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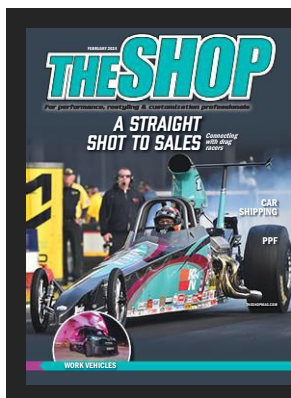
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Drag racers, by and large, are an impatient group. Shops that serve them can get right to the point by offering the products and knowledge competitors at all levels need to go fast. (Main photo courtesy K&N Engineering)

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Jef White
Editor

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The Wheels Keep Turning

The February issue of THE SHOP magazine is constructed during the weeks leading up to the holidays, when everyone in the aftermarket is trying to wrap up end-of-year responsibilities in time to celebrate and unwind with family and friends.

For many, it's a time of reflection and a chance to take stock of what's been accomplished over the past 12 months. Coming off yet another year of uncertainty (is there any other kind anymore!?), it feels good to celebrate victories big and small and show gratitude for employees, customers and fellow professionals.

Because the specialty automotive aftermarket covers so much ground, this is also the time we like to take stock of all the different parts of the industry we've touched on in these pages over the past year. If it seems 2023 passed by in a blur, recognize that a lot happened as well, including:

- **FEB 23** – Drag racing keeps its momentum; work trucks get the job done; window film sticks to the facts.
- **MAR** – Overlanding racks handle the load; classic cars are driving & thriving; fuel pumps deliver a steady flow.
- **APR** – Influencer captures car culture; clutch systems hold on tight; winches are a true anchor point.
- **MAY** – Bumper sales demand a straightforward approach; auto trends drive CES; diesel performance doesn't take a day off.
- **JUN** – Drifting turns 20; the Austin Hatcher Foundation uses mechanical work as therapy; programmer sales are dialed in.
- **JUL** – U.S. products make the grade; performance shocks provide stability & safety; ceramic coatings have a glossy allure.
- **AUG** – Industry suppliers are friendly neighbors; sport compacts are now classic cars; take cover with the latest tonneaus.
- **SEP** – Rooftop tents put heads in the clouds; road racing keeps finding traction; spray lubricants target tough tasks.
- **OCT** – Light bars drive away the dark; sales live beyond shop walls; quality drivetrains just mesh.
- **NOV** – SEMA projects blend tradition & innovation; Pro-Touring enhances the good; storage solutions solve space issues.
- **DEC** – New-gen Broncos ride tall in the saddle; American builds enjoy overseas demand; towing & hauling's perfect match.
- **JAN 24** – Smoothing the way forward; step products support a leg up; performance oils & fluids go with the flow.

Happy New Year and best wishes for health and prosperity from THE SHOP. **TS**

THE SHOP

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YOUR WEBSITE & SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS ARE **BROKEN**

PART I

■ Here's why & some steps to fix them. By Barry Alt

Note: This is the first in a multipart article addressing common issues with websites and social media accounts often encountered by specialty automotive aftermarket shops.

In this day and age, restoration, performance, race and restyling shops can't afford to have a weak online presence, so staying ahead is a must.

With smart search engines and AI on the rise, consumers using multiple electronic devices, and stricter government and platform compliance and regulations coming into play, your shop needs a robust, user-friendly website and social media business accounts to keep up and stand out.

These are like digital shop windows where potential customers can check out your offerings, assess your expertise and judge your credibility.

In fact, according to a Salesforce survey, 85% of consumers do some online digging before they make a purchase or use a service. Among the most-used channels for research are websites (74%) and social media (38%).



Your shop needs a robust, user-friendly website and social media business accounts to keep up and stand out.

This is why ensuring your online presence is in tip-top shape isn't just important—it's vital.

We're here to help you spot the key areas where your online presence may be lacking, on both your website and social media accounts, to identify opportunities to improve them.

Rest assured—we'll also provide the solutions to these issues, empowering you to attract new customers, boost your brand's recognition and maintain a competitive

edge in the aftermarket industry. For this article, we'll start with common things to go wrong with websites and how to fix them.

BE 'WEBSITE WISE'

With the advent of DIY web development platforms, building a website has never been easier. But we all know from experience—just because something is easy to do, it doesn't mean it's easy to do well.

We've noticed that while these platforms



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provide most of the tools needed to build a decent website, some of them don't explain how to fully use their web builders or how to avoid common problems.

We've all heard the phrase "you don't know what you don't know," and in the web development industry, what you don't know can lead to missing key elements that contribute to your web design's success.

Even if you do decide to hire a web developer or marketing agency, it's still important to familiarize yourself with and take the time to address important issues. This month we'll tackle seven issues to watch for.

1 NEGLECTING YOUR WEBSITE IN FAVOR OF SOCIAL MEDIA

One of the most common website-related mistakes shops make is relying only on social media while neglecting their website—or not having a site at all. We see this a lot with people starting out in the automotive aftermarket.



SOLUTION: Social media can do a lot for your business—especially when it comes to growing your customer base and keeping them engaged—but it can't do everything. Most likely you'll need a strong, clear, user-friendly website to carry out the bulk of your business online, from booking consultations to converting casual visitors into customers.

An experienced web designer or web development agency that specializes in the automotive industry can help. Together, you can build and maintain the perfect site for your business—one that goes hand-in-hand with your social media presence.



PRO TIP: Strike a balance by using social media as a complementary tool to drive traffic to your website. Share project teasers, exclusive content and updates to encourage your audience to explore your website for more information on your automotive aftermarket services.

2 AN INCOMPLETE SITE MAP

Before you or a developer starts building your site, you need to understand what pages and content to include. We see many sites that are missing key pages, making it difficult for visitors to find the information they need.



Strike a balance by using social media as a complementary tool to drive traffic to your website.

Here's a simple example of key pages we always start out with for an auto restoration or speed shop website map:

Home

Our Services

- [Service]
- [Service]
- [Service]
- [Service]
- [Service]

FAQs

Photo Gallery

- Current Projects
- Completed Projects

About

- Our Facility
- Our Team
- Testimonials
- Careers

Contact

- Terms of Use
- Privacy Policy
- Cookie Notice
- Accessibility Statement

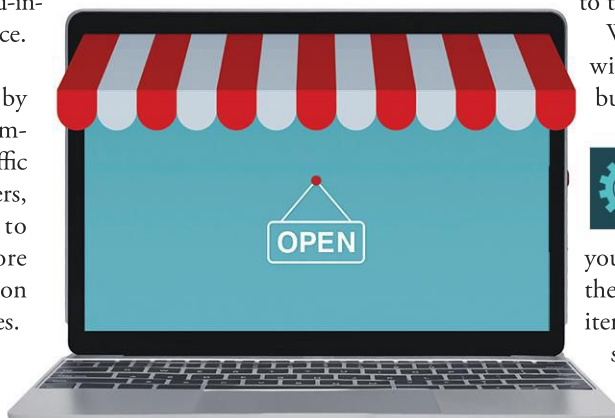


SOLUTION: First, consider what people want to know when they search for your products and services. Plan to build your site so that it answers their questions and offers solutions to the problems they're trying to solve.

What would help them choose to work with you? An FAQ page? A gallery of builds you're proud of?



PRO TIP: You can start building your website by creating a simple bullet list of the key things that you want your customers to know, and then make sure there are pages for these items built into your site map. If you're stumped for ideas or think you might be missing something, take a look at what your key competitors have on their websites. What seems to be working well? What might you want to avoid? You don't need to copy what someone else is doing, but it can help to see what may or may not work for you.



Your website and social media accounts are like digital shop windows, through which potential customers can check out your offerings, assess your expertise and judge your credibility.

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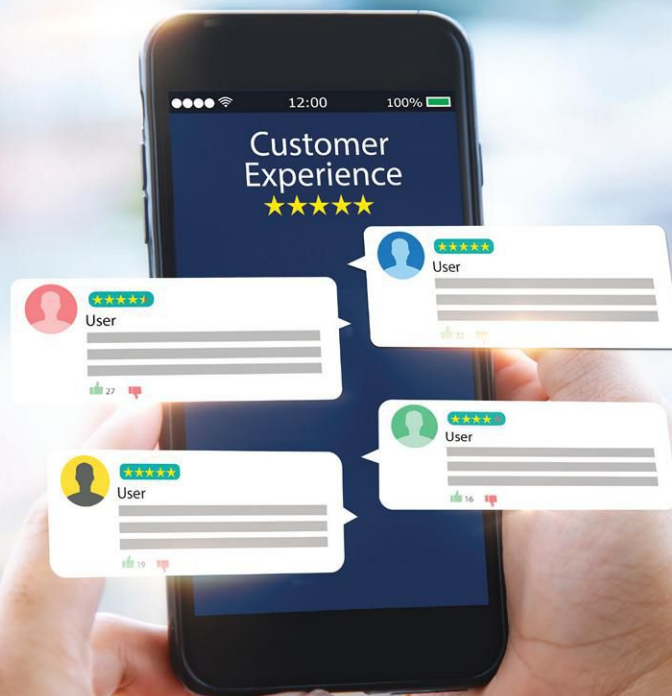
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Encourage user-generated content, such as customer reviews and testimonials, to enhance credibility and authenticity.



Google
Analytics

Regularly monitor your website's performance through tools like Google Analytics and Search Console.

3 MISSING OR LOW-QUALITY CONTENT

Quality content (copy and images) is the lifeblood of any successful website and a lack of it can seriously impact your level of perceived professionalism.



SOLUTION: Think about the story you're going to tell across your entire site, creating great, SEO-rich copy for each page. You should also

consider adding things like a blog with step-by-step DIY guides, process demonstrations and showcases of successful vehicle builds.

Enhance your site by including FAQs and detailed pages to offer valuable information to visitors.

Once you've loaded your site with valuable content, perform regular content audits to ensure accuracy, relevance and proper grammar.



PRO TIP: Encourage user-generated content, such as customer reviews and testimonials, to enhance credibility and authenticity. We mention blogs because they're great for SEO (search engine optimization), helping your website show up more prominently in search results. Remember that anyone could enter your site on any page. Not everyone hits your homepage first.

4 LACK OF CLEAR CALLS TO ACTION

Clear and compelling calls to action (CTAs) in your website text or buttons will guide your visitors toward the action you want them to take. Unclear CTAs may lead to confused visitors and missed opportunities.



SOLUTION: Strategically position prominent CTAs and descriptive buttons at relevant places throughout the pages of your site. Ensure the language is concise, action-focused and tells users exactly what to do next.



PRO TIP: Carry out A/B testing on different CTAs to find out which ones resonate best with your audience.



Carry out user testing or gather feedback from your audience to identify any issues with your website's look and feel.

5 NEGLECTING SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION (SEO)

A lack of quality SEO-related content that informs search engines about your products and services can make it extremely difficult for your audience to find your website.

I always say that Google does not care about your business, it cares about its customers—the people using its search tools.

Google's goal is to provide the best possible experience to its users by giving them the most accurate results in their search queries.

If you don't tell Google who you are or what you do by making sure you have great content that includes keyword phrases, searches in Google will not deliver your business to potential customers.



SOLUTION: Make sure your website follows SEO best practices.

This includes crafting compelling title and meta tag descriptions for each page, using SEO-rich H1 headers, optimizing your on-site copy to include important keyword phrases and optimizing images with descriptive ALT tags.



PRO TIP: Regularly monitor your website's performance through tools like Google Analytics and Search Console. Adjust your SEO strategy based on these insights for the best results.

6 NO CONTACT INFORMATION OR CONTACT FORM

If you expect people to hire you, they'll

need a quick and easy way to get a hold of you first. Prospective customers should have easy access to your contact information.

If your site is missing this, it can leave them frustrated—and possibly send them on to a competitor's website.



SOLUTION: Make sure your contact details are readily available on your website. Consider placing them in the header or footer for maximum visibility and accessibility. You can even embed a scheduling tool into your site like Calendly or Book Like a Boss.



PRO TIP: Include as many contact options as possible, such as a contact form, email address, phone number and even a physical address, if possible.

7 MISSING OR HARD-TO-NAVIGATE HEADERS & FOOTERS

Other common stumbling blocks for website visitors are poor headers and footers that aren't properly formatted—or haven't been included at all.

These are two key features that elevate both the look and feel of your website and its ease of navigation. Leaving these items unaddressed can often lead to users feeling frustrated.



SOLUTION: Keep your website menu simple, use clear labels, and organize your content logically.

Make it easy for users to find what they want without any hassles.

We also always recommend linking your phone number in the header and making sure your company or brand logo is readable and looks great.

And remember social media profiles? Put all those social media links down in the footer.



PRO TIP: Carry out user testing or gather feedback from your audience to identify any issues with your website's look and feel as well as how easy it is to navigate.

NEXT TIME

Check back next time, as we address even more common website issues you'll want to avoid. **TS**



BARRY ALT and his team at Motorhead Digital have more than 26 years of experience in digital marketing and website development. They offer their *DONE-FOR-YOU* Location, Site and Marketing Maximizer programs to supercharge your website, social media and online presence to attract better, higher-value leads to your shop. Email them at maximizesales@motorheaddigital.com; visit online at motorheaddigital.com; or call them at (585) 766-9785.

PERFORMANCE

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More drag racers are getting involved in the sport at every level. (Photo courtesy K&N Engineering)



A STRAIGHT SHOT TO SALES

Don't lose time connecting to drag racing customers.

By John Carollo

Drag racers, by and large, are an impatient group. Shops that serve them can get right to the point by offering the products and knowledge competitors need to go fast.

While some wonder if the market is set for a slide, insiders are seeing just the opposite, as a wide variety of series and events offer racing at every level. A growing community of grassroots enthusiasts and participants continue to pursue their need for speed.

