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Jef White
Editor
www.theshopmag.com

Creating High-Performing Teams

As one of the older employees at my organization, my expectations regarding the workplace environment fall somewhere between the old-school football coach's mantra of "Do Your Job!" and today's more collaborative approach aimed at making workers feel appreciated and empowered.

If you're having trouble forming your shop employees into a cohesive unit, a recent Dale Carnegie study titled "A Leadership Imperative: Creating a Culture of High-Performing Teams" highlights seven essential factors organizations can focus on to propel their groups to the next level.

"Today's organizations are managing an increasingly diverse and mobilized workforce," says Joe Hart, president and CEO of Dale Carnegie and Associates. "This creates unique challenges, especially when it comes to how teams work together effectively."

None of the seven factors are likely surprising, but taken together can help form an initial plan of attack for busy shop environments:

1. Connectedness
2. Recognition/Acknowledgement
3. Encouragement
4. Learning
5. Growth Potential
6. Psychological Safety
7. Empowerment

The study shows that building high-performing teams requires ongoing efforts from leaders, managers and team members. Effective team leadership also involves transparent communication, clear goals and cross-functional collaboration.

Even when teams are developed with quality talent and complementary skill sets, performance can still suffer, especially without a culture where that talent works closely and effectively together.

Since high-performing teams offer a competitive advantage, and less than one-third of teams report functioning at this level, it makes sense for shops to focus on teamwork as a top objective.

The study notes that:

- 85% of high-performing teams reported having well-defined goals
- 81% of high-performing teams interact daily
- 74% of high-performing teams have access to training & development

Finally, the study notes that working in a teamwork-focused culture, "individuals can commit to accountability and transparency founded on shared values, continuous learning and meaningful communication."

The downloadable whitepaper on the team approach is available at dalecarnegie.com. ***TS***

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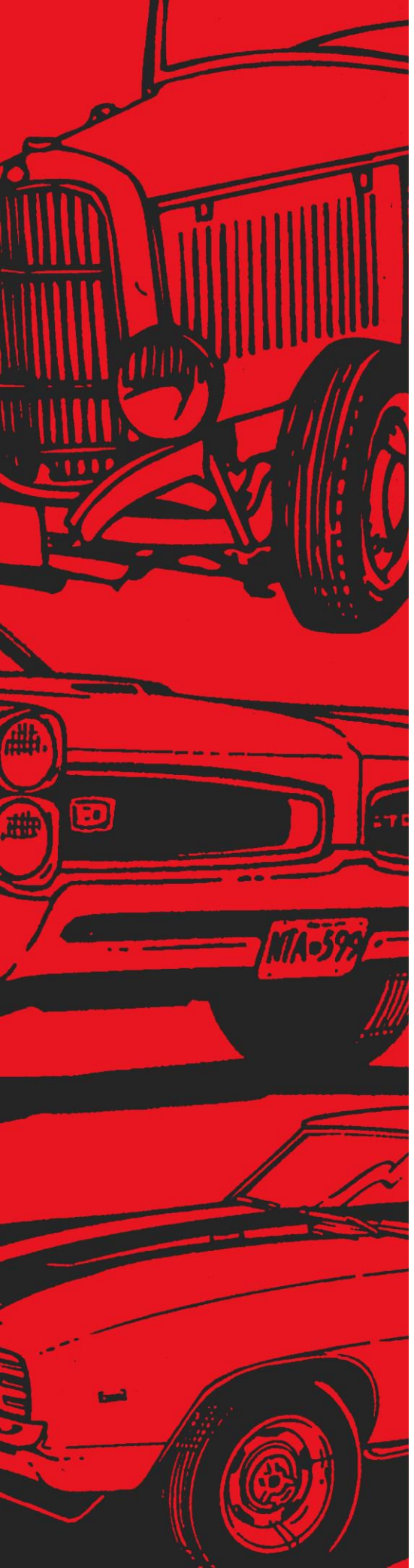
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YOUR WEBSITE & SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS ARE BROKEN PART II

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

Note: This is the second in a multipart article addressing common issues with websites and social media accounts often encountered by specialty automotive aftermarket shops. Part I appeared in the February 2024 issue of THE SHOP.

Let's continue looking at some of the most common issues with automotive shop websites and their solutions.

8 NEGLECTING YOUR WEBSITE IN FAVOR OF SOCIAL MEDIA

In today's mobile-centered world, neglecting mobile-friendliness is a big mistake. If your website visitors have to pinch and zoom in to see your content on a smaller screen, or if they're unable to navigate your site on different devices, you run the risk of losing them.

SOLUTION: Make sure your website is built to be mobile-ready and works smoothly on various devices and screen sizes. Test your site across different platforms to guarantee a consistent and user-friendly experience for all.



Don't neglect your website in favor of social media.

PRO TIP: Regularly test and update your website's mobile responsiveness to adapt to new devices and technologies.

9 INACCESSIBILITY

Building the best possible website for your business takes more than just a slick design, compelling copy and high-quality content. You want your services to be available to the widest possible audience, so your website needs to be accessible to all visitors and to be compliant with ADA (The Americans with Disabilities Act) regulations.



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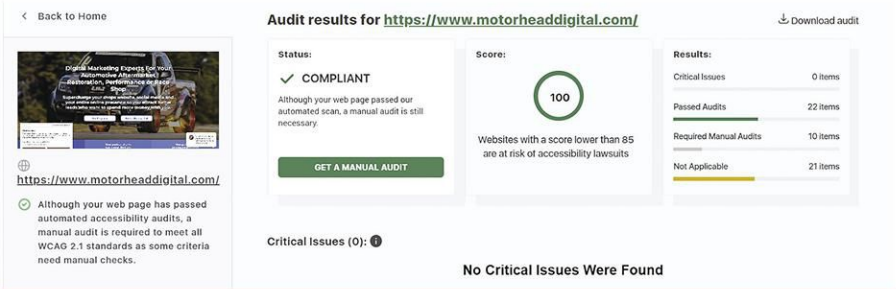
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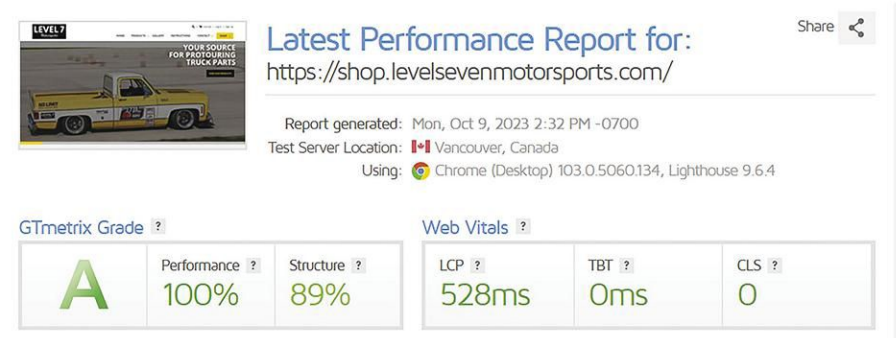
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Your website needs to be accessible to all visitors and compliant with ADA regulations.



Slow loading times can damage your search engine rankings.

SOLUTION: Consider the accessibility of each element of your website's design. Is your font clear and large enough to be readable for people with visual impairments? Are there audio options available? If you include video content, consider providing a transcript for those who are hard-of-hearing.

Apply these and other accessible elements to your site to ensure a smooth user experience for all. Much more about this subject can be found in our resource articles section of the Motorhead Digital website.

PRO TIP: Consider using accessibility plug-ins and tools that can help automatically find and fix common accessibility issues on your website.

10 MISSING POLICIES & OUTDATED COPYRIGHT INFORMATION

I know what you're thinking. "Nobody reads these things anyway, right?"

Still, neglecting privacy policies, terms of use and copyright information on your site can break the trust of your audience and leave you vulnerable to legal consequences.

SOLUTION: Make sure your website includes essential information like your privacy policy, terms of service and cookie policies. And if you have an eCommerce website, you'll also need to provide clear shipping, return and warranty policies information.

Additionally, make sure you're keeping all copyright dates and information current.

Make it easy for users to find these details by dedicating an easily accessible section of your website to them and linking this section in the footer of your site.

PRO TIP: Regularly review and update your policies to align with changing legal requirements and industry standards. To make things a bit easier on your end, there are several companies that specialize in U.S. privacy laws and privacy regulations all around the world.

11 INACTIVE OR FAULTY FORMS

If you're not getting responses from submission forms on your website, the culprit may be missing SPF (Sender Policy Framework) or DKIM (DomainKeys Identified Mail) records in your domain registry's backend.

These are a bit technical, but they're important to set up as they tell your customer's mail server that the email coming from your site is legit and not spam.

SOLUTION: Update and configure the SPF and DKIM records properly to guarantee that form submissions reach your inbox and that your responses reach the customer.

PRO TIP: We recommend that you—and, ideally, several of your team members—test all of your forms to see if any automatic notifications or error messages occur. Some hosting or domain name providers may be able to help you with setting up these records if you don't know where to start.

12 SLOW LOADING TIMES DUE TO BAD CODE OR LARGE FILES

Slow loading times can be a major turnoff for visitors to your website, making them more likely to leave—especially when they're browsing on a mobile device. Plus, slow loading times can damage your search engine rankings, making it harder for people to find you.

SOLUTION: To speed up loading times, resize and optimize large image files by compressing and formatting them properly. Avoid using preloaders or unnecessary content.

Also, streamline your website's code by minifying CSS and JavaScript files. These steps enhance user experience and improve your website's performance.

If you're DIY-ing, this might be a time to call in a developer who knows what all this means and can help you get it done without the headaches.



Invest time learning how to use DIY tools effectively or consider seeking help from a professional.

