, the staff members who work at Rocky Top Customz get to build the life they want.

"Coming in on Monday mornings and hearing how they spent their weekends, whether it be wheeling at Windrock, a cookout with the family or even just having the time to sit and relax, is truly rewarding," Willis says. "As with any business, we would love to continue to grow. Growth is key to all business, and we strive to continue to climb and grow."

So, what's next for a shop that's on top of the trail?

"We can't give away all of our secrets to what our future holds, so I guess you will just have to follow our journey along with us!" he says. ***TS***

MAURA KELLER *is a freelance writer based in Minnesota. She can be reached at maurakeller@yahoo.com.*





Factory Replacement Springs

Eibach, Corona, California, presents its Eibach Replacement Line (ERL) of factory replacement springs. The range of springs covers hundreds of common applications ranging from Audi to Volkswagen and Chevrolet to Toyota. The springs are made to OE guidelines and feature zinc phosphating as a pre-treatment to prevent infiltration of corrosion. Thoroughly tested, they are developed and produced in the USA and Germany.

Van Insulation Kits



Design Engineering Inc. (DEI), Avon Lake, Ohio, presents a newly expanded line of Van Insulation Kits, including applications for new Ford Transit and Dodge Ram ProMaster models. Custom insulation kits are also available for select models of (high-roof) 2007-up Mercedes-Benz Sprinter vans. The custom-cut kits take the guesswork out of creating cool, quiet and comfortable van interiors, featuring D-Mat insulation that keeps the cabin at a consistent temperature and Boom Mat damping material that eliminates squeaks, rattles and vibrations.



Camping Bundle

Napier Outdoors, Niagara Falls, New York, presents the Napier Lite Pack, a standalone, compact, lightweight ground tent crafted for adventurers seeking an off-grid experience beyond their vehicle. The lightweight tent weighs 10 pounds and offers a spacious 7-by-6-foot interior, with a three pole design allowing for easy setup in less than 10 minutes. The Napier Lite Pack is part of a unique camping bundle that includes the two-person tent and two hollow fiber-filled sleeping bags.

Bronco Third Brake Light Antenna Mount

Bullet Proof Diesel, Mesa, Arizona, presents a Third Brake Light Antenna Mount for new-generation Ford Bronco models. The patented mount is made from machined aluminum with corrosion-resistant connectors for a wide range of radio compatibility. The system replaces the OE spare tire arms to seamlessly house antenna components.





Off-Road Suspension Products

RSO Suspension, Hayward, California, a **CYC Engineering** brand, presents its complete line of Off-Road Suspension Products for overlanders and trail rigs. Tested on challenging terrain from the Gobi Desert to Moab, available components include Adjustable Shocks, Heavy-Duty Track Bars, Coil Springs, Control Arms, Lift Kits and more for popular truck, Jeep and SUV applications.



Extreme All-Terrain Tire

Yokohama Tire, Santa Ana, California, presents the GEOLANDAR X-AT extreme all-terrain tire, now available in 17 new Euro/hard metric sizes along with its existing LT-metric sizes. The tire, engineered for pickups, Jeeps and SUVs, will be offered in more than 80 sizes by year's end, ranging from 15 to 22 inches. Created for off-road performance without sacrificing on-road comfort, it features a dual-sidewall design that allows drivers to choose their preferred appearance.

Accent Lighting Control Module



Dakota Digital, Sioux Falls, South Dakota, presents its new BIM-RGB Accessory Module to control a vehicle's LED accent lighting. Designed to be used as a standalone unit or with the company's gauge systems, the module offers the ability to sync interior lighting with the color scheme of the gauges. Outputs for up to four 32-inch strings of LEDs are included, along with optional switch inputs to support custom installations. There are more than 30 color selections, and the system is programmable via Bluetooth using the app.

Ford Bronco Sasquatch Lift Kit



Tuff Country, Phoenix, a **DPI Off-Road Brand**, presents a 2-inch Suspension Lift Kit designed to make lifting Ford Bronco Sasquatch models simple and affordable. The kit includes Tuff Country Upper Control Arms that ensure proper geometry and alignment after the lift is installed, in turn improving handling characteristics and suspension articulation. It enhances overall off-road capabilities and allows for a larger tire size to be installed.