Understanding individual racer's requirements while building loyalty through knowledge and customer service are keys to unlocking increased sales in the drag racing market. Suppliers are here to help shops set their personal bests, with advice on market trends and top components to drop those ETs.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

As a new season approaches, suppliers are focusing on various aspects of the market.

Bring something desirable to the table to attract and retain racing clients. (Photo courtesy K&N Engineering)

Steve Williams, chief business development officer for K&N Engineering and an NHRA World Champion, believes all





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A STRAIGHT SHOT TO SALES

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Steve Williams

Chief Business Development Officer

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■ FEATURES & BENEFITS:

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Lucas Oil

Duane LaFleur

National Account Manager – High Performance

■ HOT PRODUCTS:

PowerPak Piston Kits for Late-Model Applications

■ FEATURES & BENEFITS:

Include premium forged pistons and rings, with all the components needed for assembly; standard issue skirt coatings; many applications include a hard anodized ring groove; optional thermal barrier coating for the crown can be added by special order.

MAHLE Motorsport

Eric Grilliot

Product Manager

■ HOT PRODUCT:

Bolt-Together Torque Converter

■ FEATURES & BENEFITS:

Best-selling torque converter; custom built by the crew at FTI Performance; billet aluminum covers remove 3-10 pounds of rotating weight compared to a welded converter; several tuning combinations available.

FTI Performance

Krista Baldwin

Director of Marketing



Drag racers are not shy about giving product feedback. (Photo courtesy FTI Performance)

forms of drag racing will continue to experience growth, propped up by market influences including the continued popularity of the “Street Outlaws” cable television program, which he sees “promoting drag racing across every series.”

“From NHRA to No-Prep and all forms from high-dollar bracket racing to Pro-Mod series, everybody is enjoying the focus and attention provided by the hit series,” Williams says. “The end result is record attendance, and people are getting involved again at a grassroots level.”

Duane LaFleur, national account manager – high performance for Lucas Oil, also calls drag racing “a growing market.”

“The different sanctioning bodies and

the high-dollar bracket races that are being put on have helped grow this market,” he observes. “The big-dollar events have had the greatest impact.”

Rising popularity means everyone wants to get in on the action—putting stresses on product delivery that hasn’t been the same since the pandemic.

“Honestly, it’s the parts,” says Krista Baldwin, director of marketing for FTI Performance and an NHRA Top Fuel driver. “Ever since the pandemic, all drivetrain companies have had issues in receiving products in a timely manner so that we can send our finished products to our customers.”

In response, her company formed a new supply business, FTI Performance Parts, to help alleviate some bottlenecks.

In terms of product trends, Eric Grilliot,

Serve drag racers well and they will quickly become loyal repeat customers. (Photo courtesy FTI Performance)



Drag racing has the unique advantage of being one of the last outlets in motorsports that covers the entire spectrum of engine development. (Photo courtesy MAHLE Motorsport)

product manager at MAHLE Motorsport, is focusing on high-compression boosted applications this offseason.

“From a product development standpoint, we’ve had to re-evaluate what constitutes a ‘boost-ready’ shelf stock part—10:1 or 11:1 (compression) engines used to be fairly safe in the realm of the naturally aspirated zone, but that’s no longer the case,” he explains. “Part design and component selection have had to evolve accordingly.”

TIME TO SHINE

Just like the drag racers they serve, top speed shops and engine builders are always looking for the slightest advantage over the competition. Suppliers offer some areas of opportunity.

“Product availability. If the products are available, the customer is going to buy. They don’t want to have the product ordered for the next day,” says LaFleur, adding “also, understanding the difference

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STEWART SUBBING FOR PRUETT IN TOP FUEL



NHRA Top Fuel drag racer Leah Pruett has announced she will temporarily step away from driving duties to focus on starting a family with her husband, Tony Stewart.

Stewart will race the full 2024 NHRA Mission Foods Pro Drag Racing Series season in her place in the Tony Stewart Racing (TSR) team's 11,000-hp Dodge//SRT Direct Connection Top Fuel dragster.

"We are thrilled to welcome Hall of Fame racer Tony Stewart as the new full-time driver of the Dodge//SRT Direct Connection Top Fuel dragster for the upcoming 2024 NHRA Mission Foods Pro Drag Racing Series," said Tim Kuniskis, Dodge brand chief executive officer – Stellantis. "With her decision to temporarily step back from a full-time racing career, we also recognize all Leah Pruett has accomplished in her many years competing and winning under the Dodge and Mopar banners. We're extremely excited that Leah will continue next year as an at-track ambassador for our brands."

Stewart's drag-racing career began

Leah Pruett is temporarily stepping away from Top Fuel driving duties to start a family with husband Tony Stewart, who will serve as her fill-in driver.

in 2022 with a close loss in his debut in the Top Alcohol Dragster category in Las Vegas, but the Indiana driver returned for a full season in 2023 and placed second in the NHRA national points, including wins at Las Vegas and Reading.

He recognizes the tough decision Pruett made.

"I am very proud of my wife," Stewart said. "We had discussed starting a family and this was her decision. I was very supportive as to whether she wanted to do it now or years from now. I'm very humbled that Leah and Neal (Strausbaugh, crew chief) felt I was the driver to fill in for her. I feel honored that I can do that for my wife and this team."

Pruett is expected to drive in the PRO Superstar Shootout, Feb. 8-10 in Bradenton, Florida. Stewart will make his debut at the season-opening NHRA Gatornationals on March 7-10 in Gainesville, Florida.

between brands and educating the customer is very important."

Baldwin speaks to the loyalty of competitors you've helped perform at their best.

"Drag racers are some of the best customers that a company could have. They are honest and give feedback on all of our

products," she says. "The opportunity in drag racing is the potential of gaining a new customer. Once a customer races with our torque converters and transmissions, they are most likely a customer for life. Drag racers are very brand loyal."

Want to get your business brand in front

of local competitors? Look to create low-cost marketing partnerships with local tracks, Williams advises.

"The ability to develop promotional programs at your local tracks drives foot traffic and loyalty," he says. "Grassroots drag racing is a very affordable form of racing, with growing popularity. Just spend a few days at the track and talk to the local racers. Ask questions and develop a pilot marketing program specific to that track. It can be as simple as a shootout with gift certificates to the winner and runner-up. Start small and grow from there."

THE NEXT RUN

One of the great things about drag racing is that the next run often comes very soon. Here are some tips for riding the wave into the 2024 season.

"Drag racing has the unique advantage of being one of the last outlets in motorsports that covers the entire spectrum of engine development," says Grillo from MAHLE Motorsport. "At the ultra-restrictive end, parts are being refined and optimized to extract every last ounce of performance. Alternatively, there are still opportunities for a true 'run-what-you-brung' customer and unlimited possibilities."

K&N's Williams is seeing good stuff coming down the track.

"With the increased popularity and expansion of additional series comes increased expenses," he notes. "It's likely



Drivers can take a street car to their local drag strip and race on any given day. (Photo courtesy lucasoil.com)

FROM DISNEY SCREENS TO SPEED QUEENS



Fans of the Disney Channel Original Movie “Right On Track” were recently treated to a new documentary that gives viewers unfettered access to drag racing sisters Erica and Courtney Enders.

“Speed Queens: The Enders Sisters Story” follows the two sisters and the Elite Motorsports team as Erica chases her fifth NHRA Camping World Drag Racing Series world championship. Erica, a pro drag racer with five world championships, and Courtney, a motorsports journalist, on-air personality and influencer, had their childhood story in the Jr. Dragster ranks shared with millions of fans through the Disney movie.

Sisters Courtney (left) and 5-time NHRA Pro Stock Champion Erica Enders enjoy a moment in the winner’s circle.

Produced by FloFilms, a division of FloSports, “Speed Queens” was filmed over the course of several months and in multiple locations, giving an in-depth, all-access look into the racing sisters’ adult lives.

“You’re going to hear some cuss words,” cautions Courtney. “You’re going to see the agony of defeat, the thrill of victory, the tight-knit family aspect we’ve always had, and everything in between.”

“Speed Queens: The Enders Sisters Story” is available for viewing now at floracing.com.



If products are available, customers are going to buy them. (Photo courtesy lucasoil.com)

we’ll see some consolidation and increases in purses. Weekend bracket races have evolved into week-long events from coast to coast. I also see the 1/8-mile continuing to become more popular in some series.”

Core strengths are strong in this market, says LaFleur from Lucas Oil, including ease of entry.

“We are hoping the drag racing market continues to grow as it has been recently. Drivers can take a street car to their local drag strip and race on any given day. You can’t do that in many other racing markets,” he says.

Asking for predictions, FTT’s Baldwin believes the sport “is only going to get bigger.”

“So many more teams are forming, and many new race events are popping up,” she says. “The beauty of drag racing, particularly in the Southeast, is that you can go 100 miles in any direction and hit a drag strip. Most tracks bring in large payouts, so there is something substantial to win for our customers.” **TS**

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Riding the Wave

A passion for fast imports is still going strong at Cartune Auto Repair in San Diego.

By Mike Madriaga

In the 1990s, import car builders in San Diego who specialized in Japanese vehicles had a tough time competing at the nearby Carlsbad Raceway quarter-mile track.

“The hot rod builders laughed; there was no acceptance really for import drag racing back then,” recalls Justin Lim. “They would say, ‘What are you doing here?’”

This pre-golden era was years before “The Fast and the Furious” showed the world 10-second import tuners.

“We were mocked on and off the tracks,” Lim says.

In the mid-’90s as a teen, Lim was tinkering with his 1986 Honda CRX in El Cajon, east of San Diego. His dreams were big.

“One day, be able to beat those hot rods. Once I graduated from high school and got a job, I upgraded to a 1993 Honda Del Sol Si, which I later turbocharged with one of the first GReddy kits installed in the U.S., around 1996.”

Lim’s import tuning obsession forced him to get a second job while attending college. But it was worth it, he says.

“I’m not gonna lie; afterward, I didn’t lose many races.”

That perseverance and determination developed while building and racing Jap-

anese import cars against monster V-8s would also be helpful in creating a successful import tuner business.

SURVIVING THE PANDEMIC

Fast-forward to September 2023, and the team of builders of Japanese import cars



Having grown up in the early days of the import tuning wave, Justin Lim brings an enthusiast’s attitude to his shop, Cartune Auto Repair.

at Cartune Auto Repair in San Diego is kickin' asphalt and taking names at the track. The shop is buzzing in preparation for the 2023 SEMA Show.

Lim, 45, is now at the helm of Cartune with his business partner, Jeff Oleksow. Maybe surprisingly, he attributes some of the shop's success to surviving the pains of the pandemic three years earlier.

Besides Lim and Oleksow, Cartune had four other employees back in April 2020 during the pandemic's initial stages, including Jakob Lim, Justin's son. All six import tuners have remained employed at the shop since the COVID-19 shutdown.

It was tough for shops in those times of uncertainty—almost 40,000 California-based small businesses reportedly closed by September 2020. Meanwhile, tuning outlets found it twice as challenging to stay afloat, as they were limited in selling and installing many performance parts as state and national regulatory agencies investigated various outlets in San Diego County.

A July 2020 memo released by the California Air Resources Board (CARB) read

Justin's son Jakob Lim was racing before he could legally drive on the street and is now a vital part of the Cartune crew.



in part: "CARB enforces against individual vehicle owners (consumers) that have violated the law by tampering, modifying, or installing illegal parts on emission

controlled vehicles operated on a public highway. Violations of these requirements are subject to penalties up to \$37,500 per violation."

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Mods from mild to wild are all part of Cartune's many offerings.



So, one of the services Lim offers is converting modified vehicles back to stock.

"Thank goodness automotive repair (was seen) as an essential business," recounts Lim.

The Cartune team downshifted its business model and reverted to repairing and maintaining stock vehicles to make it through the slowdown.

"And we hit record numbers during the pandemic," Lim continues, "as people needed to travel with their cars, which then saw the normal wear and tear, and had to have them serviced."

These days, he estimates the shop is about 80% general repairs and 20% high-performance tuning. Before some of the emissions crackdowns, it was closer to a 50/50 split.

Such is the reality of doing business in California.

"It's tough to get parts. Now, you can't even get a header. It's been hard to get parts because the laws have changed."

Compliance is mandatory for Cartune, Lim adds, pointing to YouTube reports of shops that were hit with huge fines for illegal upgrades.

"That would wipe me out," he notes.

EFFICIENCY & EXPERIENCE

To stay profitable, Cartune turns customers away if their projects are unrealistic. Lim uses the example of a time-consuming 2WD-to-4WD conversion.

"We can do that on our own cars, but we need to have open lifts and keep things moving in and out daily. That's the best way to make money and keep people happy."

Some of the maintenance jobs the shop provides are oil changes, brake and pad installations, wheel and tire swaps, alignments and manufacturer-scheduled maintenance.

"In the next year or so we'll be getting up to date with the newer cars still under warranty," Lim forecasts. "Eventually, those warranties will run out, and we want to be ready."

The shop is eyeing new Honda Civics



and the Toyota Corolla GR, among other imports, as potential revenue sources.

"We have to buy new equipment for that stuff," Lim notes. "In the following year, it will be more training-based and getting all our equipment up to spec for that transition."

Cartune Services has seven lifts in its 4,500-square-foot facility, which includes a Dyno Dynamics AWD dynamometer.

"I had a 1972 240Z with an RB26 that we just dynoed," Lim says. "It had conservative horsepower at 400. That car is so light, about 2,300 pounds, and it moves."

Performance is still an important part of the shop's recipe, of course. The website (cartuneindependentservice.com) touts, "At Cartune Auto Repair, we also have the expertise to work on vehicles that need reliability—race cars."

From mild to wild, the shop does suspension upgrades, exhaust and intake installations, wheel and tire upgrades, roll bar and seat installations, safety restraint mounting, turbo installs, engine and transmission rebuilds, and differential and LSD work.