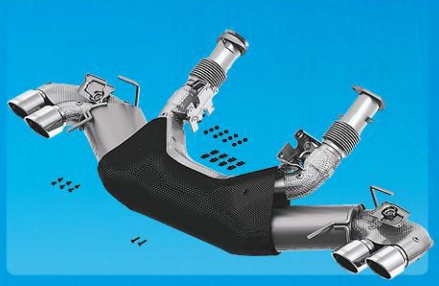
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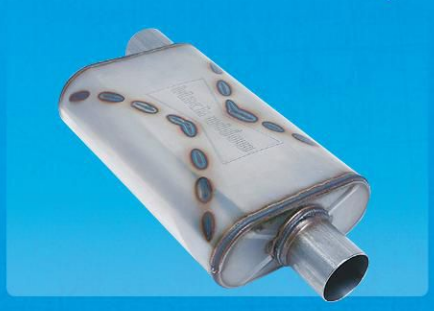


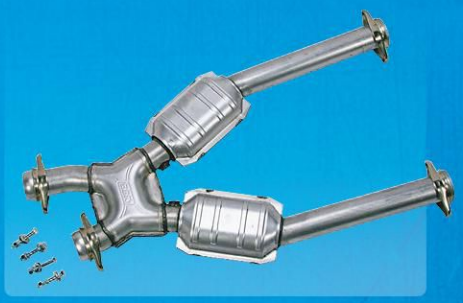












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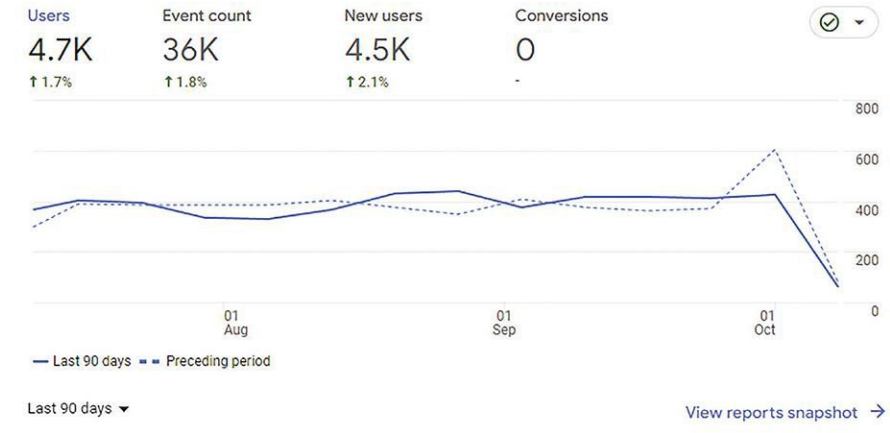
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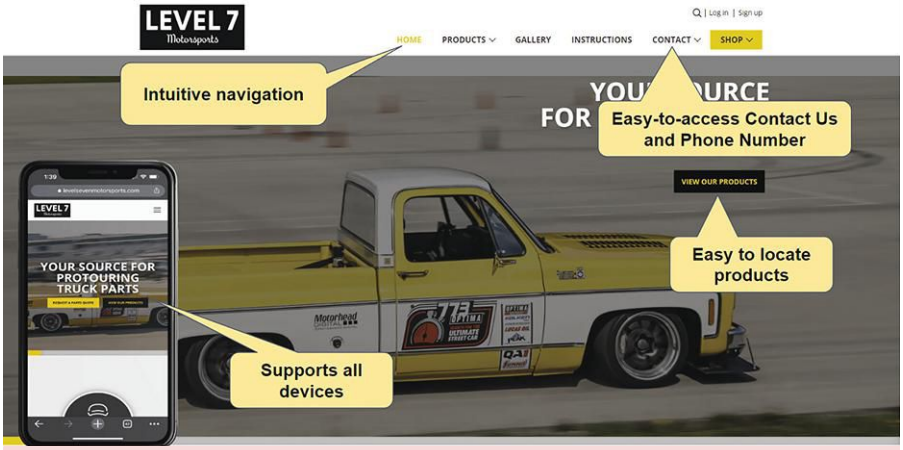
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WHSE24TS



Google Analytics is an important tool that tracks the traffic on your website, determines how people navigate it and sees how they found you.



Work to make your virtual storefront as welcoming and helpful as if the customer had actually walked in your front door.

PRO TIP: Regularly test your website's loading speed using tools like Google PageSpeed Insights or GTmetrix.

13 LACK OF KNOWLEDGE ABOUT WEBSITE BUILDERS

Using DIY tools like WordPress, Shopify, WIX, Squarespace or other website builders without proper knowledge can lead to poorly designed and dysfunctional websites with key elements missing or not working properly.

You can also run into major security issues if some of these tools aren't kept up to date.

SOLUTION: Invest time learning how to use DIY tools effectively or consider seeking professional help to ensure your website looks appealing, functions correctly and caters to the needs of mobile users.

PRO TIP: Properly update, test and optimize key elements to guarantee a seamless online experience for your audience.

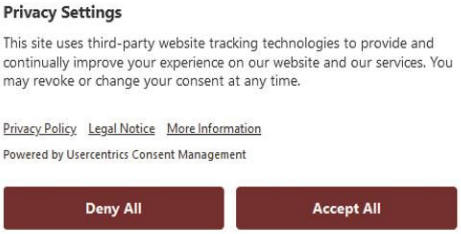
14 NOT SETTING UP GOOGLE ANALYTICS OR SEARCH CONSOLE

Google Analytics and Search Console are free tools that are essential to the success of your site and your business—especially if you're also doing marketing activities.

Google Analytics tracks the traffic on your website, how people navigate it and how they found you.

Google Search Console not only shows traffic to your site, but also allows you to submit your SITEMAP.XML file. That means it can see what pages are on your site and when you update them.

Search Console also provides Core Web Vitals that let you know when something is wrong. Imagine being notified the moment a page of your website is corrupted by



Make sure your website includes essential information like your privacy policy, terms of service and cookie policies.

malicious code. A tool like Google Search Console alerts you to issues like these so you can fix them as quickly as possible.

SOLUTION: Set up accounts on both platforms and connect them to your site. Monitor the data they provide to see how people are using your site and make sure it's always running on all cylinders.

PRO TIP: Use Google Analytics to see what pages are the most popular and which ones get less traffic so you can optimize them for better user engagement.

Keep an eye out for all of these common website issues to make sure your virtual storefront is as welcoming and helpful as if the customer had actually walked in your front door.

Meanwhile, there's another half of your online presence to monitor and maximize—social media. Tune in next time to learn how to make your shop a social media sensation. ***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.*

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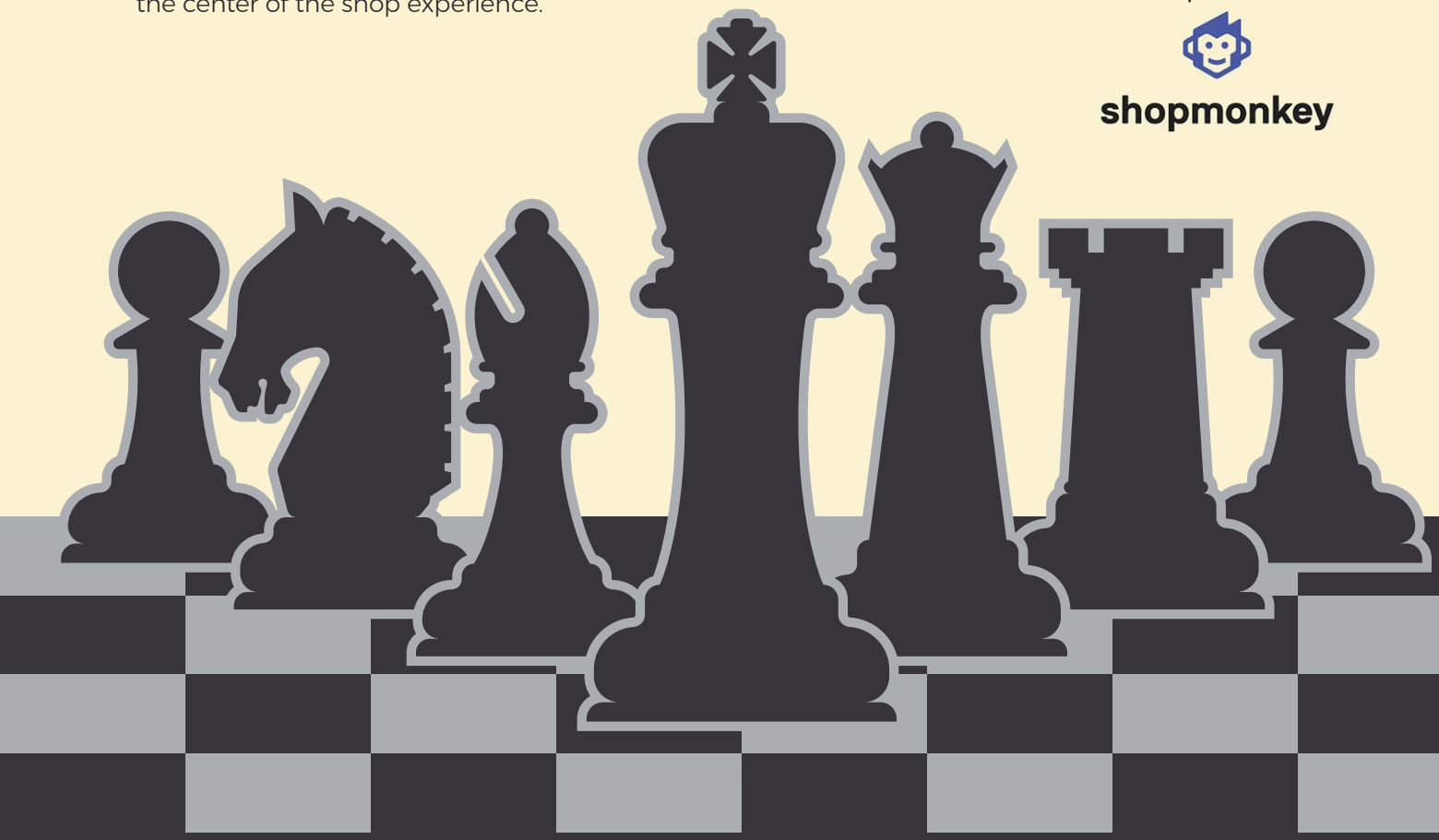


Brett Kinsfather
Senior Industry Marketing Manager

For more than 20 years, Brett has been responsible for bringing new programs and company initiatives to market with both manufacturers and distributors. Today, at Shopmonkey, Brett focuses his industry efforts on helping every shop thrive by closing the "connection gap" with intuitive, easy to use technology.