Shocks for Mid-Size Trucks



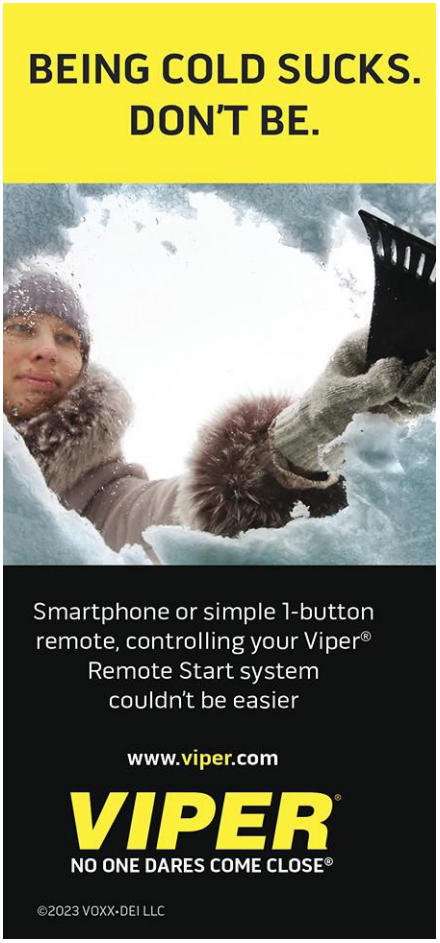
Radflo Suspension Technology, Fountain Valley, California, presents ROAM 2.5 Series Shocks, designed for mid-size trucks such as the Toyota Tacoma with added conversions such as a camper or rack system. Upgrading to a 2.5 shock with standard adjusters improves control and offers the ability to adjust for all types of on- and off-road terrain. For maximum control, optional Hi/Lo adjusters are available.

Wrangler Side Steps



Quadratec, West Chester, Pennsylvania, presents Carnivore Side Steps for Jeep Wrangler JLU and JKU models, featuring the addition of two new protective styles. Designed to blend function and performance with affordability, the 72-inch-long, 6.25-inch-wide side steps allow easier access to the vehicle while adding a tough, rugged look with aggressive styling. Each step is dipped in a protective black textured powder-coating for corrosion resistance. *TS*





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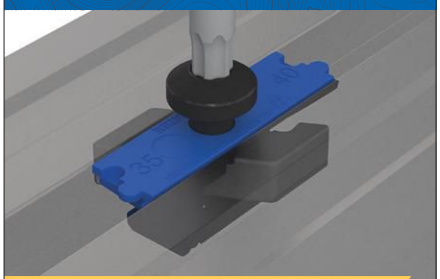
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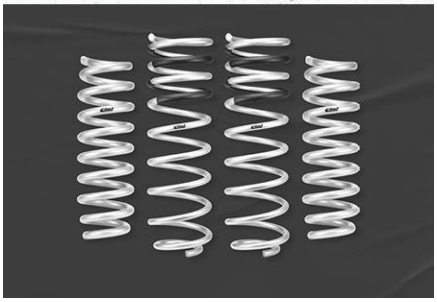
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The Top Vehicles for Dogs

According to a recent study from Autotrader, 92% of dog owners consider their dogs to be a part of their family, and more than 77% of dog owners think about transporting their pets when considering which vehicle to buy.

For its 10th annual National Dog Day celebration, Autotrader, a Cox Automotive brand, set its sights on helping pups in need by partnering with Emmy-nominated celebrity personality and New York Times bestselling author Jonathan Van Ness.

Van Ness and a team of makeover specialists visited Austin Pets Alive! in Austin, Texas, to give some well-deserved pampering to the shelter's long-term residents. The hope was to help the dogs catch the attention of their future families by ensuring the pups were all cleaned up and ready to assume their positions as beloved shotgun riders.

As part of the promotion Autotrader also unveiled its Best Cars for Dog Lovers list.