The shop uses a Snap-On Zeus diagnostic scanning tool for engine and transmission diagnostics.

"You can view live data and actuate various electronic components on a vehicle,



The shop loves track days and helping customer vehicles perform their best.

like operating a solenoid or opening a window,” Lim explains. “It can also be used to program PCM, TCM, keys and immobilizers.”

The shop has a 4.8-star rating on Google, 4.5-star rating on Yelp and a 4.9-star rating on Facebook, with customers highlighting prices and turnaround times as company strengths.

RIGHT-HAND DRIVE

Lim has many customers with right-hand drive vehicles that were imported from Japan. Because San Diego is a military city, many clients once stationed in Japan shipped a car or two back to the States for free as a military perk.

“This morning, we had a RHD Toyota Supra from the 1990s come in,” Lim reports. “It was like the one in (‘The Fast and the Furious’) movie” in which the late Paul Walker’s character drove an orange ’90s Supra and a gray 1999 Nissan Skyline R34 GT-R.

Cartune’s parking spots are often filled with ’90s Hondas, including Civics, CRXs, Del Sols and Preludes. Some are ready for the track with large front-mount intercoolers; others are stock and showroom-clean.

“Some people are spending like \$20,000-\$30,000 on these Hondas,” Lim says. “They were going for less than \$3,000 not too long ago.”

During a recent visit, a Midori green Honda Civic owned by Dennis Caco, founder of the Autocannon clothing brand and the creator and artist of Max Boost, a comic book based on the import lifestyle, was parked in the shop’s lot.

The Max Boost comic had a monthly spot in the 1990s-2000s magazine Import Tuner, for which Lim did some freelance writing. At the turn of the century, the publication was one of the bibles of the then-import community—Super Street, Turbo and Sport Compact Car were among the other big players.

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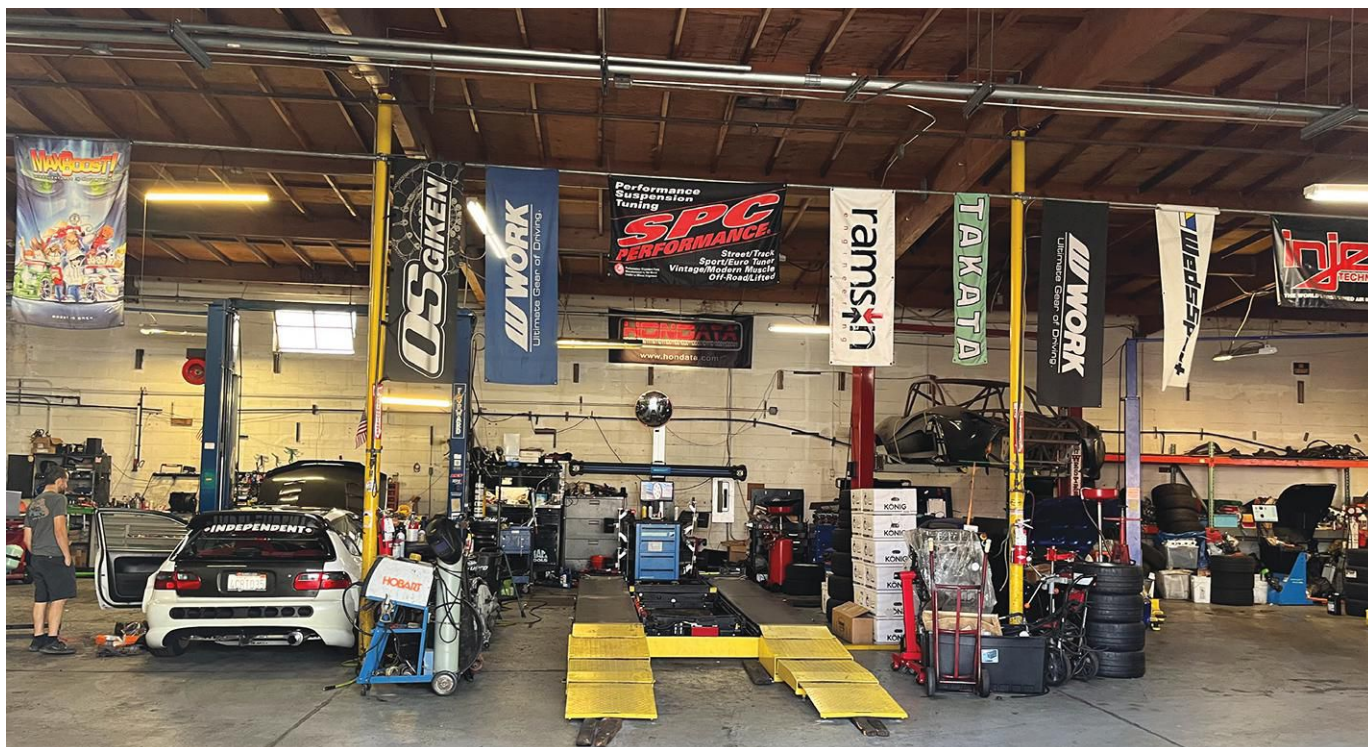
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CHARLIE HAS THE RIGHT TOOLS, DO YOU?



Cartune has seven lifts in its 4,500-square-foot facility.



A tight-knit group of employees who stuck it out through the pandemic has helped build the shop's strong reputation.

"Dennis Caco and I caught up with one another a few years back when we met at Pann Auto during its 20th anniversary car meet," Lim reveals. "Afterward, Dennis and I started meeting up at High-Performance Driving Events (HPDE) on little track days, and it's grown to us meeting at more serious track days like VTEC-Club days."

Another vehicle depicted in the Max Boost comics is the car nicknamed "Godzilla," a 1999 R34 GT-R. It is nearing its 25th anniversary, and it's getting harder to find in Japan and more so in the U.S., Lim explains.

"It's because of the 25-year rule. Basically, once a car reaches 25 years of age, certain

regulations don't have to be followed to conform with USDOT rules and regulations."

Word on the street is many collectors are scooping up 1999 R34 GT-Rs for similar reasons.

"Next year they'll turn 25, and that's why there's so much hype behind it. I heard some brokers have stashes, and they're waiting for a boom to bring them out," says Lim. "We worked on a couple of R34s—one is a regular customer. Mainly, I see more R33s, and we've worked on a ton of R32s."

The R32 and R33 are earlier Nissan Skylines with similar twin-turbo configurations.

FATHER & SON

Mentioned earlier, Jakob Lim, now 22, recently worked on a 1993 Mazda Autozam AZ-1—a two-seater kei (micro) car with a three-cylinder turbo engine.

"They open up with gullwing doors," he says enthusiastically. "I heard there were only 1,500 from that year, and we had three of them here at the shop we worked on."

Meanwhile, Jakob is the shop's fastest road racer and his trophies are proudly displayed in the main office. He's also the first person to greet walk-in customers.

Justin says the father/son work partnership is special and seemed destined from years earlier because of Jakob's longtime automotive affinity.

"We got Jakob his car when he was 14 and started building it," Lim says. "When he was 15, they allowed him to take his car on the road race track for the first time, and he was driving on a track before he got his license."

Jakob took to it quickly.

"I used to be faster than him, but not anymore. We can't catch him," Lim says proudly.

Looking back to his own teenage tuner days in the '90s, Lim says builders utilized Haynes repair guides and performance magazines to create speedy, dependable

projects in the days before YouTube and online guides and forums.

In those years, Lim remembers rendezvousing with his buddies and hitting illegal drag races in San Diego County. In the mid-1990s to early 2000s, they'd meet at Fire House, Kearny Villa Road, Wild Animal Park and other clandestine spots.

They'd also race at the now-defunct legal quarter-mile track at Carlsbad.

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

This was also around the time technology caught up with passion, and Lim was ready to realize his goal of beating some of those traditional hot rods down the track.

"We had a friendly rivalry; we'd throw revs at the V-8s on the streets."

In the early days, Lim had taken a second job at a bank to help fund his automotive projects. Not long after, he acquired a 1993 Toyota MR2 Turbo, which was stolen about a year later.

Utilizing the insurance money, he funded Rice Works, his first car shop, which was

located in El Cajon. It stayed open for a couple of years.

In 1999, Lim bought his first new car, a 2000 Honda Civic Si in the Electron Blue Pearl finish. A month later, he turbocharged it utilizing a Drag 2 turbo kit.

His projects were still funded by his 9-5 banking job.

"But I wasn't passionate about banking, so I started working at Pann Auto," one of the largest import shops in San Diego in those days, Lim recounts.

Initially, Pann Auto was divided into two suites—one for automotive parts sales and the other for automotive parts installation.

The owner decided in late-2008 that he no longer wanted to deal with the installation and service side.

"He offered to partner with me and my business partner, Jeff. Cartune was later officially opened in February 2009."

Fourteen years later, Lim admits it's not as easy wrenching on vehicles every day as it used to be, but he still loves the passion and creativity of the industry.

"Maybe I'll start thinking of transitioning out of the automotive repair business and doing another type of automotive business that's less physically intensive," he says.

But it won't be an abrupt departure.

"I have good employees—many of them have been here for more than five years. If and when the time comes for me to start thinking of getting my exit plan going, I'd like to give them a piece."

In the meantime, he'll continue being a focal point of the San Diego tuner scene. **TS**



MIKE MADRIAGA is an award-winning multimedia journalist who has created content for a variety of media outlets.

From 2000-06 he owned and managed Team Prototype, a world-renowned auto fabrication shop in San Diego that built dozens of car show winners, magazine cover vehicles and SEMA projects.



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Make sure your bases are covered before shipping a custom vehicle to a client or car show.

The top 5 essentials every professional needs to ship a vehicle.

So, it's time to ship a finished vehicle to a special event or an excited customer. These special deliveries involve more than just loading the car onto a hauler or trailer and driving away.

Read on to learn the top five essentials every professional needs to ship a vehicle to a client or a car show.

1 INSURANCE COVERAGE

Car shipping has its share of risks. These include theft, accidents and damage when loading or unloading. That's why you need to get the right coverage.

To comply with federal laws, you must carry at least \$750,000 in primary liability insurance as a car shipper. This covers property damage and bodily injury caused to other road users.

Added coverage options to also consider include:

- Cargo insurance
- Physical damage insurance for your truck

- Loading and unloading insurance
- Workers' compensation

2 OPEN OR ENCLOSED VEHICLE TRANSPORT?

Open carriers expose cars to the weather and road debris during transit, while enclosed carriers provide complete protection.

Open trailers have immense profit potential, however. Most customers prefer open transportation because it's the cheaper option.

Moreover, some open trailers can accommodate up to 10 vehicles, allowing quicker shipping. For shops looking to buy, they're also relatively affordable to invest in, operate and maintain.

Meanwhile, enclosed trailers usually only carry up to three vehicles. Ideal for transporting fragile or valuable cars, demand for enclosed trailers is lower because they're more expensive.

In most cases, customers pay up to 50%



These special deliveries involve more than just loading the car onto a hauler or trailer and driving away.

more for enclosed shipping over open transport.

3 THE RIGHT LICENSES & PERMITS

You'll need the right licensure to legally operate as a car shipper. Here's a checklist to ensure everything's covered:

- **State-specific auto transport licensing:** Each state has its own licensing require-



Route planning saves time and reduces fuel expenses, driver wages and insurance costs.

planner. It doesn't show heavy traffic or adverse weather along routes.

Instead, find reliable truck route software that considers all important aspects of route planning, including live location updates, travel speed, road conditions and safety factors.

5 A STRONG CUSTOMER SERVICE TEAM Customers want to feel assured that their cars are in safe hands. Therefore, you need a customer service team that can promptly respond to client queries.

Your customer service team should also give customers regular updates on car shipments.

Find qualified candidates for the role and provide them with the training, knowledge and tools they need to excel at their jobs.

THE BOTTOM LINE

The auto shipping industry can be quite profitable. But, like any other successful company, you need a robust business plan.

If you're not sure where to start, you can use the tips and essentials outlined in this guide to get a foothold in the industry. And, who knows—you might scale up to the point of offering international car shipping services someday.

This article was provided by Jalopnik Advisor, a news and opinion website about cars, the automotive industry, racing, transportation, airplanes, technology, motorcycles and more. Visit jalopnik.com/advisor. TS



To adhere to federal law, you must carry at least \$750,000 in primary liability insurance as a car shipper.

ments for car transporters. Visit your state's Department of Motor Vehicles website to find out what licenses you'll need.

- **Commercial driver's license (CDL):** There are three CDL class categories—Class A, Class B and Class C. Most car shippers operate with a Class A CDL.
- **Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA):** Car shipping companies must register with the FMCSA. The organization monitors and regulates the operations of shipping companies.

- **U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) number:** Every auto shipper needs a USDOT number. Customers can check your background history and compliance using this unique identifier.

4 ROUTE PLANNING SOFTWARE Route planning entails finding the most convenient truck routes. The process helps car shippers save time while reducing fuel expenses, driver wages and truck insurance costs.

Don't rely on Google Maps as your route

Many of the shop's old features and touches are still intact.

MACHINE WORK WITH STAYING POWER

A 1907 Wisconsin shop in its original location still serves local drivers. **By John Gunnell**

Hidden away in the basement of an old business in Waupaca, Wisconsin, is an automotive shop that—believe it or not—dates to 1907. This shop was the first auto repair business in Waupaca and also used to sell the spindly Maxwell, the car that was comedian Jack Benny's favorite antique auto.

Maxwell ultimately merged into Chrysler and Chrysler changed with the times. Further mergers with firms such as American Motors and Mercedes-Benz helped the automaker adapt to new trends and new technologies.

Meanwhile, that original shop site in

Waupaca has survived for 116 years, virtually unchanged, and continues to serve the machining needs of local drivers.