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Restyling AFTERMARKET ACCESSORIES

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Get Out of Town

Overland racks are the key to taking what's needed when leaving it all behind.

By Jef White



When it comes to installation, knowing what the customer wants to do with the rack is key. (Photo courtesy Fab Fours)

As overlanding continues its upward climb, accessory makers keep introducing innovative gear to make long trips more enjoyable. The question is how to fit all those convenient products on the vehicle itself and still have room for travelers.

Overland racks are the answer, offering sturdy, stable support to take what's needed when getting away from it all. Nothing says "get out of a town" like a fully loaded, off-road-rigged truck or SUV sporting an ingenious rack covered with tools and supplies.

Shops offering rack sales and installation have a few choices to make, including the brands and styles to carry, and how to best present them to an interested audience.

Suppliers have suggestions, outlining the hottest new products, trouble spots to avoid, and a list of questions for customers to help choose the perfect overlanding rack for their next adventure.

MORE THAN A RACK

Some drivers may not recognize or understand the important benefits of racks designed for overlanding and off-road adventures. It's up to professional outlets to teach them their value, says Sara Ford, marketing manager for TrailFX.

"Shops may sometimes recommend or install a generic rack without considering factors such as the customer's intended use, load capacity requirements or the type of accessories they plan to mount," Ford says. "This oversight can result in customers ending up with a rack that doesn't adequately meet their needs or is incompatible with their vehicle. It's crucial for shops to engage in a comprehensive discussion with customers, asking relevant questions about their usage, preferences and vehicle specifications to provide tailored recommendations."

Today's offerings allow customers to get exactly what they want, says Kristi Barker, senior graphic designer/marketing specialist for Rhino-Rack.

"Not all rack enthusiasts have the same intentions in mind. You've got your weekend warriors, your family road-trippers in need of extra storage space, your off-road experts and those multipurpose adventurers who want it all," she says.

OVERLAND RACK PRODUCTS

HOT PRODUCT:
Dropracks XL Elevating Roof Rack
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Dropracks lowers the entire roof rack including the load down to a comfortable height adjacent to the vehicle for easy and safe access; it's also very simple to lift a fully loaded rack back up.

Dropracks Inc.
Helge Dimmen
Chief Marketing Officer

HOT PRODUCT:
Overland Rack for Jeep Gladiators
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Made in the USA by skilled welders; expandable design offers an extension over the cab; multiple tie-down and mounting points; 10 integrated 3x3 LED pod mounts; roof access step; option for additional crossmembers to increase strength and support.

Fab Fours
Jason Bukolt
Director of Marketing

HOT PRODUCT:
The IBEX Truck Bed Rack
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Constructed from lightweight, durable aluminum; ballistic black powder-coat finish; multiple frame sizes; handles substantial loads on and off the grid; includes telescoping crossbars, numerous T-channels, and full and mid-height configurations.

Küat Racks
Craig Metcalf
Automotive Manager

HOT PRODUCTS:
ACS Forged Bed Rack & Tonneau Bed Rack
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Patented features including a sliding rear load bar for loading tall items like motorcycles; integrated toolboxes called GearPODs allow storage of tools and other items on the side of the rack within easy reach.

Leitner Designs
Bernhard Leitner
CEO

HOT PRODUCT:
Lost Canyon Base Camp Bed Rack
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Available for 2020-up Jeep JT Gladiator full- and half-cab models; affordable price point; heavy-duty steel construction; triangulated outrigger supports; static working load of 750 pounds and a dynamic load of 300 pounds; compatible with tonneau covers.

Quadratec Inc.
Patrick Bennett
Senior Product Designer

HOT PRODUCT:
Rhino-Rack Pioneer Platform
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Sleek, low-profile design; integrated wiring capabilities within all extrusions; crafted from a robust combination of aluminum and fiberglass-reinforced nylon corners; black powder-coat finish; additional accessory channels on the front and rear extrusions.

Rhino-Rack
Kristi Barker
Sr. Graphic Designer/
Marketing Specialist

HOT PRODUCTS:
ZROADZ ACCESS Overland Racks With 3-ACCESS Gate Option
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
ACCESS gates allow full access to the bed when opened and still protect gear when closed and locked, in addition to accepting accessories; 100% built in the USA.

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

HOT PRODUCT:
TrailFX Overlanding Roof Rack for Ford Broncos
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Combines style and functionality; optimizes the carrying capacity of new Broncos with hard or soft tops; crafted from robust, e-coated and powder-coated steel tubing; supports 600 pounds static load or 300 pounds dynamic load; no-drill installation.

TrailFX
Sara Ford
Marketing Manager

HOT PRODUCT:
The All-New Mesa Roof Rack
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Aluminum construction for weight savings and corrosion resistance; multi-purpose cargo management system; compatible with most rooftop tents; removeable 16-gauge wind deflector plate with light mount; no-drill/no-cut installation.

Westin Automotive Products/
Superwinch
Cameron Quiroz
Southwestern Regional
Sales Manager

"It's crucial for shops to take the time to understand and narrow down the customer's exact purpose before making a sale."

A rack setup will be different for someone who's interested in mountain biking for the week versus a couple looking to take the dog on a weekend getaway, says Jason Bukolt, director of marketing for Fab Fours.

"When it comes to installation, knowing what the customer wants to do with the rack is key. Why? Because you're going to set up the rack system tailored to their activity or usage."

And not just today. There's also the opportunity to take future considerations into account, says Patrick Bennett, senior



While versatile, overland racks are not overly complex. (Photo courtesy Küat Racks)

QUIZZING CUSTOMERS: WHAT TO ASK

Quizzing customers is continually highlighted as the most important step in finding the proper rack application for each project. Suppliers offer a question checklist for sales personnel:

- What's your budget?
  "Not all racks are created equal, and price should not be the only factor in deciding which manufacturer to choose," says Casillas.
- What year, make, model and bed length do you have?
  "Chances are, we have a bed rack and accessories to support that," Metcalf says.
- What's the intended use?
  "It ultimately boils down to weight; both the product and the vehicle have a specified capacity they can handle," says Bukolt.
- How much time are you going to spend overlanding and how much time are you going to use the truck as a daily driver/work vehicle?
  "You want to pick a rack that does everything and does not hinder you when you're not out exploring," says Leitner.
- What will you bring on the rack?
  "When and how often do you use those items, and will you use the vehicle and rack for activities other than overlanding?" asks Dimmen.
- Does it need to be compatible with a rooftop tent?
  "We have a perfect option for anybody," says Quiroz.
- Would you like to use a tonneau cover?
  "One key aspect of bed racks can be their incompatibility with tonneau covers. Asking this question early helps set expectations during and after the sale," says Bennett.
- Where's it headed?
  "Is their adventure meter set to moderate or extreme? Do they brave torrential downpours or scorching deserts? Evaluating the level of durability they seek allows shops to recommend racks made from top-notch materials that can weather any storm," says Barker.
- Do you have an installation preference?
  "Is the customer comfortable with drilling or do they prefer a no-drill option?" asks Ford.



From tonneau covers to rooftop tents and other popular accessories, make sure the rack will work with your customer's overall vehicle setup. (Photo courtesy Quadratec Inc.)

product designer for Quadratec Inc.

"Look at the bigger profit picture and don't limit the customer's purchasing options," he says. "Selling by brand only or pushing a higher-priced product is a common mistake. This limits your ability to up-sell and generate additional revenue as the customers' needs change."

The systems are wise investments, says Victor Casillas, sales and marketing manager for T-Rex Truck Products/ZROADZ Off Road Products.

"A well-designed rack manufactured from quality materials will provide you with years of confident performance and off-road use," he notes.

INSTALLATION INSIGHTS

While versatile, the racks are not overly complex, notes Craig Metcalf, automotive manager for Küat Racks.

"Communicate how easy and modular the setup and configurations are," he recommends. "Don't overcomplicate."

Still, it pays for shops to build in adequate time for proper installation, notes Bernhard Leitner, CEO of Leitner Designs.



Offer versatile accessories for different activities. (Photo courtesy Dropracks Inc.)



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Be sure to block out adequate time to perform a thorough installation. (Photos courtesy Leitner Designs)



"Misquoting installation times can lead to lost profits," he says. "Rooftop tents also require special brackets and a forklift to install, so be sure to have everything ready for the smoothest installation possible."

Depending on the rack, attachment does not necessarily require drilling, says Cameron Quiroz, Southwestern regional sales manager for Westin Automotive Products/Superwinch.

"The customer does not always want a rack that needs to be drilled into the roof of a brand-new vehicle," he says. "Our engineering team always takes that into account, which is how we have been able to offer a product that is not only extremely solid but requires no permanent damage to the vehicle for installation."

Removable options are popular with some customers, agrees Helge Dimmen, chief marketing officer for Dropracks Inc.

"Selling/installing racks and gear carriers that make it time-consuming to use or detach when not needed reduces the versatility of the vehicle to be used for other purposes/activities," he says.

SALES ACTIONS

Businesses that offer a variety of overland rack solutions quickly become one-stop destinations for adventure travelers, says Ford from TrailFX.

"By providing customers with a range of options tailored to different vehicles and preferences, shops simplify the buying process and elevate the overall shopping experience," she says. "This expansion not only caters to varied needs but also presents a prime opportunity for upselling at the point of purchase. Well-informed staff can guide customers toward complementary accessories or premium rack options, fostering customer satisfaction and boosting sales revenue."

Casillas from T-Rex recommends spending all the time it takes to understand the customer's expectations.