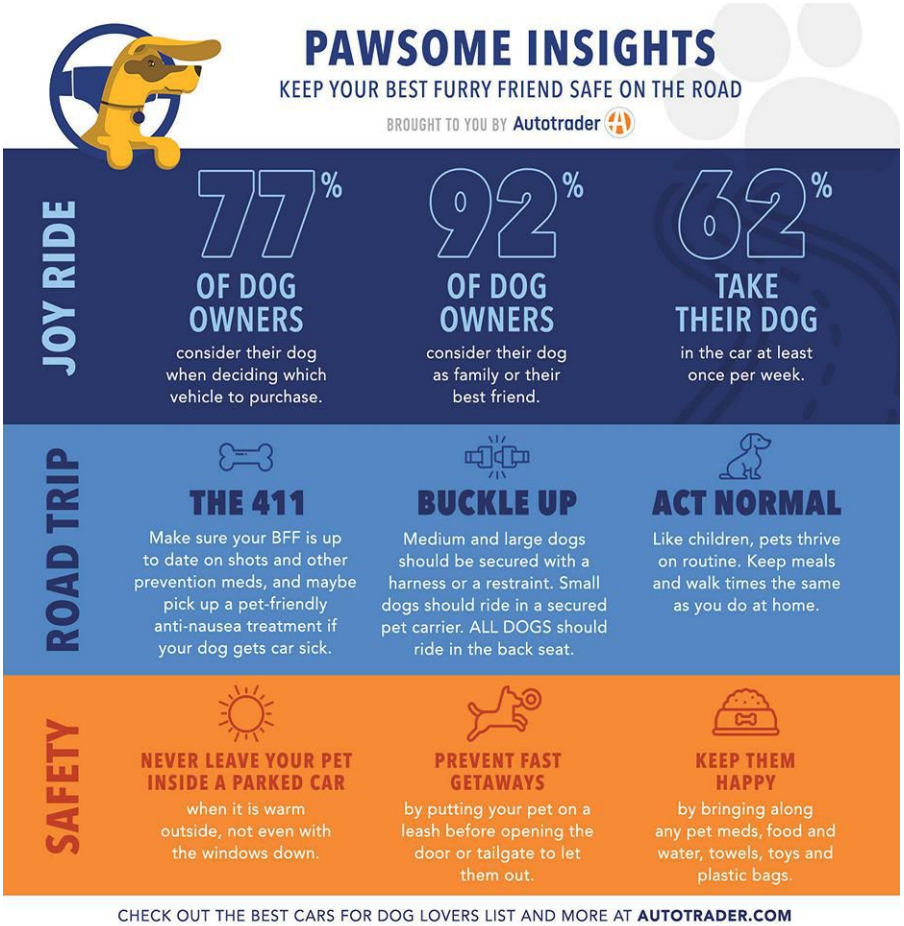
"We honor the unbreakable bond between humans, their furry companions and the joy of driving with Autotrader's Best Cars for Dog Lovers for 2023," says Brian Moody, executive editor at Autotrader. "Partnering with the effervescent Jonathan Van Ness to pamper these shelter dogs, we're reminded that just like finding the perfect car, the journey to finding a loving home for these dogs is a special one. Together with Jonathan, we're embracing the spirit of National Dog Day and creating memories that will last a lifetime by celebrating love, compassion and the open road."

The Best Cars for Dog Lovers list, curated by Autotrader editors, considered 2023 model-year vehicles "that are paw-fectly suited for dogs and their owners."

In alphabetical order, the list includes:

- 2023 Audi Q3
- 2023 Ford Bronco Sport
- 2023 Honda Pilot
- 2023 Hyundai Venue
- 2023 Jeep Grand Cherokee L
- 2023 Kia Soul
- 2023 Subaru Forester
- 2023 Tesla Model Y
- 2023 Toyota Sienna
- 2023 Volvo V60 Cross Country

In tandem with the makeovers, Autotrader also donated $10,000 to Austin Pets Alive! to help all the shelter's residents. ***TS***





Three-out-of-four dog owners think about transporting their pets when considering which vehicle to buy. (Photo by McLendon Photography)



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