A CITY STALWART

A.M. Hansen—an automotive pioneer in the city—opened his long-lasting Machinery Hall in the fall of 1907. Even before it was built, the Waupaca Republican newspaper noted “the large and roomy basement of the building is equipped with two lathes, drilling machines, pipe cutting machines, and everything usually found in the best machine shops.”

More than 11 decades later, the city's current newspaper—the Waupaca Post—

could write the same story today. The well-used machines show slight wear, but they are all still there and still functional.

Hansen was said to be a tall, stern man with a heavy mustache. He owned the second automobile in the city of Waupaca—a red Rambler—long before Nash and Hudson Motor Car Co. merged in 1954 to form AMC. Hansen reportedly always had a black cigar in his mouth and carried a gold-headed cane.

When he went driving, he would wear a long, yellow duster, a straw hat and gloves.

Hansen ran a blacksmithing business and was already talented at repairing wagons, horse-drawn carriages and farm implements. When automobiles arrived in the early 1900s, it was natural for him to take on auto repair work (see sidebar). Hansen would become the earliest garageman in Waupaca.

By 1908, a year after opening his machine shop, Hansen also began selling Maxwell (and Rambler) automobiles. The Rambler Model 31 was advertised as the “right car” for both farmers and businessmen, at just \$1,400.

As more Ramblers and other cars started showing up on the streets of Waupaca, Hansen's Machinery Hall was kept busy fashioning parts to keep the vehicles going. After all, there were no auto parts stores



Visiting the shop is like traveling back in time to the first years of the Industrial Revolution.

RAMBLIN' MAN

On family outings, A.M. Hansen's wife sat beside him in their Rambler Model 31 runabout. She would wear a long white dress and a huge leghorn hat fastened with a long chiffon scarf that trailed in the wind as they drove.

Meanwhile, Hansen's daughters wore fancy dresses made of lace with other frill trims and big hats. His son Alton would be outfitted in a navy blue sailor suit, high-button shoes and a big straw hat secured with a piece of elastic.

Hansen's Rambler had a crank on the side. Once it started, it could make a speedy 10 mph. It had tiny wheels and no doors, top or windshield. The seats were high, allowing for a grand view of the countryside.

In later years, Alton would relate how, on one Sunday, his father decided to take the family to the nearby town of Weyauwega. The sun was blistering hot, and in many places, there was sand 10 inches deep. About 3 miles outside of Waupaca, the Rambler experienced problems.

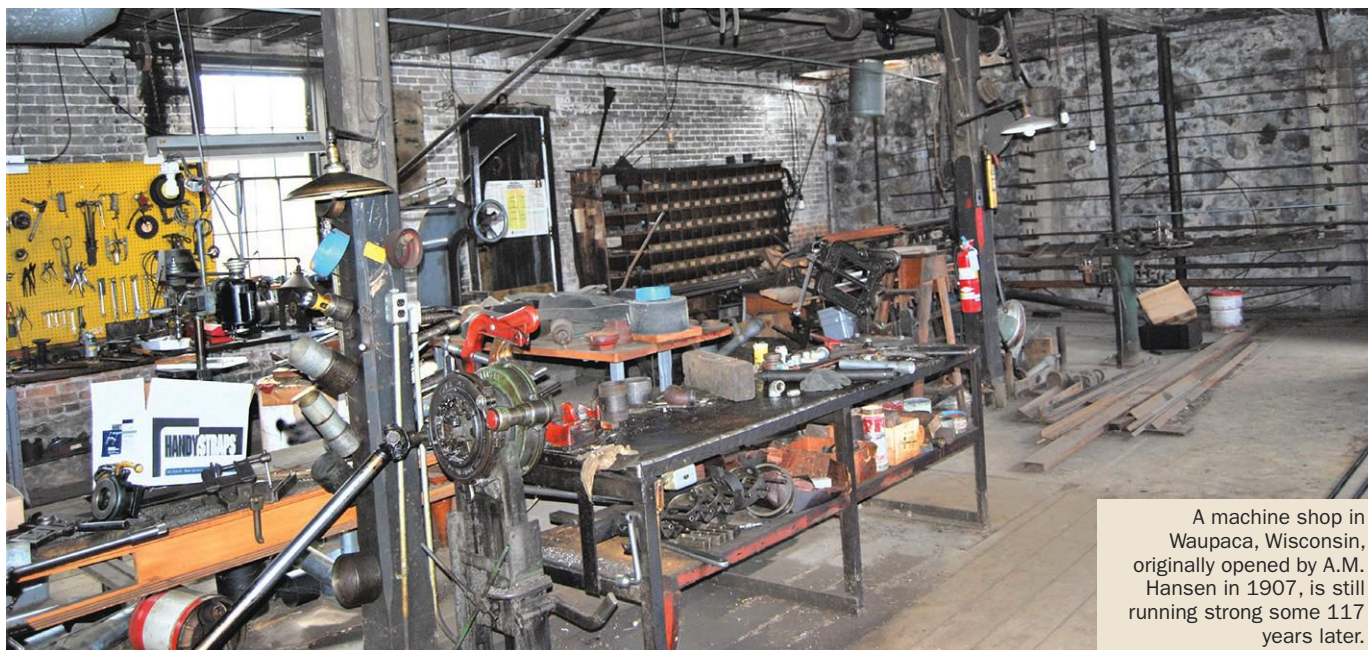
"My father paused and looked and tinkered and took off his duster. He puffed harder on his cigar and became more and more cross," Alton recalled. "The girls asked questions and got in the way, so they were rowdily scolded. I was tired and cried. There were no garages and no one to call to help

my father in his trouble. My mother could take it no longer, so we walked home. Mother carried me most of the way and it was hard plodding through the weeds and sand."

This experience convinced Hansen that Waupaca needed an auto repair shop, so he opened one and filled the role of vehicle mechanic for the city's earliest motorists.



A Wisconsin Automobile Museum exhibit shows early motorists in typical garb around the time Hansen opened his auto shop.



A machine shop in Waupaca, Wisconsin, originally opened by A.M. Hansen in 1907, is still running strong some 117 years later.

then; parts had to be crafted by hand.

The shop handled everything from gasoline engine repairs to steam fitting jobs. Upstairs, the main floor of the 35-by-100-foot building was a sales floor for gasoline engines, pumps, steam fittings, hoses and plumbing supplies.

There was also an office described as being "as fine as any in the city." That office is still there and is still in pretty much the

same configuration as it was in 1907.

According to a 2014 article in The Waupaca County Post, Hansen's company did a booming business. He and a partner even built Waupaca's waterworks. Today, if you walk past the side of the building opposite the street, you can see where the waterway ran that powered the machinery.

Eventually, Hansen's son, Alton, assumed ownership of the machine shop and adja-

cent hardware store in the early 1940s. He kept the original blacksmith shop behind a wooden door and it's still there today, with an anvil and other old tools still ready to take on the toughest jobs.

Alton ran the business until 1962, when he was hit and killed by a car one day while walking to work. For two years after that, an employee ran the business for Alton's widow.

A MAXWELL PROJECT

After he became the newest proprietor of the W.J. Doran Company, Luke Schwiesow decided the historic treasure trove in the basement of the building wouldn't be complete without a Maxwell automobile. So, he found the remains of a 1913 Maxwell touring car in Montana and brought the pieces back to Waupaca, in the middle of a cold winter, around seven years ago.

Being as busy as he is with the business, Schwiesow doesn't have a lot of time to devote to his Maxwell restoration project, but he is making steady progress. He has been able to purchase additional parts for the ancient auto and has some local Amish craftsmen repairing the car's wooden artillery spoke wheels.

Schwiesow established that the car's honeycomb radiator had not-easy-to-repair problems. He's talked to specialty shops about getting it repaired. One shop quoted a cost of \$5,000 and then closed. A second shop set the cost at \$10,000.

Meanwhile, Schwiesow has been in contact with other Maxwell restorers and is aware that The Automobile Gallery in nearby Green Bay, Wisconsin, has a smaller 1912 Maxwell Messenger Vestibule Roadster on exhibit. The two-cylinder Messenger model with its 86-inch wheelbase is smaller than Schwiesow's four-cylinder Mascotte touring car with its longer, 104-inch wheelbase.

Schwiesow plans to keep going with his project until all of the Maxwell parts are rebuilt, restored or replaced and the car is reassembled and put back in working order. In the meantime, he is learning a lot of new talents that he can use in his business, such as block-stitching to repair cracks in one of the car's cylinder jugs.



Restoring this 1913 Maxwell is the goal of the shop's current owner, Luke Schwiesow.



Some of Schwiesow's wood spoke wheels are out for repair.



Schwiesow dreams of one day having a fully restored Maxwell kept in the shop.



One of the most recent owners, Wally Doran, in his well-preserved, 109-year-old office in a 2016 photo that was taken after a personal tour of the facility.

NEW OWNERS & UPGRADES

Wally Doran entered the picture in 1964. He was 32 years old and had spent four years in the U.S. Navy. Doran then studied industrial technology in Minnesota, and later at the Milwaukee School of Engineering.

He had worked a few jobs and was

looking for something more permanent when he saw Mrs. Hansen's "machine shop for sale" advertisement in a newspaper's classified ads column.

At the time, Doran was married with three kids, and his wife was pregnant with a fourth. He had no money to speak of, but answered the ad and Hansen's widow

helped him purchase the shop. The acting manager stayed on to work for him and wound up sticking around for four decades.

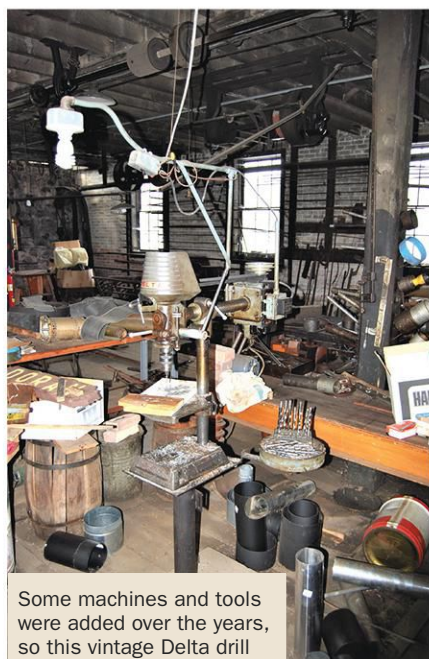
At first it was all work and no play. Doran had to scramble to generate a profit and keep the business afloat. As time went on, he developed an interest in the old building's history, too.

He replaced the coal-burning furnace that had turned the ceiling of the downstairs machine shop sooty black. He removed a replacement concrete floor and added one that looked like the original hardwood floor. He even got an historic buildings grant to help repair the brickwork and some water damage above the front display windows.

Doran got rid of a few of the old machine tools, but everything else was kept in good condition and the shop is something to see today. As you descend the long, steep wooden stairs from the sales floor into the basement, you get the impression that



"The Pipe Master" has been working hard for decades.



Some machines and tools were added over the years, so this vintage Delta drill press may be newer than 1907.

you're going back in time to the beginnings of the Industrial Age.

It's dark and musty, but also beautiful.

A TRIP BACK IN TIME

The old machines are mostly "industrial strength" in appearance. They carry names like "Howell" and "Becker," spelled out in heavy raised letters on their cast iron decks.

Several machines have heavy stands, huge flywheels and massive castings. Most of the machine tools are covered with metal shavings that came from years and years of constant use. "The Pipe Master" reads the gold script on the black antique pipe cutting and threading machine.

Wide leather belts hang from pulleys

mounted on long shafts that run the length of the ceiling. Doran used to start up a machine to demonstrate how the pulleys spun and the belts went into action driving the flywheels on the clever devices.

Even today, a few of them still have wooden clutches to engage the gearing. In a 2016 interview, Doran said that some of the machines must have been World War I military surplus units, as they still had U.S. Army markings.

Then there's Hansen's old blacksmith shop. It is intact and attached to the side of the building.

During the interview, Doran unlatched a large wooden door and swung it back to reveal the blacksmithing equipment inside the small shop. If the machine shop was breathtaking, the old blacksmith studio was quite amazing.



This old lathe still sees limited use in machining work.

In 2016, Doran was in his mid-80s. He had owned the business for more than half a century. He still went there to deal with a few customers, take care of ordering inventory and help with sales.

And, yes, he even still did a limited amount of machine shop work at the time. Amazingly, 110 years after opening, the shop had become a place to hang out, putz around and bask in the history of a skilled trade that gets too little recognition today.

After the pandemic, Luke Schwiesow stepped in to help Doran and soon became the new owner.

He also developed quite an appreciation for the old building's history, and today his business card reads "W. J. Doran Company." Under that, it notes the shop was "Formerly A.M. Hansen, Established in 1882," referencing Hansen's pre-Machinery Hall blacksmith days.

In addition to machine shop services, Schwiesow offers expertise in industrial and millwork, as well as plumbing supplies. He is also an experienced and talented welder and automobile painter.

But maybe "American Industrial Historian" should be on the card, too. The old shop has certainly earned it. **TS**



JOHN GUNNELL has been writing about classic cars since 1972. He is also the owner of Gunner's Great Garage in Manawa, Wisconsin. He owns 11 cars and seven motorcycles.



Stock Your Shelves With These
Go-Fast Components



OE Replacement Diesel Head Gaskets

Elgin Industries, Elgin, Illinois, introduces OE-replacement Multi-Layer-Steel Head Gaskets for 2011-20 Ford 6.7L diesel engines. The new gaskets match the design, fitment and quality of the original

equipment gaskets, with an assembled thickness of 1.26mm. Elgin also offers a range of premium replacement parts for these engines including camshafts, lifters/tappets, push rods, sprockets, valve guides, locks, springs, retainers and valve stem oil seals.