"Doing this will help narrow down their options, thereby reducing confusion, and will always give the customer a better experience," he predicts.

Seeing is believing, says Leitner from Leitner Designs, so be sure to have a showcase rack readily available for inspection.

"Have a display on a company truck. Customers want to know what it looks like, how it's manufactured and what use



Today's offerings allow customers to get exactly what they want. (Photos courtesy Rhino-Rack)



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LIPPERT



Provide a variety of overland rack solutions to become a one-stop destination for adventure travelers. (Photo courtesy TrailFX)



A well-designed rack manufactured from quality materials will provide years of service. (Photo courtesy T-Rex Truck Products/ZROADZ Off Road Products)

they can get out of it," he explains. "Small displays do not do a good job of conveying all the benefits of a proper overland rack."

Quadratec's Bennett agrees that hands-on experiences help make the sale.

"Having something the customer can look at and touch is what makes a brick-and-mortar shop stand out," he says. "Having products on the showroom floor or installed on shop and/or employee vehicles helps the customer visualize what they want and sets realistic expectations."

Meanwhile, as utilitarian as these products are, don't forget they also support a personality profile, reminds Metcalf from Küat Racks.

"Pay attention to trends and how the aesthetics of trucks and autos are changing to complement a customer's lifestyle aspirations," he says. "Keep tabs on all of the innovations happening in cargo management and choose brands that support and service their dealers/WDs."

Showing you understand their passion goes a long way with buyers in the overland market, says Barker from Rhino-Rack.

"It's all about finding a brand and rack that perfectly matches their personal adventure style. Whether they're into off-road expeditions, camping in the wilderness or tackling rugged terrain, help them discover a brand that aligns with their adventurous spirit," she says. "Once you've got their attention, it's time to get them fired up and excited about how this overland rack will be the solution to all their gear carrying dilemmas. Paint a vivid picture of hassle-free adventures and emphasize that it will effortlessly accommodate all their equipment, from kayaks to camping gear. Ignite their wanderlust with the promise of cargo-packing bliss."

If that sounds grandiose, remember the community can also stretch beyond typical overland boundaries, adds Quiroz from Westin Automotive Products.

"Overland racks are not only good for overlanding—our Mesa roof rack also offers additional storage when going on long road trips or any time that extra storage space is needed."

Dimmen from Dropracks also views a wider customer base as offering greater benefits.

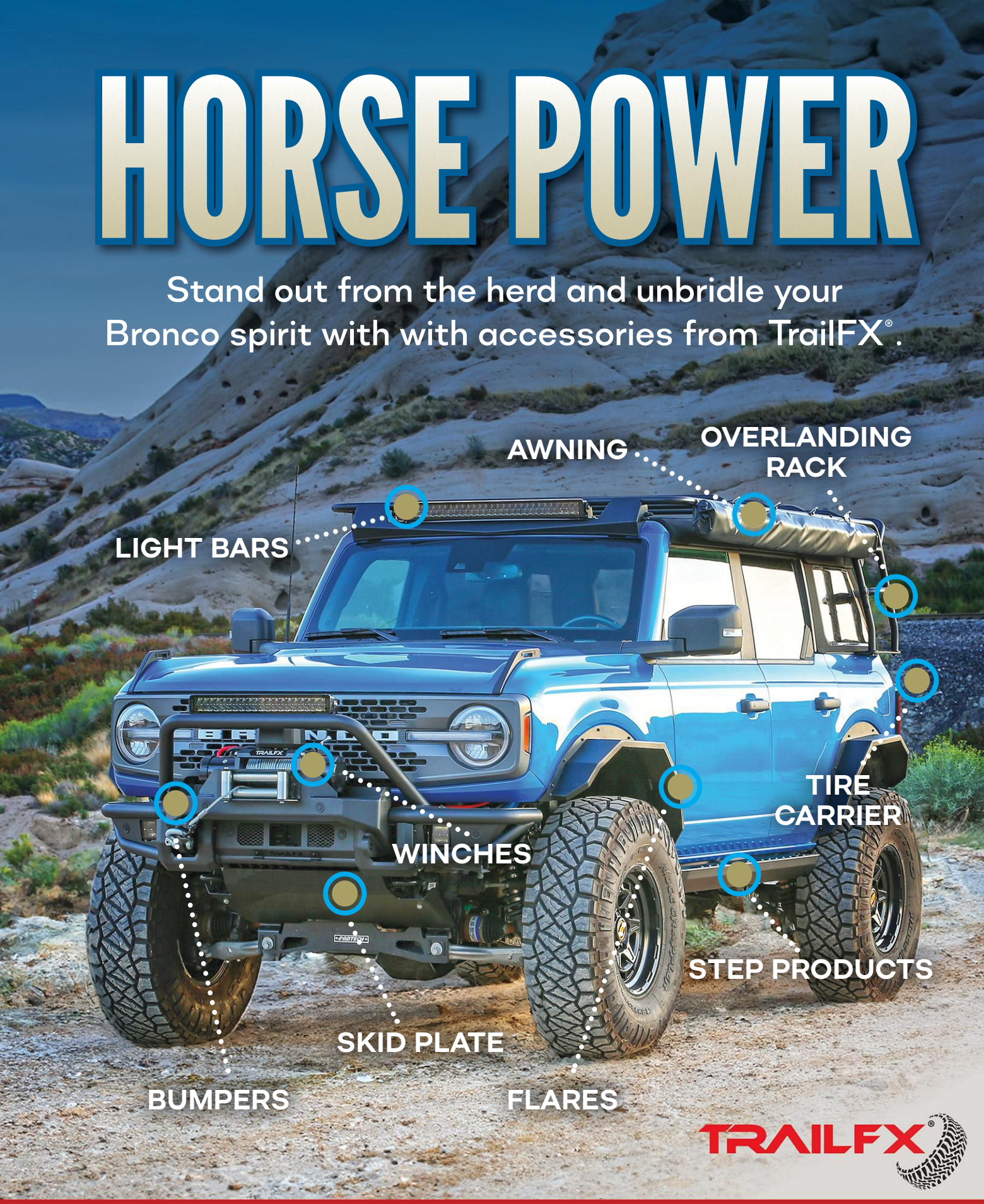
"Aim for versatility and to sell even more accessories for different activities," he says. "Drivers will use the vehicle more often, which means more exposure for the rack in different scenarios, increasing the likelihood they'll spend more on accessories."

Overlanding is extremely popular right now, and as even more drivers look to join in on the fun, chances are they'll turn to their local shop for advice and guidance.

"Let's face it, there are a ton of products in the overland space," says Bukolt from Fab Fours. "Your customer is relying on you to help them with what to bring and what stays at home." **TS**



Overland racks also offer extra storage for road trips. (Photos courtesy westinautomotive.com)



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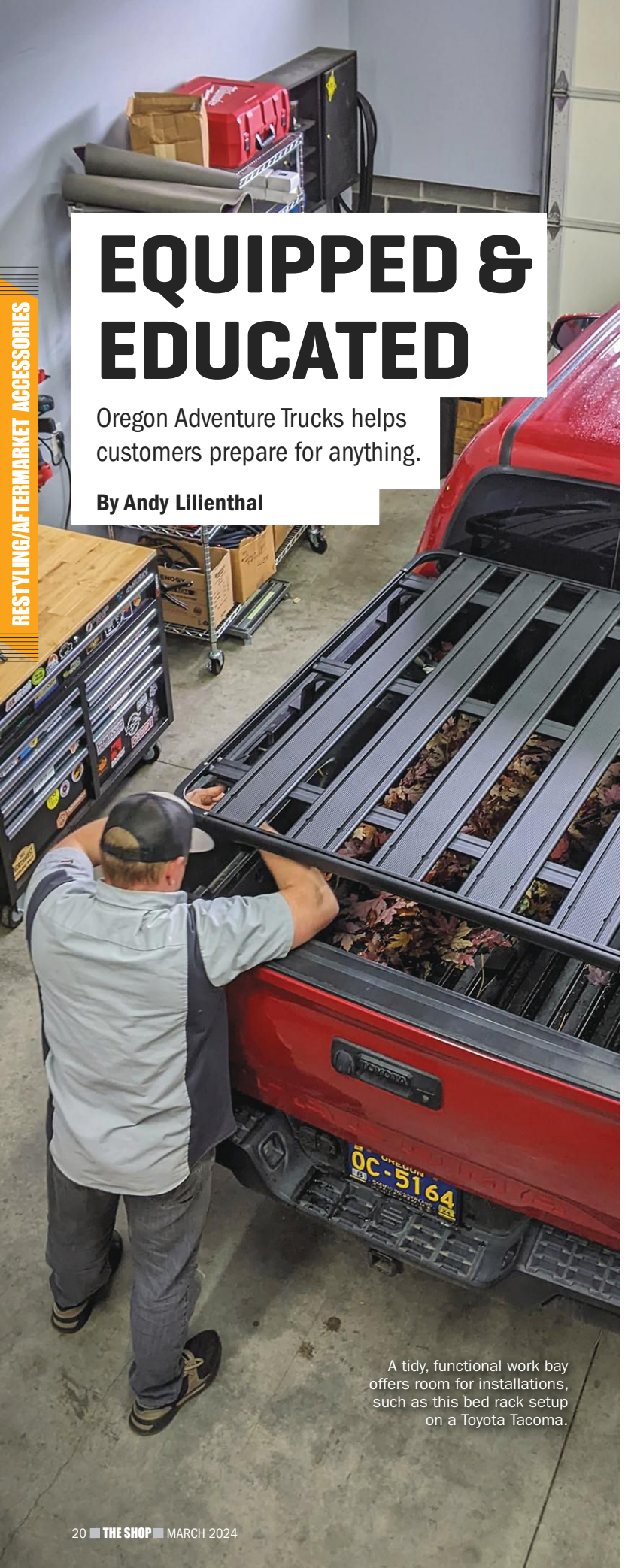
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EQUIPPED & EDUCATED

Oregon Adventure Trucks helps customers prepare for anything.

By Andy Lilienthal



A tidy, functional work bay offers room for installations, such as this bed rack setup on a Toyota Tacoma.

Some businesses are fueled by passion, whether it's a desire to turn an advocation into a vocation, to do better than a competitor, or to just make the entire space a better place for everyone involved.

Brent Baker and Aaron Wirth, owners of Oregon Adventure Trucks in Bend, Oregon, describe themselves as "just two guys who had a passion for the off-grid and camping industry."

But their shop, established in 2020, isn't just a place where they sell and install truck parts—it's a part-time classroom as well.

The store hosts classes and events throughout the year to educate enthusiasts about off-roading, including how to respect and preserve land and trails. By offering a combination of parts, installation and education, Oregon Adventure Trucks (Oregon AT) takes the idea of being an outfitter to the next level.

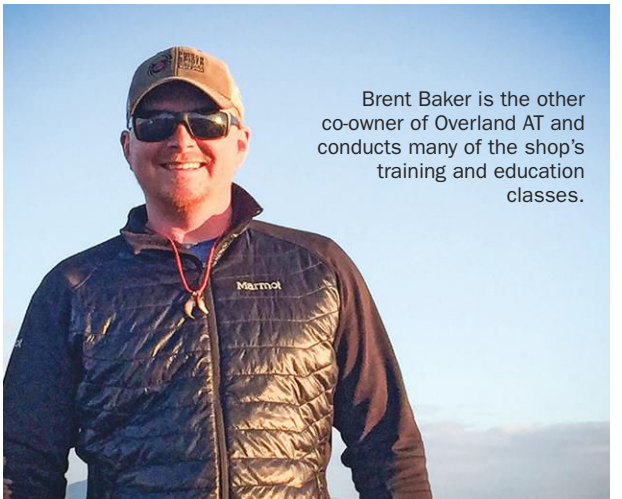
With so many new consumers coming into the off-road sphere, there's a thirst for education. While anyone can buy a 4x4, outfit it and hit the trail, Oregon AT's classes help customers go with knowledge, confidence and awareness.

OFF-GRID CAMPING & MORE

Baker and Wirth started Oregon AT to represent products from Prescott, Arizona-based AT Overland in the Pacific



Aaron Wirth is co-owner of Oregon Adventure Trucks. He's also one of two full-time employees.



Brent Baker is the other co-owner of Overland AT and conducts many of the shop's training and education classes.

Northwest. AT Overland manufactures toppers, campers, rooftop tents and storage solutions, and Oregon AT is the manufacturer's No. 1 dealer in North America.

Being the exclusive dealer in the region put them on the path to becoming a well-rounded outfitter. What started as two guys selling bed caps in their garage in 2020 turned into helping customers outfit their vehicles with improved ways of off-grid camping and overlanding.

Oregon AT is best described as an off-grid vehicle-supported camping store carrying everything needed to outfit vehicles for long weekends or long-term adventures.

In addition to AT Overland products, the business focuses on 12V power systems used for off-grid recreation and is also the exclusive U.S. dealer of the Czech-made Egoé Nestbox. The system is a modular, removable, in-vehicle camper setup that allows vans and SUVs to have a bed, stove, sink and 12V refrigerator, but doesn't require a permanent build-out.

Oregon AT also offers its own line of soft goods, such as storage bags, for camper setups and stocks a variety of multiuse items such as camping supplies, gear and swag. Vehicle-specific products or parts that require customization are ordered as needed.

The business remains a lean operation. Baker and Wirth are the only full-time employees at the 1,800-square-foot shop. Two part-time employees round out the crew, mixing upfitting skills and a passion for the industry.

THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION

Having all the gear is just the start. The addition of regular educational seminars helps Oregon AT stand out in a growing market.



Baker teaches a class at the NW Overland Rally in Plain, Washington.

"We soon realized that selling products wasn't enough, and to be true stewards of this type of recreation we also needed to provide training to help customers keep themselves, their passengers, their vehicles and the environment safe," says Baker.

The company offers introductory training courses and vehicle safety recovery classes. Not only does the shop sell a full line of recovery products, but it also teaches its customers—and anyone else—how to use them.

An online statement at oregonat.com notes: "All the gear in the world means nothing if you don't have the skillset required to use it."

Baker is the trainer; he's both Wilderness First Aid and TreadLightly! certified. Oregon AT is also a co-founder of the nonprofit Public Land Stewards, Bend, Oregon (plsbend.org) that works to keep public lands accessible.

The shop's training courses seek to teach people or teams the skill sets needed to travel confidently and safely into remote areas. Baker focuses on the principles of the Off-Road Safety Academy to help people comprehend crucial techniques, ranging from knowing their vehicle's off-road capabilities all the way through advanced vehicle recovery procedures.

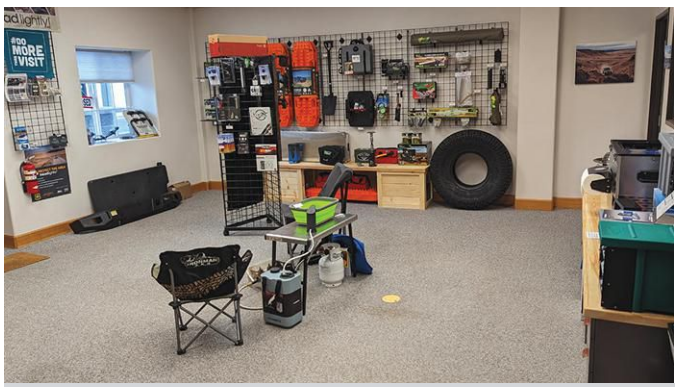
The shop's courses include an "Introduction to 4x4" class in which Baker aims to put novice participants on the path to safe and ecologically minded off-roading. The two-day, $390 course is taught as if the attendee is traveling alone without other vehicles in remote or even international locales.

Highlights include topics such as electronic communications, map use, off-road survival, tire pressures and fixes, spotting, kinetic strap use and more. Oregon AT says after completion, participants will begin to understand the limitations of their vehicles and driving skills and be able to thoughtfully choose excursions and routes to match their capabilities.

Next there's a dedicated vehicle recovery course for seasoned off-roaders. The two-day, $525 session gets into the nitty-gritty of vehicle recovery, from mobile battery jumps and extinguishing fires to a multitude of winching activities and



Oregon AT stocks a host of camping gear and basic adventure items. It also has its own line of soft bags, as seen to the right.



The shop's compact showroom is simple and clean. Displays include vehicle recovery parts, camping goods and vehicle accessories.



Oregon AT is the exclusive U.S. dealer of the Czech-made Egoé Nestbox in-vehicle camper setup.



Baker says seeing customers' faces after receiving their dream adventure rig is one of the best parts of owning a shop.

important rigging techniques. The curriculum also includes a variety of advanced tire repair procedures.

Finally, there's a Cold Weather Skills class for intermediate and advanced drivers wanting to be more prepared for wintertime adventures. The one-day, $300 class includes lessons on deep snow travel, self-recovery and gear education. It also includes tips on keeping water from freezing, specifics on snow driving and winch recovery basics, among other pertinent topics.

All of Oregon AT's courses require a street-legal vehicle with a two-speed transfer case with low-range gearing. Not all the courses, however, require the attendee to be fully outfitted—Oregon AT will provide certain gear, or the participants can bring their own.

ADVENTURE-FOCUSED, CUSTOMER-CONSCIOUS

Bend, Oregon is a hotbed for outdoor activity. From camping and paddleboarding to mountain biking and, most certainly, overlanding and off-roading, the shop's clients are ready to get out and enjoy.

"(Our customer base is) centralized around people who have a passion for outdoor recreation and who are excited to use their vehicles to support their adventures," says Baker.

Like many businesses catering to this crowd, the COVID-19 pandemic was a boon to business, as outdoor recreation was one of the few activities people could safely enjoy during the quarantine and afterward.

"We stayed modest by only operating within our means, even though the business grew quickly," Baker recalls. "This allowed us to keep our overhead low and be more agile in adapting to customer needs."

Like so many other businesses, Oregon AT wasn't immune to the pandemic's supply chain slowdowns. Lead times on their main product, AT Overland toppers, were out beyond a year, forcing Baker and Wirth to look at new ways to diversify.

A wider approach included bringing on different products and new services. For example, they purchased a Jeep Gladiator, outfitted it and rented it to those who wanted to try overlanding and dispersed camping before heavily investing in their own vehicle.

These days, though not as drastic, the shop still tries to avoid seasonal ups and downs. Baker says it's typical to see a slowdown in business between November and March as the weather cools down and fewer people are outside camping and overlanding.

No matter the season, however, Oregon AT tries to be reasonable with business and prices.

"The last thing we want is for those wanting to enjoy these types of adventures (to be stopped) because of a high price tag," Baker says. "There are many options out there, so our goal is to help customers figure out what they need, then help them navigate the options."

The shop needs to make a profit, of course, but Baker says it has options for customers who are on a budget, and always encourages them to use what they already have and only add what they need.

Baker tells the story of a customer named Lisa Kent from Fallon, Nevada. He says she contacted Oregon AT because she was looking for the experience of traveling remotely in America and didn't like the setup she already had.

"We did everything from helping her purchase a truck, outfitting it with the first AT Overland topper for the platform (Ford Ranger), custom-building the interior of the camper, and finding storage solutions and ways to make her experience better."

They later met up with Lisa in the middle of Nevada to give her a private off-roading lesson to get her comfortable with the Ranger on trails.

"She loves her setup, visits us at all our events and enjoys traveling across the country, camping in remote places," said Baker.

NOW HEAR THIS

The company doesn't go it alone on all builds, however. Oregon AT partners with local shops for suspension needs, such as Technique Vehicle Outfitters and Arc Flash LLC. So, if there's something outside of the shop's scope, it has help waiting in the wings.

With its combination of products and education, getting the word out is doubly important. Oregon AT uses Google Business, Instagram stories and local events to get the word out.