Maverick Cat-Back Exhaust System

BORLA Performance Industries, Johnson City, Tennessee, presents its Cat-Back Exhaust System for 2022-23 Ford

Maverick AWD models that improves horsepower and torque. System 140938 delivers the recognizable BORLA S-Type sound without any drone or resonance inside the vehicle. This system is made from T-304 stainless steel and features all-welded construction for durability and long life. System 140938 features bright chrome on T-304 stainless steel tips, and System 140938BC with black chrome tips is also available.



Lotus Suspensions

KW automotive, Clovis, California, presents two new Four-Way Adjustable Coil-Over Suspension Kits, the KW V5 and KW V5 Clubsport, for Lotus Emira models. Both coil-over kits utilize an innovative solid piston design, enabling independent adjustment of high-speed and low-speed compression and rebound forces. Offering a stepless lowering range of 10-30mm, each kit caters to specific driving preferences.

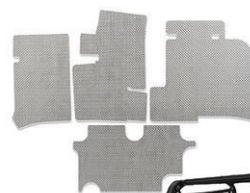


Mazda MX-5 Miata ND Brake Kits

Wilwood Disc Brakes, Camarillo, California, presents Street and Race Brake Kits for 2016-23 Mazda MX-5 Miata ND models. The race-spec kits feature Lug-Drive floating rotors, dynamically mounted to eliminate thermal stresses, and aggressive BP-40 racing brake pads, plus Type-III hard anodized calipers. Street kits use the same calipers and fixed-mount rotors with BP-10 brake pads. Street calipers are offered with a gloss black or red powder-coating, with 22 additional colors available. Premium hardware and braided stainless Flexlines are included.

Race Car Remote Steering System

Hostile Industries/Steering Buddy, Anniston, Alabama, presents the Steering Buddy steering device to move powered-down race cars. Offering all-new, specially designed features for dirt, asphalt and drag cars, the lightweight device attaches directly to the steering shaft or column, allowing crew members to steer the car remotely when it's powered off. Made in the USA, the Steering Buddy weighs 17 pounds and installs in seconds. Once in place it can be controlled manually, through an app or via an all-new wireless remote.



Honda Pioneer Under-Seat Kit

Design Engineering Inc. (DEI), Avon Lake, Ohio, presents an Under Seat Heat Shield Kit for 2022-23 Honda Pioneer side-by-side UTV models, designed to reduce seat temperatures and make the interior more comfortable. The kit blocks engine heat from entering the passenger area with high-quality, custom-cut insulation pieces. It includes front seat and middle panel heat shields, and installation is easy with adhesive backing that allows the vehicle to be serviced as usual.



New Clutch System

UniClutch, Melbourne, Australia, presents its new Clutch System designed for efficiency and performance. UniClutch and UniClutch Sport, the first iterations to launch in the U.S., feature the company's dual core technology created to significantly boost torque capacity without compromising drivability. The patented design fits multiple vehicles to simplify inventory management, expedite clutch replacement times and lessen common installation problems. UniClutch Sport offers 15% more torque capacity than UniClutch and a sport-tuned pedal feel.

Headliner Kit

Heatshield Products, Escondido, California, presents its db Headliner Kit designed to insulate vehicle interiors against heat and noise. The two-part kit includes db Skin liquid sound damping material that can be easily applied to the roof structure and metal with a brush, roller or low-pressure spray gun to dampen structural vibrations over a wide frequency range, and Stealth Shield thermal barrier material that, at only 1/8-inch thick, easily installs between the factory headliner and roof and handles up to 1,800 degrees of constant heat while being fire resistant.



GM Truck Exhaust

Vance & Hines, Santa Fe Springs, California, presents its new Holeshot Series Cat-Back Performance Exhaust System for 2019-23 Chevrolet Silverado/GMC Sierra 6.2L crew cab, short bed models with rear-exit exhaust. Designed to improve torque and sound, the system features a Turbo-Chambered Muffler and installs easily utilizing sectioned slip-fit components and clamps. A rear exit setup with quad 4-inch tips offers a sleek, refined look with bright polished Twin

Slash angle-cut tips or matte black Eliminator tips featuring CNC-machined billet end caps.



Diesel Oil

AMSOIL, Superior, Wisconsin, presents 10W-30 Diesel Oil, the latest addition to its Commercial-Grade family of products. Designed for heavy-duty equipment and vehicles, the diesel oil features greater than 50% synthetic content for better wear protection. A low rate of volatility helps reduce oil consumption and contributes to fewer combustion chamber deposits. The oil flows dependably in cold temperatures while maintaining power and fuel efficiency for reliable startup and engine protection.

Portable Air Coolers

Cool Boss, Theodore, Alabama, presents new Cool Boss CB-28 and CB-36 portable evaporative air coolers, designed to cost-effectively keep workers comfortable and productive in shop environments. As the largest coolers in the Cool Boss lineup, they can drop the air temperature up to 26 degrees while using up to 70% less energy than conventional air conditioning. The feature-rich models include built-in air ionizers to clean the chilled air, Bluetooth players to improve the shop atmosphere and powerful LED floodlights for greater visibility.



Gas Connect Console for Cutting Systems

Hypertherm Associates, Hanover, New Hampshire, presents the CorePlus gas connect console for XPR X-Definition cutting systems. CorePlus introduces argon gas capability for customers that primarily cut mild steel. The gas console offers all Core console capabilities plus argon marking and an increase in piercing thickness with argon-assist enhanced piercing capability. The CorePlus console includes full X-Definition capability on mild steel and entry-level capability on stainless steel and aluminum with nitrogen as its plasma gas.



Battery Monitoring System

EnerSys, Reading, Pennsylvania, presents the ODYSSEY Connect Battery Monitoring System, featuring proprietary technology to actively monitor and track a range of battery health and performance data for optimal operations. The information received through the system is communicated via Bluetooth to any Apple or Android smart device. The system actively tracks battery state of charge (SOC) and state of health (SOH) by censoring voltage and temperature status through cranking and other events.

Porsche Pedal Assembly

Penta Motorsports, Moorpark, California, presents a Billet Aluminum Pedal Assembly that is a bolt-in replacement for the factory steel units in 1963-89 Porsche 911 models. Benefits include pedal position adjustability to achieve optimum heel/toe actuation, the ability to accurately set the front/rear brake balance and use of **Tilton** 78-Series brake and clutch master cylinders mounted on the unit for ease of maintenance and security.



Subaru Rotor Upgrade

Disc Brakes Australia (DBA), Grove City, Ohio, presents its 5000 Series T3 Brake Disc Upgrade for 2022-newer Subaru WRX STI rotors. The two-piece performance rotor is specifically developed for the WRX, making it one of the first systems to allow the popular STI brake package with 4-pot **Brembo** front calipers to be installed.



Transmission Repair

Bar's Leaks, Holly, Michigan, presents its new Bar's Leaks Trans Fix transmission repair product, now in a super-concentrated formula. One 11.5-ounce bottle eliminates the need for specialized transmission stop leaks and can solve a variety of issues including jerking, slipping or shuddering. The synthetic-blend treatment works on transmission fluid, seals, metal surfaces, bands and clutch plates and is compatible with all automatic and manual transmissions, as well as CVTs (Continuously Variable Transmissions) and DCTs (Dual Clutch Transmissions).



Sport Performance Tire

Goodyear, Akron, Ohio, introduces the Cooper Cobra Instinct, a hyper-responsive, high-performance tire that delivers decisive maneuvering regardless of the weather. Combining all-season capability with confident sport performance, the tire is engineered with an asymmetric tread pattern and sweeping tread grooves for agile traction, enhanced grip and improved braking distance on wet and snowy roads. Cooper Cobra Instinct is available in 25 sizes, from 17 to 20 inches, to fit the Chevrolet Camaro, Ford Mustang, Mazda 3, Lexus IS 300 and Acura TLX.

Mustang 5-Speed Adapter Plate

California Pony Cars, Ontario, California, presents a 1965-70 Ford Mustang Adapter Plate for TREMEC TKO/TKX 5-speed conversions. The adapter plate allows for use of the factory early-model six-bolt bellhousing and comes with a mounting hardware kit. Made in the USA, the plate does not require any modifications to the bellhousing.





Mustang Digital Dash

AutoMeter, Sycamore, Illinois, presents its new InVision Direct Fit Digital Dash System for 1971-73 Ford Mustangs. A one-model solution for the entire dash, the system monitors the speedometer, tachometer, fuel level, oil pressure, water temperature and volts, all in one place. Features include a 12.3-inch LCD screen with four user-selectable screens, and all kits include a wiring harness and sending units for water temperature and oil pressure. An integrated joystick allows for easy programming.

Mustang Supercharger Kit

Roush Performance, Livonia, Michigan, presents its E.O.-approved 2022-23 Ford Mustang Supercharger Kit. The kit fits Mustang GTs with 5.0L V-8 engines, boosting power to 750 hp and 670 pound-feet of torque. Now legal for installation in all 50 states, the kit includes TVS R2650 technology that provides increased power output throughout the rpm band. Features include high-capacity cooling technology and a full-face, low-temperature radiator that increases cooling capability, allowing for greater power output and maximum performance.



Engine Treatment

Rislone, Holly, Michigan, presents its Rislone Engine Treatment, now available in a more concentrated product in a smaller bottle. A 16.9-ounce bottle of Maximum Performance Engine Treatment replaces the quart size in the Rislone lineup, delivering the same improved motor oil performance to better clean and protect engines in new and classic vehicles. The new concentrated formula contains high-quality penetrating oil combined with protective engine additives and special cleaning agents to help motor oil flow freely.



GM Truck Under-Dash Three-Gauge Panel

Speedway Motors, Lincoln, Nebraska, presents an Under-Dash Three-Gauge Panel for 1967-72 GM C10 truck models. Designed to monitor engine vitals, the panels match factory gauge face styling with distinctive era-inspired graphics featuring mint green/black fonts, orange pointers, perimeter lighting, flat glass lenses and stainless steel bezels. The included three-hole gauge panel features all-aluminum construction and a black anodized finish, and mounts easily under the dash. Water temperature and oil pressure senders are included.

2024 Ford Mustang Supercharger Kits

ProCharger, Lenexa, Kansas, introduces its in-development Supercharger Kits for 2024 Ford Mustang models, designed to deliver 300- to 1,000-plus-hp of bolt-on power upgrades. Featuring a straightforward installation process with no cutting, trimming or modification of the factory vehicle, the power curve matches Ford's 6- and 10-speed transmissions.



Limited-Slip System

Speedmaster, Rialto, California, presents the DANA 30, 27-Spline Torque Worm Helical Gear Limited Slip Differential system. The torque-biasing, six-pinion gear-type limited slip unit delivers durability, reliability and performance to allow for harder launches and faster corners. The use of six pinion gears means the stress on gears is spread over a greater surface area, reducing the load on all internal components. **TS**

Restyling

AFTERMARKET ACCESSORIES

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Flying Tint p. 46

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BUSINESS TO *Business*

By Jef White

Helping work vehicle & fleet owners get the job done.



We've all got business to attend to—especially customers who use their vehicles to get work done for commercial projects.

Your shop can connect with these loyal repeat clients by offering the knowledge, products and services they need to make their own companies successful. Whether it's a complete cargo storage solution for a Sprinter-type van or racks and seat protectors for a full-size pickup, there are plenty of aftermarket solutions to take care of business for any work vehicle owner.

To help sort through it all, industry suppliers offer tips on partnering with these local business owners and fleet managers, new products to investigate and potential problems to avoid so you can get your own work done with commercial clients.



Commercial customers need products that work as hard as they do. (Photo courtesy DECKED)

DOWN TO BUSINESS

If small businesses are the economy's backbone, then economic trends will naturally trickle down to work vehicle customers.

“Over the past few years, many different segments of the fleet industry have been affected by the overall economic status, tightened supply chain, raw material dis-



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- Stainless steel lock handles for security and corrosion-resistant operation
- Connecting rod allows for convenient operation from driver or passenger side
- Widespread handles are easy to reach from either side of the truck



WORK VEHICLE PRODUCTS

■ **HOT PRODUCT:** The DECKED Drawer System + CargoGlide

■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**

Improves productivity through organization and ergonomic access, which reduces injury; minimizes impact and improves the pickup workspace.

DECKED

Rachel Farrell

Strategic Partnerships Manager

■ **HOT PRODUCT:**

ATC LED Fleet Fiberglass Truck Cap

■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**

Versatile and timeless; fully customizable with options to satisfy all industries including pest control, tree care, plumbing, construction and many more.

LTA Manufacturing

Dustan Menz

National Fleet Sales Manager

■ **HOT PRODUCT:**

LUVERNE Van Grip Step XL

■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**

Extra-wide, 9.5-inch stepping surface; expanded metal treads; dual body and rocker mount points; finished in a durable black powder-coat.

LUVERNE

Jeff Perez

Director of Business Development

■ **HOT PRODUCT:**

Hornet LED Strobe Light Bar

■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**

Class 1 strobe light with extensive independent testing and certification to meet high-caliber user requirements; 30 strobe patterns; multiple color options such as amber, white and blue, with any combination; black, high-impact ABS housing.

Putco Inc.

Paul Elwell

National Sales Manager

■ **HOT PRODUCT:**

TrailFX Steel Transfer Tanks

■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**

Steel liquid transfer tanks offer a safe and simple solution for transporting non-combustible liquids; available in square and L-shaped configurations; durable, corrosion-resistant matte black or gloss white powder-coat finish; made in USA.

TrailFX

Sara Ford

Marketing Manager



Keep customers' best interests at the forefront of every sale. (Photo courtesy LTA Manufacturing)

ruption and truck availability," says Dustan Menz, national fleet sales manager for LTA Manufacturing, maker of ATC fiberglass truck tops. "As things begin to normalize, LTA has become hyper-aware of potential disruptions, and we are prepared to react with our customers' best interests at the forefront."