"Stories on Instagram bring in a decent amount of attention and shares," says Baker. "They help us share the day-to-day and our customers' posts. We also utilize Facebook, but more to respond to customers who reach out with questions."

The company uses a small online store



The crew gets down to business working on the shop's Ram truck.

to mostly sell its own branded products, such as a multitude of Velcro-backed soft storage bags and training programs.

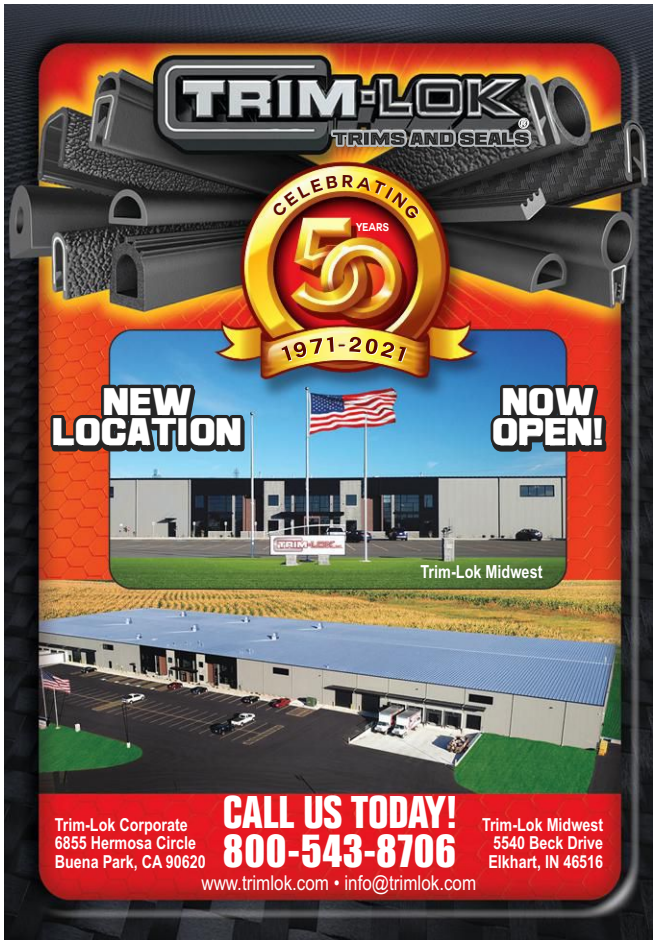
When asked about the best part of his job, Baker says, "seeing customers get so excited when we build their dream adventure rig." He notes happy clients are constantly sending him and Wirth photos of them using the vehicles on backcountry adventures.

Moving forward, Oregon AT intends to stay moderate and continue to connect with its customer base to grow the operation. It's also started to do consignments on certain adventure-based vehicles.

Meanwhile, Baker also intends to focus on achieving a proper work-life balance to keep things enjoyable. ***TS***



ANDY LILIENTHAL *is an award-winning automotive journalist who's written for a host of online and print publications. He worked as a communications manager in the automotive aftermarket for 17 years, primarily in the off-road and overland spaces. He also has a penchant for unique cars and vehicle-based adventures.*





OFF-ROAD ROUNDUP

News & announcements happening on natural terrain.



Just because the snow flies doesn't mean news and announcements affecting the off-road, 4x4 and overlanding communities go into hibernation.

Here's a roundup of recent happenings and announcements for those whose excitement begins where the asphalt ends.

EV TEAM SETS HIGH-ALTITUDE RECORD

The Gebrüder Weiss Peak Evolution Team has set a new world altitude record for electric vehicles at 6,500 meters (21,325 feet) above sea level.

The team drove up to the western ridge of Ojos del Salado on the Argentina/Chile border—the highest active volcano on earth—in "Terren," a truck powered exclusively by solar energy.

"This is a record not only for this technology, but for our years of research work and for the very future of mobility," said Patrik Koller, CEO and developer at Peak Evolution. "We hope that this success will attract more attention to alternative drives and their use in mining and other demanding transport tasks."

Logistics partner and main sponsor Gebrüder Weiss has been on board since the very beginning, co-financing the effort and ensuring the vehicle arrived safely in South America.

"As the oldest transport and logistics company, we are committed to the future of mobility," said Frank Haas, head of corporate brand strategy & communications at Gebrüder Weiss. "This success underlines our ongoing support for sustainable mobility projects and innovative technologies. We are delighted for the team and will now bring the record-breaking vehicle safely back to Switzerland."



The Gebrüder Weiss Peak Evolution Team set a new EV altitude record at 6,500 meters (21,325 feet) above sea level with its ascent of the western ridge of Ojos del Salado on the Argentina/Chile border—the highest active volcano on earth. (Photos courtesy Gebrüder Weiss/Anna Pocinska)



The undertaking began last fall when Gebrüder Weiss transported the EV from Switzerland via Rotterdam and then by sea freight to Chile. Another overland transport took the solar truck to the Atacama region.

The Peak Evolution team started at the Maricunga salt lake with exploratory tours and acclimatization on the mountain at an elevation of 11,000 feet. The extreme terrain and environmental conditions of the world's highest volcano not only put the high-tech vehicle to the test, but also put the team under physical and mental strain.

"Despite these extreme conditions, our specially developed vehicle managed to drive higher than any other e-vehicle—let alone a solar-powered one," says Koller. "We have been training for this moment for four years, so giving up was never an option."

The three adventurers reached the first milestone at the end of November, breaking the record for EVs by surpassing the 19,000-foot barrier. One week later, they reached 21,325 feet above sea level—the record height of their mission.

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YOUR COMMERCIAL-FLEET SUPPLIER

COMPANIES SUPPORT KING OF THE HAMMERS



Hitting the trails for two weeks of action in late January, the 2024 Progressive King of the Hammers Presented by Nitto and Powered by OPTIMA Batteries connected off-road fans and competitors worldwide with 10-plus days of racing events.

Many aftermarket suppliers wanted to get in on the action in the California desert, offering their products, services and support to racers and teams.

Suspension components company Eibach was named the Official Race Springs of the event, playfully tagging itself "Spring of the Hammers."

For more than 70 years, Eibach has provided high-performance suspension systems for a wide range of vehicles including cars, trucks, SUVs, UTVs, motorcycles and other motorsports applications. Products include springs, shock absorbers, sway bars and coil-overs.





"We are proud to be a part of the King of the Hammers team as the Official Race Springs of the event," said Mark Krumme, head of marketing for North America at Eibach. "Eibach has been a longstanding member of the off-road community for over three decades and the springs of choice for champions globally."

Meanwhile, Warn Industries and Factor 55 were named the Official Winch Partner and Official Winch Recovery Gear partners of the off-road racing event.

In addition to providing recovery gear and assistance at dedicated course recovery points, Warn and Factor 55 showed competitors, volunteers and recovery teams proper use of the products.

Each recovery team also received a vehicle recovery kit.

"We're thrilled to support King of the Hammers in such an impactful way this year," said Jake Petersen, vice president of marketing at Warn and Factor 55. "Competing in a series of races like the King of the Hammers makes having the best recovery gear an essential tool. We're confident that our products, combined with our knowledge of effective recovery methods, will be a valuable resource throughout the event."

Meanwhile, presenting sponsor OPTIMA Batteries, a Clarios brand, brought the green to the desert with its dedicated electric vehicle camping area and trail runs.

EV and hybrid owners were invited to the second annual OPTIMA Unplugged Powered by Clarios and Presented by DCE event as part of the festivities. Held Feb. 1, it was expected to be the largest gathering of off-road electric vehicle enthusiasts ever, according to the company.

EV and hybrid owners were invited to the second annual OPTIMA Unplugged event as part of the King of the Hammers off-road races in late January.



"This year, OPTIMA Unplugged expands to a two-day event where participants can register their EVs or HEVs to experience the most iconic trails in Johnson Valley and the all-new dedicated camping area, the OPTIMA Oasis at The Forty," the company noted.

OPTIMA planned to provide 10 Level 2 chargers and four Level 3 chargers, all powered by hydrogen supplied by industry experts at Renewable Innovations.

The entire OPTIMA Oasis was also to be powered by Renewable Innovations' zero-carbon green renewable energy via solar and hydrogen as OPTIMA and Clarios continue to push for innovation in the off-road community, according to company officials.

"The OPTIMA Oasis is the perfect alternative for EV owners looking to experience the spectacle of King of the Hammers," the company stated. ***TS***



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Join Johannes Crepon, CEO and co-founder of PDM Automotive, for a 45-minute workshop, where you will learn the essentials of crafting and executing an impactful content strategy for omnichannel success. This session is perfect for sales and marketing leaders, catalog managers and e-commerce teams.

Attendees will learn:

- Why product content is the foundation of a successful aftermarket business
- To adopt a content-centric strategy that drives customer engagement and sales
- How to seamlessly expand your market reach across multiple channels
- Craft and manage high-quality, impactful product content that stands out, whether on your website or external marketplaces
- To bridge the gap between catalog and ecommerce teams, ensuring streamlined operations for optimal results



Johannes Crepon, CEO and co-founder of PDM Automotive, is a seasoned entrepreneur in the automotive aftermarket. Before PDM Automotive, Crepon founded Velocity, a European e-commerce business that sources and sells parts for American cars. The pervasive issue with the consistency and availability of parts data inspired the idea for PDM Automotive. Crepon, alongside Philipp Crepon, founded PDM Automotive to bridge the data gap for suppliers, distributors and retailers. Crepon has been recognized in SEMA News' "35 Under 35" list, highlighting rising talent, and is a frequent speaker at industry conferences.

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Ford Super Duty Steering Kit

Synergy MFG, San Luis Obispo, California, offers a Heavy-Duty Steering Kit for 2005-up Ford Super Duty F-450/F-550 models. The tie rod and drag link bolt directly into the stock locations for an immediate upgrade in steering feel and strength. There are no wheel size requirements, and the tie rod is made from 2-inch steel tubing for maximum strength. The drag link is made from 1.5-inch steel tubing and machined to retain the stock steering stabilizer.

Tundra Spacer Kit



Timbren Industries, Whitby, Ontario, introduces its SPCRTORTNDR Spacer Kit for lifted Toyota Tundra models. Designed to make the company's TORTNDR and TORTTNDR kits work just as effectively on lifted trucks as they do on pickups with standard ride heights, each spacer kit comes with two 1-inch and two 1/2-inch spacers along with all the necessary hardware to allow customers to mix and match to achieve a desired ride height.



Trailer Hitch Covers

Vance & Hines, Santa Fe Springs, California, presents self-branded Trailer Hitch Covers. The dual-layer riveted badges are handcrafted from 304 stainless steel and offered in either a brushed metal or matte black finish. Designed for 2-inch receivers, the hitch covers require a standard hitch pin (not included).



EV Charge Cord Cover

Design Engineering Inc. (DEI), Avon Lake, Ohio, presents its new EV Charge Cord Cover. Designed to wrap around electric vehicle charge cords, the robust cover provides a durable layer of protection against weather, UV rays and everyday abrasions, while the vibrant orange color offers high visibility to minimize tripping and other safety hazards. The cover fits 3/4- to 1-inch-diameter charge cables and comes in lengths of 20 feet. A split sleeve design provides hassle-free setup and DEI Quick Fix Silicone Tape is included to seal the ends for a secure, long-lasting fit.



Off-Road LED Pod Spotlights

ORACLE Lighting, Metairie, Louisiana, presents its new off-road Vega LED Light Pod Spotlights. Available in 20-watt (Vega Series 2) and 40-watt (Vega Series 4) versions, the compact and rugged pod spotlights feature horizontally symmetrical beam patterns so they can be mounted upside down or right side up without changing the beam angle. Optional interchangeable lens covers can also be added without tools to easily change the color of the light output to yellow or amber.

New Bronco Shocks

ICON Vehicle Dynamics, Riverside, California, presents EXP Shocks for 2021-up Ford Bronco models. The EXP Series combines the performance of a fully rebuildable 2.5-inch-diameter premium shock with the convenience and cost benefits of reusing the Bronco's factory coil spring and other components. EXP bridges the gap between spacer lifts and threaded coilovers, providing suspension lift, custom-tuned performance and maximum travel, all in an economical package.





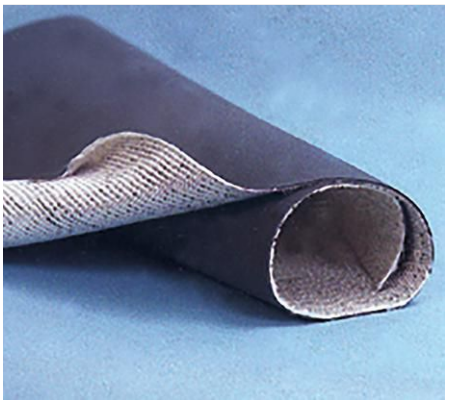
On- & Off-Road Tire

Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co., Akron, Ohio, presents the Cooper Discoverer Road+Trail AT on- and off-road tire. Featuring an aggressive tread pattern and bold sidewall, the tire is engineered to deliver a smooth, quiet ride regardless of terrain. Thick interlocking tread lugs provide confidence in wet and dry conditions, and the tire also has the three-peak mountain snowflake designation for traction and stability in winter weather conditions. It is available in 36 sizes, from 15 to 22 inches, to fit a range of SUVs and mid-size and light-duty pickups.

Outback Bumper Guard



advanced FLOW engineering (aFe POWER), Corona, California, presents its Terra Guard Front Bumper Guard for 2020-23 Subaru Outback models. Crafted from 1.5-inch tubular steel, the heavy-duty front bumper guard ensures maximum protection and off-road utility. Integrated recovery shackle mounts deliver added safety, and tabs allow mounting of up to six 6-inch-diameter lights (not included). A similar model is available with a winch mount and skid plate, and no drilling or cutting is required for installation.



Heat & Sound Insulation

Koolmat Insulation, Mooresville, North Carolina, presents its composite Heat and Sound Insulation Material. Designed to stop extreme heat and lower sound by 23 decibels by covering floors, firewalls, tunnels, kick panels and other areas of the vehicle, the thin material saves space while staying flexible, flame-proof and resistant to mildew and abrasion. Koolmat is available in bulk 20-, 30- and 60-inch widths in any length, and is also offered in pre-cut floor kits



CUV/SUV Tire

Yokohama Tire, Santa Ana, California, presents the all-weather GEOLANDAR CV 4S tire, engineered for today's most popular crossovers, smaller SUVs and minivans. Severe snow rated and initially available in 32 sizes ranging from 17 to 20 inches, the tire offers increased winter traction with an asymmetrical tread pattern that maintains dry road performance. The distinctive tread pattern and advanced construction reduce road noise, regardless of weather conditions.

Chevy Truck Gauges



Dakota Digital, Sioux Falls, South Dakota, presents its GRFX-55C-PU Digital Dash System for 1955-59 Chevrolet trucks, part of its new GRAFIX series of gauges. Featuring fully digital, TFT-type displays, the systems offer user-selectable lighting colors and graphic themes (called Schemes in the menu) including Basic, Race, Modern and Vintage. Each display can be configured for readout type and interface style, including simulated analog or bar-graph layouts in standard or metric readouts.



Hitch-Mounted Cargo Carrier

1UP USA, Dickeyville, Wisconsin, presents a 60-inch Hitch-Mounted Cargo Carrier that offers the same hitch design as its racks. The carrier mounts to a vehicle in seconds and carries up to 380 pounds. Bolt on one or two Quik Rack Add-Ons to accommodate two bikes in addition to what's hauled on the tray. Features include all-aluminum construction, and the carrier can be tilted up to 90 degrees for storage or away for rear vehicle access. The hitch assembly and mounting rail are anodized with a powder-coat finish on the tray. ***TS***

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 are appearing nationwide. Here's a sampling of what restylers may soon encounter on dealer lots.

2024 CHEVROLET COLORADO ZR2 BISON



Made in partnership with American Expedition Vehicles (AEV), the all-new 2024 Colorado ZR2 Bison includes exclusive content that may inspire aftermarket professionals.

Made in partnership with American Expedition Vehicles (AEV), the all-new 2024 Colorado ZR2 Bison is built to conquer any terrain.

Powered by a standard 2.7L Turbo High-Output powertrain and loaded with AEV off-road enhancements to enable even higher levels of performance and extreme capability, the midsize truck was put through its paces by champion off-road racer Chad Hall in competition and underwent testing on the Rubicon Trail.

Armed with the latest factory infotainment, connectivity and driver assistance systems, it's the Bison-exclusive content that may inspire aftermarket professionals.

It sports segment-exclusive Multimatic front and rear Jounce Control Dampers, plus AEV add-ons including a heavy-duty, winch-capable front bumper, rear bumper, fender flares, interior badge and 17-inch, beadlock-capable wheels with 35-inch M/T tires.

Boron steel skid plates and rocker protectors guard the underbody and power-locking front and rear differentials drive the Colorado's 38.2-degree approach angles, 26-degree departure angles, 26.9-degree breakover angles and 12.2 inches of ground clearance.

Finishing touches include a racing-inspired spare tire carrier, spray-on bedliner, "Flowtie" front badge and Bison exterior identification.

2024 TOYOTA TACOMA

The all-new Toyota Tacoma is completely redesigned and reimagined for model year 2024, ready to help drivers tackle their ambitious adventure bucket lists.

For the new generation, Tacoma engineers focused on its rich history of quality, durability and reliability, while incorporating modern tech, rugged styling and go-anywhere capability.

Built on the TNGA-F global truck platform shared with Tundra, Sequoia and Land Cruiser, the all-new Tacoma was designed and engineered specifically for the U.S. market. Constructed on a high-strength boxed, steel-ladder frame, it adds numerous features aimed at off-road enthusiasts.

One leap forward is a fully redesigned coil spring multi-link rear suspension available on most grades that enhances overall ride and handling.

The new Tacoma also diversifies its powertrain choices with two options that improve power and efficiency. The turbocharged i-FORCE 2.4L engine produces up to 278 hp and 317 pound-feet of torque. The available i-FORCE MAX hybrid, meanwhile, produces up to 326 hp and 465 pound-feet of torque, the most in the mid-size truck segment, according to the company.



The 2024 Toyota Tacoma is designed for the U.S. off-road market.

The trucks also sport upgraded styling, comfort and technological advancements.

2024 F-150 RAPTOR

The 2024 F-150 Raptor boasts new FOX Dual Live Valve shocks to provide a more confident, controlled riding experience. With position-sensitive compression control standard, new continuously variable rebound controls work to further enhance on- and off-road driving.

The shocks complement the five-link rear suspension system, launched on Raptor in 2021, improving off-road capability and delivering lateral stability and traction. The setup includes extra-long trailing arms to better maintain axle position on rough terrain, a Panhard rod and 24-inch coil springs—all optimized for stability while aggressively traversing desert terrain.

Ford designed the modular front bumper to be accessory-capable. For the new addition, available on Raptor series vehicles with 37-inch tires, engineers modified the bumper end caps to expose more front tire compared to the traditional bumper offering, adding to the aggressive styling and allowing for more capability. A light bar attachment is also available.

Updated colors and materials add off-road styling. Shelter Green, a new exterior color for 2024 unique to Raptor, blends into forested backgrounds and stands out in desert environments.

Meanwhile, other styling touches include new symmetrical hood graphics for both V-6 and V-8 models, along with "Raptor" graphics above the wheel lip molding and a body side graphic below.

A blackout tape micro-texture paired with Code Orange coloring creates an eye-catching paint scheme.



The 2024 F-150 Raptor boasts new FOX Dual Live Valve shocks to provide a more confident, controlled driving experience.





2025 RAM 1500 RAMCHARGER



The 2025 Ram 1500 Ramcharger BEV has debuted with a targeted range of up to 690 miles.

The all-new 2025 Ram 1500 Ramcharger BEV has debuted with a targeted range of up to 690 miles.