Shops are also in dire need of competent, reliable employees to serve fleet customers, says Rachel Farrell, strategic partnerships manager for DECKED.

"It seems that no one knows where the labor pool went, but workers are not knocking on doors. Being unable to hire skilled and trained workers is a huge thorn in shop owners' sides," she says. "So many shop owners are spending more of their time now installing products, spraying liners, calling customers back or working Sundays to keep the ball moving down the field. We are all eager for the labor pool to fill back up."

Being understaffed in a tight economy, it may be tempting to consider less-expensive, lower-quality product options—something Paul Elwell, national sales manager for Putco Inc., warns against.

"As with many segments of the automotive aftermarket, generic import products are having a major effect. Many entities are marketing low-end, untested and uncertified products to our (work vehicle) market," he says. "It is important for shops and manufacturers alike to be the experts in this product space and seek to present the best possible solutions to our customers,



Explain how your product will help a company become more efficient and ultimately more successful. (Photo courtesy LTA Manufacturing)

such as our safety lighting that is rated, covered by warranty, and carries a true and trusted brand name."

Asked about the outside factors having the greatest impact on the market, Jeff Perez, director of business development for LUVERNE, notes: "Supply shortages, as well as a proliferation of electric commercial vehicles hitting the market."

Another positive aspect of the industry is the tendency of most fleets to replace their vehicles at regular intervals.

"The introduction of a new truck design can significantly influence the work truck market by shaping customer preferences and driving innovation. Innovative features, enhanced performance and improved fuel efficiency in new designs may attract businesses seeking to upgrade their fleets for improved productivity and cost-effectiveness," says Sara Ford marketing manager for TrailFX, noting shops will want to focus on carrying products for models with wide availability.

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2023 VW ID. BUZZ CARGO VAN

In an exclusive first appearance in the U.S., Landsail Tires debuted a VW ID. Buzz Cargo van project build in the Sentury Tires booth at the 2023 SEMA Show.

The ID. Buzz, Volkswagen's new all-electric cargo van that is currently only available in European markets, featured Landsail tires and aftermarket support from partners Rotiform and H&R.

"Sentury envisioned it as a perfectly sized performance tire delivery van, featuring the RapidDragon racing tire, which Landsail fitted at the front in a 235/45R21 (size) and 265/40R21 in the rear for a staggered setup," says Jamie Orr, builder.

The van also features a custom wrap designed by 7SG with GR Wraps performing the wrap installation, one-off Rotiform 21-inch STL forged alloy wheels, H&R Street Performance coil-overs and a Thule Caprock rack.

The vehicle was transported from Germany for the show and then headed home for future parts and delivery work at the Auto Ostringer dealership, according to officials.

"We asked Jamie if a Buzz would be possible for the show this year and he called us 15 minutes later to say he had secured the Buzz Cargo," says Maxwell Wee, executive vice president for

Sentury Tire.

The build was thought to be the only Volkswagen ID. Buzz Cargo van featured at SEMA.



SEMA Show attendees got a firsthand look at a Volkswagen ID. Buzz Cargo van.



Work vehicle owners and fleet managers are seeking professional partnerships with shops that can deliver the latest accessories for commercial applications. (Photo courtesy LUVÉRNE)



Adopt the mindset that there's always something more to offer fleet customers when it comes to innovative safety products. (Photo courtesy Putco Inc.)

THINK LIKE A CUSTOMER

Work vehicle clients are often looking for products in a specific range regarding price and function. Asking the right questions will help businesses find the sweet spot for each project, Ford notes.

"Clear communication and a thorough understanding of customer needs are crucial for shops to provide tailored recommendations that genuinely address and fulfill their customers' expectations," she

says. "When shops lack a comprehensive understanding of their customers' wants and needs, there is a risk of recommending products that may not align with their requirements. This can lead to the suggestion of items with unnecessary features, or recommending products without all the benefits the customer could utilize, thereby lowering overall satisfaction."

Successful shops will put each client's needs first.

"Like most industries, mistakes are made when a company does not position their goals and direction through the mindset of their customer," Menz notes.

That includes marketing strategies and fulfillment options, such as online ordering, that mesh with each customers' needs and desires, notes Farrell.

"Not being adaptable to modern go-to-market strategies can hinder growth potential," she explains. "We've found that our



Look to provide tailored recommendations that address and fulfill a customer's expectations. (Photos courtesy TrailFX)

most successful shop partners are versatile and open-minded to today's commerce environment."

Meanwhile, Elwell cautions against the notion work vehicle customers simply want boring, utilitarian products.

"A mistake is retaining status-quo solutions and not seeking innovation for work truck customers," he notes, referencing his company's newly developed VIRTUAL Blade product line. "Like any consumer market, they are hungry for innovation, new looks and new applications. It is no different than the restyling, performance or accessory markets."

Perez cautions against another temptation—trying to do it all when not fully understanding the market.

"When this happens, quality will tend to suffer," he observes.

SHOPS THAT WORK

To stimulate sales, approach your business from a client's perspective. Are you positioned to help them achieve their goals?

"When looking to increase or improve your fleet presence, it is always best to see your product and processes through the eye of the end user," says Menz from LTA. "Understanding how your product will help a company become more efficient, and ultimately more successful, is the most effective way to grow."

Take the mindset that there's always something more to suggest, be it safety or accessory items, notes Putco's Elwell.

"Most shops in our space already offer many of the products utilized by the work truck market," he explains. "Diversification into safety lighting, as an example, is a great way to reach this customer type. It is far

easier to integrate core product offerings (tonneaus, steps, mats, etc.) once a shop has proven expertise in the work truck/fleet safety market."

Ford from TrailFX suggests keeping an open mind about expanding your product array.

"A diverse inventory provides shops with the chance to upsell, offering customers a broader range of choices and educating them on various options available," she says. "This proactive approach not only enhances customer satisfaction by meeting diverse needs but also positions the shop as a knowledgeable and adaptable source for clients seeking comprehensive solutions."

Even nontraditional products and approaches make sense in certain instances, adds Farrell from DECKED.

"Leveraging the power of social media and digital advertising and focusing on shifting consumer trends may open new avenues of business. Is there something new that your customers may think of buying at their local hardware or lumber store? Bring it into your shop and test the waters. You might surprise yourself."

You can also go looking for customers instead of waiting for them to find you, notes Perez from LUVERNE.

"Reach out to your local county, city and state fleet departments directly or visit their websites," he suggests. "Another approach is to sign up for Bidnet Direct, which provides some work truck government bid opportunities." **TS**



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THE PERFECT PACKAGE FOR RUFF ROADS

A canine-themed Crosstrek was crowned 2023 PRO Cup Challenge champion. ///// By Josh Poulson

Chuck Graf of Auto Sunroof & Leather in Chester, New York, is no stranger to coming up with packages to sell to car dealers.

Having started in the industry back in 1986, he is now in his fourth decade of designing and producing packages for everyday drivers that are not only appealing but offer a lot of functionality as well.

So, when it came time to organize the annual PRO Cup Challenge as part of the 2023 SEMA Show, it was a no-brainer that Graf would be involved.

The friendly competition challenges automotive restylers from across the country to develop an accessory package for a new-model vehicle. The winning entry is voted on by industry judges based on the package's mass appeal, creativity, ease of replication and profit potential.

Installation of the package must take no more than 40 hours of labor, and its wholesale cost to dealerships cannot exceed

\$12,500. The goal is to showcase how restylers and dealers can benefit from offering marketable packages rather than focusing on massive, one-off special vehicle builds.

CREATIVE IDEAS FOR RESTYLERS

This year, six companies were chosen to compete in the PRO Cup Challenge. The restylers didn't disappoint, as each submitted a creative, appealing package that improved the look and utility of their vehicle.

The entries included cars, trucks and SUVs. But the real winners were the other restyling shops across the country that came to the SEMA Show and got to see these vehicles in person. They were able to walk away with six great ideas they could take back to their markets and pitch to their own dealership customers.

Viewing them in person, the attendees could see which products from which manufacturers were used, and how they were installed. Window tags revealed the

wholesale and retail prices, to highlight profit potential.

(Did you miss the show this year? Go to sema.org/pro to see before-and-after pictures and build sheets for all six entries.)

The excitement and buzz surrounding this year's competition had Graf and the other five builders second-guessing whether they had done enough to come out on top. I spoke with Graf a few weeks before the show and he mentioned he was still waiting on parts to finish the build—adding another layer of anxiety.

His day finally came when the transport arrived and there was nothing else to do other than ship it off to Las Vegas. The show opened on Tuesday, Oct. 31, and Myles Kovacs (DUB magazine and other industry affiliations) announced the voting results at an afternoon happy hour on Wednesday, Nov. 1, in the PRO booth on the show floor.

Kovacs made sure all the builders were shown appreciation for their hard work and

Chuck Graf of Auto Sunroof & Leather in Chester, New York, (left) and Josh Poulson, representing the SEMA PRO council, celebrate Graf's win in the 2023 PRO Cup Challenge.



Graf got the idea from his own dogs and knew others would want to show some love for their furry friends.



Since returning home from the show, Graf has sold Level 1 "Ruff Rider" packages to dealers that were placed on a Ford Bronco and a GMC Terrain.



The competition challenges restylers to create appealing accessory packages for car dealers that are profitable and easy to replicate.

creativity before announcing that Graf's 2024 Subaru Crosstrek Sport model "Ruff Rider" package had won.

PET PROJECT

Auto Sunroof & Leather has been serving the North Jersey and New York Hudson Valley areas from its Chester location since 2018, where Graf spends his time creating and building packages for local dealerships.

His contest entry came about because he and his wife have dogs and, like so many of us, absolutely love them. He also knows there are a tremendous number of dog people driving around in vehicles that he can accessorize.

Aiming at this specific market, his "Ruff Rider" package for the Crosstrek Sport includes:

- 4Knines rear seat & cargo protection package
- Avery Dennison hood stripe with paw print design
- Champion 321 Large Power Topslider sunroof

- LLumar paint protection film
- Katzkin custom leather interior with paw print design
- LP Adventure 1.5-inch lift kit with wheel and tire package
- Squatch custom emblem package

The package checked all the boxes as it presents good profit potential for restylers and dealers and is easy to reproduce on many makes and models.

"My team did a great job," Graf said. "I'm a dog person. I have lots of dogs and I know that people relate to that, so it's something that's sellable. It should be something that's marketable to everybody. I hope that other restylers pick up on it and do the same thing."

That's truly the spirit of the competition and now Graf and his "Ruff Rider" package will be added to the PRO Cup Challenge trophy kept at SEMA headquarters as well as receiving his own trophy to display at his shop.

Since the show, Graf has been back to

work, showing off the package to other dealers who have jumped on board, most recently a Ford dealership that did a Level 1 package on a Bronco Sport and a GMC dealer that made a similar add-on to a new blue GMC Terrain, he reports.

Level 1, Graf explains, consists of a custom leather interior (choice of color), front heated seats, rear seat and cargo protection, and Ruff Rider graphics and emblems.

The package has a wholesale price of \$2,995, with a recommended MSRP of \$4,199.

This attractive add-on allows dealers to set themselves apart and appeals to drivers who want to stand out in a crowd and show a little love to their best furry friends.

Even better, there have been reports from restylers in other parts of the country who have had similar successes with their own takes on Ruff Rider-inspired pet-themed packages.

In fact, I need to have a meeting with my two sales reps now and get a few of these lined up at some local dealers.

Bye! **TS**



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



More and more drivers understand and desire the features and benefits paint protection films deliver. (Photos courtesy Eastman Performance Films)



NOTHING TO HIDE

The benefits of today's quality paint protection films are clear.

By Jef White



What shop wouldn't want to offer a practically invisible product that protects its customers' aftermarket investments? Today's quality paint protection films deliver an added layer of defense for any performance, classic, off-road or luxury vehicle.

Easy to install and with subtle appearance

options that can make a big impact, the benefits of applying PPF are clear. With more and more drivers recognizing and desiring the product, it's just a matter of choosing the right offering, performing a clean installation and then letting the film do its work.

If you're interested in adding PPF services to your shop, suppliers have nothing to

hide when it comes to top products, sales approaches and common pitfalls to avoid.

BIGGER IS BETTER

As proof that paint protection films are growing in popularity, a recent trend is to cover even more of the vehicle in PPF.

"We've seen a shift from smaller, partial installations to more full front clips and

Choose the right product, perform a clean installation and then let the film get to work protecting the vehicle. (Photo courtesy xpel.com)





Use social media and highlight past projects to let local drivers know about your PPF services. (Photos Photos courtesy XPEL Inc.)

full vehicle wraps,” notes Dan Birkenmeier, channel marketing leader, Americas and EMEA, for Eastman Performance Films.

Chris Hardy, senior director of sales for XPEL Inc., agrees that more customers are covering more of their vehicles.

“Five years ago, there were very few clients that would agree to a full body installation. Today, some shops average over 25% of their business on full body installs,” he says.

One of the reasons, he notes, is that end consumers are much more familiar with the products and excited to explore the possibilities on their own vehicles.

“The awareness of paint protection film in general has grown exponentially,” says Hardy. “It has become much more common than ever before to do a daily driver versus just exotic and highline cars and SUVs.”

That awareness spurs sales as drivers

become more comfortable with adding films, says Alex Sikorski, CEO of Premium Tech Coating Inc.

“Today, PPF professionals have less trouble explaining the benefits of the film to their customers, as (drivers) are arriving at the shops knowing what they want, how much it costs and how long the installation takes,” he says.

Armed with that knowledge, Narayan Andrews, owner of Spectrum Auto in

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PPF PRODUCTS

■ HOT PRODUCT:

Avery Dennison neo noir Paint Protection Film

■ FEATURES & BENEFITS:

Customers like how neo noir really looks like paint and want it to accent the hood or to make the roof look panoramic; it has self-healing properties and a hydrophobic topcoat, like a ceramic coating, that's built in.

Spectrum Auto

Narayan Andrews

Owner & Avery Dennison PPF Trainer

■ HOT PRODUCTS:

LLumar Valor & SunTek Reaction

■ FEATURES & BENEFITS:

Our latest-generation PPF films; offer a self-healing, ceramic-style ultra-gloss finish and, for installers, improved stretch and tack for a better installation experience.

Eastman Performance Films LLC

Dan Birkenmeier

Channel Marketing Leader,

Americas & EMEA

■ HOT PRODUCT:

Matte Paint Protection Film

■ FEATURES & BENEFITS:

Our customers' number one request; gives great aesthetic pleasure in addition to all the benefits of clear film; easily stretches, molds and adheres to curved areas, saving installers valuable time.

Premium Tech Coating Inc.

Alex Sikorski

CEO

■ HOT PRODUCT:

XPEL ULTIMATE FUSION

■ FEATURES & BENEFITS:

FUSION PLUS ceramic coating embedded into the film itself makes it glossier, hydrophobic and easier to clean.

XPEL Inc.

Chris Hardy

Senior Director of Sales

Colorado Springs and a trainer for Avery Dennison paint protection film installation classes, says more and more people are ready to protect their vehicle investments.

"The average price of a new car in Colorado today is \$50,000. New trucks or SUVs can approach \$100,000. That's why buying PPF is almost a no-brainer for most people."



Today's customers are more familiar with paint protection films and their benefits. (Photo courtesy Premium Tech Coating Inc.)

Andrews also highlights the technological advancements the industry has enjoyed over the past decade.

"The self-healing, the new adhesives, the layers—compared with 10 or 20 years ago, PPF films are easier to work with today and they don't yellow after a few years like films did in the past," he says.

CLEAR UNDERSTANDING

It's easy to forget that buyers new to PPF may believe that all clear film is the same. It's up to shops to show them the subtle-yet-important variations.

"Take the opportunity to demonstrate the appearance differences and benefits of products like matte or thicker paint protection films, and highlight incremental areas on the vehicle that can benefit from PPF," says Birkenmeier.

It's also important to show drivers beforehand which areas of the vehicle will be protected and which won't, Hardy notes.

"Take the time to go through a proper explanation of what the final install will look like," he says. "Take the customer around their car and show them the areas where the film will not cover a panel or (painted surface) 100% so there are no surprises."

Andrews outlines some common pitfalls for shops to avoid.

"As far as installations go, the biggest mistakes are the butt seams, overcut and overstretching," he says. "From the marketing side, I think two common mistakes are, one, not talking about the manufacturer's warranty and, two, not guaranteeing your work."

If your shop doesn't currently offer

PPF installations, now's the time to start, Sikorski believes.

"Many shops either wrongfully think it's an expensive product or it's difficult to install—neither of which is true," he notes. "It only takes a two-day training course for you to start on PPF installations."

FOOT IN THE DOOR

Looking to increase your shop's PPF sales? A good place to start is with current clients, says Eastman's Birkenmeier.

"If you have existing customers who have yet to incorporate paint protection film on their vehicles, consider offering entry-level applications like door edge guards and door cups, perhaps as a value-add to another product installation," he says. "This helps demonstrate the benefits of PPF and introduces them to the product."

Then, to grab new customers, reach out online, suggests XPEL's Hardy—even if you must add staff to do it well.

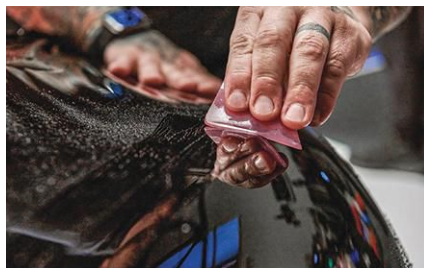
"Hire an in-house, full-time social media content creator," he suggests. "People are naturally inquisitive and want to understand, to some extent, exactly what it is that you do when you have their machine in your shop. Showing them makes all the difference."

Knowing the product inside and out will help shops explain the important features of quality PPF installations, says Andrews from Spectrum and Avery Dennison.

"Keep your clients knowledgeable about the benefits of PPF beyond just the look of their car," he recommends. "For example, in Colorado we put sand and chemicals on the roads during the winter. So, the front end of your car and your windshield literally get sandblasted. Meanwhile, in coastal areas like California and Florida, people don't think of the salt in the air from the ocean that will corrode. Wherever you are, there are going to be environmental factors that paint protection film will protect against that customers may not be aware of."

And finally, create packages and programs that serve various customers and vehicles, at different levels suggests Sikorski from Premium Tech.

"Do not expect all customers to enter your shop for a full body installation," he cautions. "By offering different packages—starting from door edges, cups and sills to front edges or full front protection packages—you'll have a product for each budget, making it easier to choose." **TS**



Educate clients about the benefits of PPF beyond just the look of their vehicle. (Photo courtesy Avery Dennison)



The latest high-tech films work better and are more versatile than ever. (Photo courtesy Avery Dennison)



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MADE IN THE SHADE

How to start & grow a window tinting business.

By Steven Hopkinson

From car windows to glass on homes and businesses, more and more people recognize and desire the benefits of window film.

An in-demand product that requires professional installation for the best results, the tint business can be fun

and lucrative. Wondering if film application might be the career for you? Here's an introduction:

THE CONCEPT

As tinters, we apply a thin, protective film to car windows or building glass for privacy,

temperature control and aesthetics. The main purpose is to protect the people and property inside the vehicle or structure from harmful UV rays.

Professionals looking to start a window tinting business usually do so because they see how other tint shops are thriving in the

Steven Hopkinson



Sean Hopkinson



Top shops have at least one expert or experienced worker who can control quality issues, tackle the toughest projects and help junior workers become experts like them.

area, and/or they notice a demand for the product that isn't being met.

Most businesses get started through one of two routes—the first is to start a small business from scratch with maybe two or three people to help build up a clientele. The other is to buy an existing shop that has a good reputation, already employs dedicated workers and includes a customer list of happy patrons.

Starting from scratch can cost you anywhere from \$10,000 to \$30,000, depending upon how many workers you hire and how much equipment you buy. Purchasing an existing shop can run between \$110,000 to \$250,000, depending on the company's size and scope.

Professionals can earn anywhere from \$50 to \$800 per window, depending upon the type of job and degree of difficulty.

STEP BY STEP

Does this business model interest you? Here are some things to consider for your new tint shop.

There is, of course, much more to each of these steps than what's listed, so consider this a simple overview to give you an idea of what's required to get up and running:



From car windows to glass on homes and businesses, more and more people recognize and desire the benefits of window film.

Decision & Planning

To start a business, you'll first need to decide who it will serve and in what location.

Consider the local demographics, competitors in the area, your budget, whether you want to operate as a mobile outlet or in a brick-and-mortar facility, and if you plan to serve retail or wholesale customers or a mix of both.

Choose a Supplier

Window film manufacturers and suppliers can offer everything a successful shop needs, including the best products, initial and ongoing training, and business assets and support services to help you grow. They can also assist with many of the following steps.

Talk with representatives at trade shows or in one-on-one meetings to get a feel for



Window film manufacturers and suppliers can offer everything a successful shop needs, including the best products, initial and ongoing training, and business assets and support services to help you grow.

which partnerships make the most sense for your business model.

Make It Legal

Officially register your company for tax purposes and obtain any required permissions or permits to operate legally in your area.

Required permits and licenses vary by state and municipality.

Business Bank Account

Strongly consider opening a business bank account, even if you're the company's only worker.

Using your personal account for business

purposes can affect your assets if a problem occurs or the business gets sued.

Insurance

Insurance will help cover losses if something unforeseen happens.

If your business is small, investigate General Liability Insurance options. If your business is larger or has employees, learn about Workers' Compensation Insurance as well.

Business Website & Phone

Create a business website to let people know more about your company and its products and services.

Assign a business phone number for easy contact without missing any calls or texts.

Team Building

If you hire employees, have a plan for work delegation and make it flexible as different workers show talent and expertise in certain roles.

Purchase Necessary Tools

Buy all the tools, software and other items needed for your business to start making money right away.

TIME TO GROW

Once you're up and running, investigate these ways of growing your business:

Google Listing

Customers finding you on Google and other search platforms is the most important part of growing your tinting business.

Claim your Google Business Profile and be sure your website lists the products and services you offer and defines your service area.

Go to Google My Business Listing and verify/claim your profile by updating your company or business name, address and contact information.

If your mobile business doesn't have a permanent address, you can still verify the listing using your mailing address and then show your service area.

Hiring Experts

Tinting is a very competitive business, and if jobs are not performed professionally and flawlessly, people will notice and tell others.

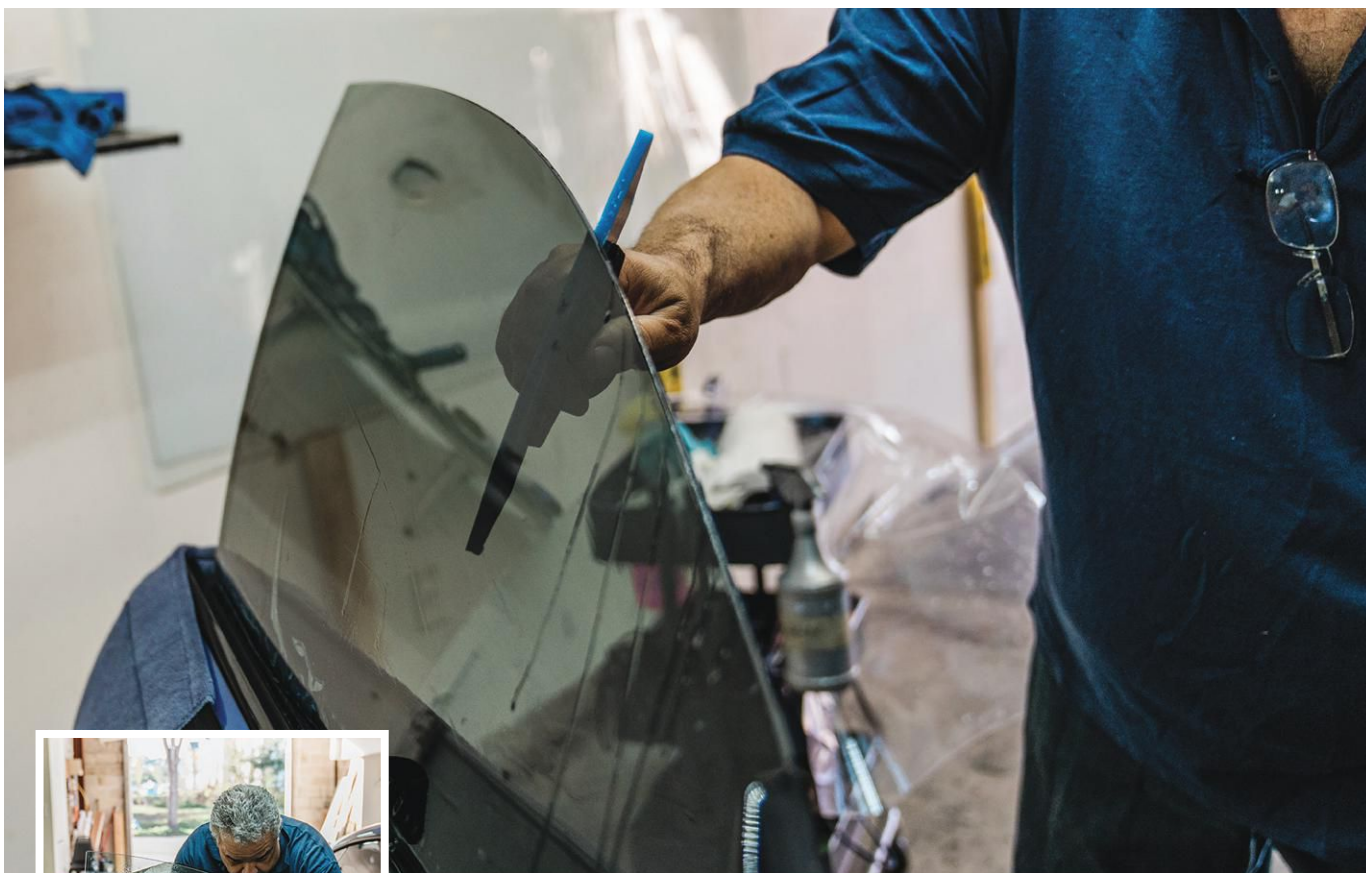
Top shops will have at least one expert or experienced worker who can control quality issues, tackle the toughest projects and help junior workers become experts like them.

Learning From Other Businesses

No matter how experienced you or your workers are in the window tinting field, there's always something to learn from the competition.

Research the other tint shops in your area and identify reasons they may be succeeding or failing.

Make a list of the positives and negatives you see and then integrate or remove them from your business, as needed.



Tinting is a very competitive business, and if jobs are not performed professionally and flawlessly, people will notice and tell others.



Offering Extra Services

Most shops perform nearly 80% of their window tinting jobs in the summer—specifically from March to August. So, what are some other products or services you could provide to even out your workflow throughout the year?

At our shop we primarily do window tinting installation, removal and replacement, but we also offer body decals, pin-striping and vinyl graphics.

You can consider anything to make extra profits, from selling add-on or decorative items to hiring a mechanic to perform traditional vehicle repair and maintenance services.

Regardless, if you build strong relationships with your window film customers, it's likely they'll return for related services.

Promoting Through Offers

Everyone loves to feel like they're getting a deal, so consider offering special discounts, free checkups, BOGO opportunities and so on.

When you're starting out, you can even offer your services at a very low profit margin early on to grab attention and build your reputation.

Impressions & Quality

First impressions work magically, so make sure everything about your shop, from the office to the work area, looks awesome.

Then, follow up with quality service that customers appreciate. It's the best way to build a client list and get referrals.

Networking

Network and communicate with different companies, including car dealerships and businesses that deal with glass and windows. Look to strike up partnerships where you refer customers looking for their parts or services, and vice versa.

You can enhance your networking through social media. Even if customers

don't see your website, they may visit their social media accounts every day.

Create accounts for your business and update them regularly—even adding special offers, if they make sense—and watch your client list grow.

Starting a new business is exciting, and window film is an in-demand product. Jump in with something new or better than what others are offering, but don't stray too far from your core.

Choose quality products, perform professional installations and take care of clients, and you'll become the first choice of many customers in no time. **TS**



Automotive industry veteran **STEVEN HOPKINSON** co-owns *Flying Window Tinting* in Orlando with his father, Sean.

With 40 years of professional expertise, the company is an authorized LLumar installer with a passion for sharing knowledge and empowering car owners to achieve their desired tint projects. Learn more online at: orlandoflyingwindowtinting.com.

NEW VEHICLE REPORT

A sampling
of the latest
models, special
editions &
updates.

Carmakers are busy rolling out new models, special editions and notable updates as 2024 vehicles begin appearing nationwide. Here's a sampling of what restylers may soon encounter on dealer lots.

2024 FISKER OCEAN FORCE E

The 2024 Fisker Ocean all-electric SUV is only made more capable with the Fisker Ocean Force E off-road package.

"Force E is our effort to bring zero emissions to the off-roading world, so that people who love the outdoors can experience it in a more sustainable way and without the negatives associated with the internal combustion vehicles that have dominated the segment for decades," says Henrik Fisker, chairman and CEO.

Designed to maximize the Ocean's torque, power and range for sustainable off-roading, Force E is available both at vehicle purchase and as a post-purchase add-on package. It will first be available for all-wheel drive Fisker Ocean One and Extreme trims, and available for the Ultra trim soon after.

The package includes 33-inch tires on 20-inch wheels, higher ground clearance, specialized dampers, front and rear skid plates and an underbody plate for greater durability.

Force E will also include a special mode delivering off-road-performance powertrain settings that will be sent via an over-the-air (OTA) update.

An optional roof basket will be sold separately.

The 2024 Fisker Ocean Force E package is hoping to bring sustainable off-roading to the trailhead.



ROLLS-ROYCE LA ROSE NOIRE DROPTAIL

During Monterey Car Week 2023, Rolls-Royce Motor Cars revealed La Rose Noire Droptail, a dark, daring and dramatic coachbuilt roadster that's the first in the brand's contemporary history.

Droptail is inspired by the allure of the Black Baccara rose, designers say, mimicking the dark pomegranate color of its petals that appears almost black in shade.

A removable hard top gives Droptail two distinct characters—without its roof it's an open-top roadster, and with the roof it becomes a dramatic coupe.

The interior took two years to develop, featuring artwork that represents an abstract expression of falling rose petals, formed using 1,603 pieces of blackwood veneer triangles. Assembly required intense concentration and the single craftsman tasked with creating it could only work in one-hour sessions for no more than five hours total per day. The artisan, who has been with Rolls-Royce since apprenticeship, spent weeks working in silence in a sound-insulated space to mitigate potential distractions.

Meanwhile, the fascia of Rolls-Royce La Rose Noire Droptail features an integrated one-off timepiece by Audemars Piguet, which was specially commissioned by the client. Coachbuild designers and engineers created a clasp mechanism that gently presents the timepiece at the touch of a button.

In celebration, the commissioning client requested a bespoke Rolls-Royce champagne chest appointed with matching parquetry and coordinated to match the color and materials of the car.

La Rose Noire Droptail is a dark, dramatic coachbuilt Rolls-Royce roadster.



2024 NISSAN PATHFINDER

Combining flexibility, advanced technology and premium features, the 2024 Nissan Pathfinder is offered in five grades: S, SV, Rock Creek, SL and Platinum.

Ideally suited to families for local commutes or long road trips, Pathfinder features three rows of seating, up to 80.5 cubic feet of cargo capacity (second and third rows folded), plus the confidence to explore in nearly all conditions with available Intelligent 4WD with seven-position Drive and Terrain Mode selector.

A towing capacity of up to 6,000 pounds (select models, when properly equipped) adds the ability to haul trailers, campers and more.

Every Pathfinder features standard Nissan Safety Shield 360, NissanConnect with an 8-inch touchscreen (9-inch available) featuring Apple CarPlay and Android Auto connectivity, and standard LED exterior lighting.

Available advanced technology includes a 12.3-inch digital dashboard, a 10.8-inch



Combining flexibility, advanced technology and premium features, the 2024 Nissan Pathfinder is offered in five grades.

head-up display and class-exclusive Intelligent Around View Monitor³.

The Platinum level caters to those seeking an elevated experience with 20-inch wheels, a panoramic moonroof, a Bose 13-speaker

premium audio system, semi-aniline leather-appointed seats with inset quilting, a premium-leather steering wheel, Bronze Metallic Brushed interior trim and climate-controlled front seats.

2024 KIA EV6

Kia America debuted the 2024 EV6 North American Utility Vehicle of the Year Limited Edition a few months ago at The Quail, a Motorsports Gathering. With only 1,000 examples set for production, the commemorative EV6 celebrates being recognized in the North American Car, Truck and Utility Vehicle of the Year (NACTOY) competition in January 2023.

The all-electric EV6 introduces the model-exclusive colorway of brilliant Deep Forest Green over Desert Beige, which pays homage to classic performance vehicle styling combinations. The centerpiece of the interior is a bespoke adornment featuring authentic NACTOY medallions and the teaser silhouette beside the gear selector.

Featuring a 77.4 kWh battery with a 74kW front motor and a 165kW rear motor, the 320-hp EV6 incorporates blacked-out exterior elements including wheel arch moldings, side treatments and front and rear fasciae borrowed from the EV6 Wind model.

Meanwhile, feature content from the EV6 GT-Line include 20-inch alloy wheels, a sunroof, Augmented Reality Head-Up Display, Surround View Monitor (SVM),

Blind-Spot View Monitor (BVM), and a heated, flat-bottom steering wheel and rear seats. **TS**

Kia America debuted the 2024 EV6 North American Utility Vehicle of the Year Limited Edition a few months back.





RESTYLING PRODUCTS

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Tank & Toolbox Combo

Transfer Flow Inc., Chico, California, presents its 40-Gallon Refueling Tank & Toolbox Combo that is DOT-legal for carrying and transferring gasoline, diesel and kerosene. The system is equipped with an easy-to-use purge function to move remaining fuel from the hose back into the tank, and the toolbox offers 6 cubic feet of storage space. Locking handles and gas-filled shocks provide easy, secure access.

New Bronco Front Bumper & Skids

ICON Vehicle Dynamics, Riverside, California, presents its PRO Series Front Bumper, Aluminum Front Skid and Steel Front Diff Skid offerings for 2021-up Ford Bronco models. The latest in the company's Impact line of off-road bumpers and armor, the Bronco bumpers and skids follow a design philosophy of high clearance, high strength and attention to detail. The PRO Series front winch bumper mounts with maximum clearance and approach angles, and a universal ACC relocation mount allows them to work with Adaptive Cruise Control.



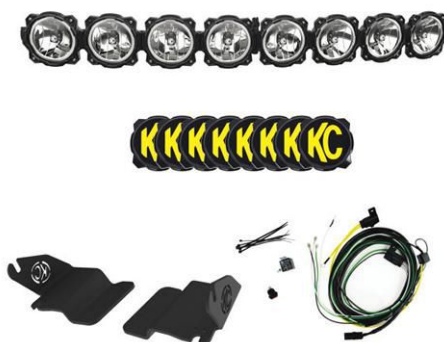
Ford F-150 Raptor Air Kits

Air Lift Company, Lansing, Michigan, presents new LoadLifter 5000 Ultimate Air Suspension Kits for 2009-14 and 2017-20 Ford F-150 Raptor models. The kits offer up to 5,000 pounds of load-leveling capability with the addition of an internal jounce bumper that helps smooth transitions over rough roads to reduce bottoming-out and offer extra protection for heavy loads. The internal jounce bumper helps to absorb shock,

even with zero air pressure. Air Lift air springs are designed to work with the vehicle's existing suspension to eliminate squat.

Bronco 50-Inch Light Bar

KC HiLITES, Flagstaff, Arizona, presents the Gravity LED Pro6 50-Inch Light Bar Kit for new-gen Ford Broncos. Designed to combine the timeless appeal of larger round lights with the highest-end modern technology, the kit is ready for off-roading with no modifications necessary. The system uses factory-designed mounting locations and hardware.



Professional Car Care Products

Meguiar's, Irvine, California, introduces new Professional Car Care products including Beyond Ceramic Paint Coating M888, Pro Speed Polish M200 and So10 All-in-One M300. Together, the new solutions are designed to offer professionals top results achieved with greater versatility and ease-of-use.



Wheel Adapters for Jeep Axle-Less Trailer Suspensions

Timbren Industries, Whitby, Ontario, introduces Wheel Adaptors for Jeep owners interested in fitting their same vehicle wheels on the six-lug hubs on the axle-less HD trailer suspension. Designed to be easily installed on the axle-less hub to accept Jeep 5x5 bolt pattern wheels, the adapters are made with 7075 military-grade aluminum and include a hub-centric design.

Combination Lock Upgrade

Tuffy Security Products,

Cortez, Colorado, offers the option of a Factory-Installed Combination Lock Upgrade for a variety of its automotive console safes and lockboxes. For customers that want the added convenience of a keyless entry option on Tuffy's heavy-duty storage products, the three-digit combination lock upgrade replaces the standard factory equipment keyed lock on select products. The upgrade is available for lockboxes and safes for the Toyota Tacoma and Tundra, Ford F-Series, and Jeep Gladiator and Wrangler models.



Electric Brake Force Meter

Innovative Products of America (IPA),

Woodstock, New York, presents its Electric Brake Force Meter, an all-in-one tester that can verify if a vehicle's trailering circuits are functioning properly. Made in the USA of global components, it accurately simulates trailer light and electric brake loads to test modern vehicles with integrated trailer brake controllers. Troubleshoot truck-side tow circuits (taillights, turn signals, 12V, reverse

and ground condition) and verify trailer brake output gain on the newest vehicles. The 25-foot cable allows one-person, in-cab testing.

Jeep Components & Lift Kits

RSO Suspension, Hayward, California, a CYC Engineering brand, presents its

expanded product line of Jeep Components and Lift Kits. Designed to elevate the driving experience, available products include Jeep JK/JKU lift kits; 2.5 piggyback reservoir, 2.5 remote reservoir, 2.5 remote reservoir coil-over and bump shocks; sway bars and end links; track bars; tie rod and drag link kits; control arms; steering stabilizers; coil springs; and bump stop extensions.



Bronco Front Bumpers & Rock Sliders

Brave Offroad Designs, Houston, introduces Front Bumpers and Rock Sliders for sixth-generation Ford Broncos. Crafted in the U.S. with precision and a deep understanding of off-roading demands, the products are designed to offer protection and complement the vehicle's design. **TS**

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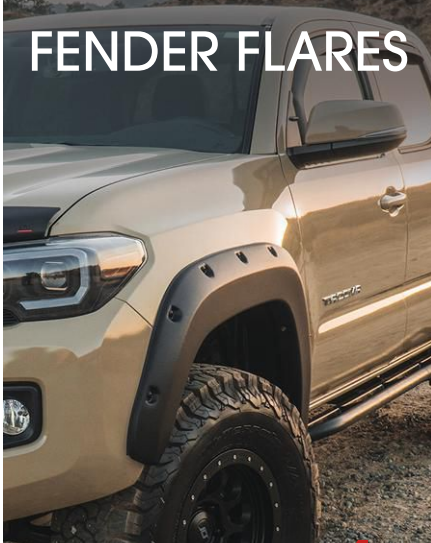

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Unplugged Performance debuted a new chapter in Tesla tuning with the arrival of its UP INVINCIBLE product line for the new Cybertruck.



Upfitting the Tesla Cybertruck

On the heels of Tesla announcing new specs and higher prices for its Cybertruck, upfitter Unplugged Performance debuted a new chapter in Tesla tuning with the arrival of its UP INVINCIBLE product line.

Tailored exclusively for Tesla Cybertruck owners “who want to push the limits of on- and off-road performance,” the unveiling took place at the company celebratory afterparty for Tesla’s high-profile Cybertruck delivery event, held Nov. 30.

Hosted at the company’s headquarters in Hawthorne, California—located near Tesla Design Studio, SpaceX and Starlink—the event attracted a capacity crowd that reflected intense interest in Tesla modification, according to officials.

“The UP INVINCIBLE collection is

designed to empower Cybertruck owners, equipping them to conquer the toughest terrains, embark on extraordinary adventures and enhance the Cybertruck’s inherent capabilities,” says Ben Schaffer, CEO of Unplugged Performance. “While we are renowned for our high-performance racing suspension and brake upgrades, UP INVINCIBLE is about infusing that DNA into the Cybertruck to take it to new heights and enhance the experience at every level.”

As a concerted effort to make the Cybertruck more robust and capable in a variety of challenging environments, the UP INVINCIBLE line features an off-road and overlanding-focused product collection including heavy-duty steel bumpers and rock sliders; carbon fiber body panels;

high-output LED light bars; bed storage solutions and MOLLE panel designs; a comprehensive suite of suspension products including lift kits; new wheel designs including a purpose-built beadlock wheel; underbody armor and more.

The full product range is slated to be available to customers early this year, officials stated.

During the event, Unplugged Performance also unveiled renderings of UP.FIT’s vision for the future, showcasing plans for Cybertruck-based police and military vehicles that can take advantage of the vehicle’s reported 340-mile range.

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