With factory specs of 663 hp and 615 pound-feet of torque, the Ramcharger features a 92kWh battery pack paired with an onboard 130kW generator, sending power to 250kW front and 238kW rear electric drive modules (EDMs). Vehicle-to-vehicle and vehicle-to-home bi-directional charging affords the pickup the flexibility to charge another Stellantis battery-electric vehicle or provide power back to the grid.

It uses the all-new STLA Frame platform designed for full-size electric vehicles featuring a body-on-frame design. The all-new, high-strength steel frame is comprised of advanced materials to be lightweight yet stiff and durable. The STLA Frame is wider in the middle to efficiently incorporate the battery pack while still using protection afforded by the frame rails.

Ram says drivers will enjoy smooth ride and handling, thanks in part to a multi-link independent rear suspension with standard, segment-exclusive, active-level four-corner air suspension. The adjustable air suspension enables five different modes: Entry/Exit, Aero, Normal, Off-Road 1 and Off-Road 2.

Highlights include new exterior design cues, power tailgate, quality interior materials, leading-edge technology features including a full-color HUD and a digital key.

2024 HONDA RIDGELINE TRAILSPORT

The first-ever 2024 Honda Ridgeline TrailSport is more off-road capable, engineered to get weekend adventurers even farther off the beaten path with new features, including an off-road-tuned suspension, all-terrain tires and steel underbody protection.

The new level joins the rest of the Ridgeline's all-wheel drive trims—Sport, RTL and the top-of-the-range Black Edition. Rugged styling starts with "RIDGELINE" stamped across the tailgate, while the grille gets a sporty new mesh design.

Inside, a new 7-inch digital instrument panel is now standard, featuring an all-digital tachometer on the left and a physical speedometer on the right. The display also includes user-selectable functions, such as Honda Sensing settings, vehicle information and more.

TrailSport's exclusive suspension tuning features unique spring rates, damper valve tuning and stabilizer bars to increase articulation and improve off-road ride quality. Honda's i-VTM4 torque-vectoring all-wheel drive system enhances traction management and control in all conditions, automatically sending up to 70% of the engine's torque to the rear wheels and continuously apportioning 100% of it between the rear wheels based on driving conditions.

Exclusive to TrailSport models is a newly available Diffused Sky Blue paint color, which debuted on the all-new 2024 Pilot TrailSport.



The first-ever 2024 Honda Ridgeline TrailSport is more off-road capable, engineered to get weekend adventurers even farther off the beaten path.

ALFA ROMEO 33 STRADALE

Alfa Romeo announces the rebirth of the *fuoriserie* (custom-built) 33 Stradale, a genuine manifesto of the Italian brand's style and driving experience.

With only 33 exclusive units planned, aligned with a unique artisan process, the new two-seater coupe provides an exciting driving experience and the immortal charm of an icon, the comapny states.

Produced by the Alfa Romeo Centro Stile, the new 33 Stradale is inspired by the historic 1967 model, with enrichments to the sculptural beauty and design elements. The exterior features balanced proportions, volumes and surface properties, with a forward design offering a powerful and muscular stance.

The profile is dynamic and slender, with butterfly doors that feature two large air inlets. Highlighted features include an iconic shield and complex elliptical-base lighting.

Two trim levels are available: Tributo and Alfa Corse, and the interior is an example of minimalistic design aimed at the greatest possible driving engagement without distracting the driver. The limited number of controls for common systems can be found on the center console.



Alfa Romeo announces the rebirth of the 33 Stradale with a limited run of 33 units.

The new Alfa Romeo can be fitted with a V-6 twin-turbo engine delivering more than 620 hp. Routed through an 8-speed DCT gearbox to the rear wheels, an electronic limited-slip differential assists in putting force to ground.

The optional BEV configuration delivers more than 750 hp. **TS**

BEING ***COLD*** SUCKS!
KEEP YOUR CUSTOMER WARM.





There's no one-size-fits-all answer when it comes to choosing the most compatible stereo for a particular vehicle. (Photo by Samuele Errico Piccarini on Unsplash)

SAME OLD SONG & DANCE?

Selecting the right-size stereo for your installations.

What's the first thing people do when they get into their cars? In most cases, they pick out the perfect song to listen to while they drive and then crank up the volume.

The right stereo can make all the difference, especially when someone is gearing up for a long road trip or taking a fun cruise in their classic vehicle.

As a stereo installation professional, you will often be asked what size stereo your customers should choose. To answer correctly, you'll want to learn everything you can about in-dash and double-DIN stereos.

The following pointers can help you guide them through the process and ensure they make the right choice.

UNDERSTANDING THE BASICS

Let's start with some basic information about these two options—in-dash and double-DIN stereos.

An in-dash stereo, as the name suggests, is a stereo that is built into the dashboard of a vehicle. In-dash systems may have a CD player, DVD player, AM/FM radio, satellite radio, Bluetooth connectivity, GPS navigation and/or a variety of other features.

Meanwhile, double-DIN stereos are a type of in-dash stereo, but they're a bit more complex. DIN, by the way, is an acronym for Deutsches Institiut für Normung, which is a German standards organization.

"Double-DIN" (sometimes referred to as "2 DIN") is a term that specifies a measurement. It's the standardized size for a car stereo and measures 4 inches high and 7 inches wide.

By comparison, single-DIN stereos have a 2-inch opening and are also 7 inches wide.

SHOP-LEVEL CONSIDERATIONS

There's no one-size-fits-all answer when it comes to making the most compatible choice for a particular vehicle. Everyone has different needs and preferences and there are a lot of awesome car stereos on the market.

Here are some factors to keep in mind on a shop level when helping a customer make a stereo selection.



Installation professionals will want to learn all they can about in-dash and double-DIN stereos. (Photo by Ainur Iman on Unsplash)



The right stereo can make all the difference, especially when gearing up for a long road trip or taking a fun cruise in a classic vehicle. (Photos courtesy Custom Autosound Mfg.)

Are they on a budget?
Because they offer fewer features, in-dash, single-DIN stereos are typically more affordable than double-DIN options. If a customer has concerns about the price of their stereo, they might prefer a single-DIN option.

Do they want a touch screen?
Touch screens are convenient and found in many modern vehicles. They also integrate better with other features like back-up cameras.

Technically, your customers can have a touch screen in their vehicle with any type of stereo. However, touch screens are most commonly associated with double-DIN systems.

Because of their larger size, they simply work better—generally speaking—with touch screen technology.

Are they a minimalist?
If the customer considers themselves a minimalist, or prefers a sleek interior, they might prefer an in-dash, single-DIN stereo instead of a double-DIN option.

Single-DIN setups have more minimalist interfaces and can be easier to control, especially for those who get overwhelmed easily and don't want to deal with as many extra (and potentially unnecessary) features.

Is their vehicle a classic?
The type of car will, understandably, influence the type of stereo it can accommodate.

For example, classic vehicles generally need in-dash, single-DIN stereos. However, newer vehicles often come with, or are better equipped to work with, double-DIN systems because they have more advanced features.

Is device compatibility important?
If the customer cares about device compatibility and wants all their devices to integrate well with their vehicle's stereo, a double-DIN stereo choice will likely be a better fit.

Many of these stereos can work with cameras, various phone apps, GPS navigation tools, etc.

Is sound quality important?
Both single- and double-DIN stereos can produce high-quality sound, so you can't go wrong here. The more significant contributor to a customer's sound quality is the brand and model of head unit, also known as a receiver, that provides the main controls for the stereo.

You can introduce customers to a few different head units to help them decide which one works with their preferences, budget, etc.

MAXIMIZING PROFIT MARGINS

If you're new to installing car stereos, you might have concerns about your profit margins and how to maximize them. Here are some tips that can help increase profitability:

Reduce SKUs
Some installers are tempted to keep a wide range of stereo options in stock—they go broad and shallow instead of narrow and deep.

It's less expensive to keep multiple units of a couple different stereos in stock. This approach can help you expand your profit margins.

Charge a shop fee
A shop fee is a flat fee added to the cost of your services. It doesn't have to be very high to be effective.

For example, if an installer charged all customers an hourly $7.49 shop fee and worked four hours per day, they'd profit roughly $9,000 a year just from the fees (assuming they worked 300 days per year).

Charge for materials
Make sure you're charging for materials. Necessities like speaker wire can be quite pricey, and you shouldn't have to pay for them out of your own pocket.

Change rates for luxury vehicles
If you're working on a luxury vehicle, a classic car or another expensive model, make sure your rate reflects the added labor you'll have to put in throughout the installation process (and the increased liability associated with working on more valuable vehicles).

Look for opportunities to upsell
Whether you like it or not, you are a salesperson in addition to a stereo installer. That means you should look for opportunities to upsell when possible.

Maybe offer to add speaker adapter rings for an extra fee, for example, allowing you to profit more from a sale than you would have otherwise.



An in-dash stereo, as the name suggests, is a stereo that is built into the dashboard of a vehicle. (Photo by Frank Albrecht on Unsplash)

FINAL THOUGHTS

As a professional installer, you will receive a lot of questions about what kind of stereo your customers should choose. It's easy to get overwhelmed initially, no matter how knowledgeable you are.

Keep these guidelines in mind—especially those related to increasing your profit margins—to make your installation business more successful.

This article was provided by the professionals at worldwidestereo.com. Learn more at worldwidestereo.com/blogs/guides/best-car-stereos. **TS**

PERFORMANCE

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Remember that not all installations are the same. (Photo courtesy Pypes Performance Exhaust)

PIPE DREAMS

With aftermarket exhaust systems, customers can have it all.

By Jef White



Supplier relationships are an important factor to success. (Photo courtesy Pypes Performance Exhaust)

Aftermarket exhausts create beautiful noise for enthusiasts who love to hear the results of power adders and other upgrades. Providing a signature sound that sets any vehicle apart, these systems let the world know what's coming.

They can also be music to the ears of speed shops, allowing the creation of attractive performance packages and bringing smiles to the faces of satisfied clients.

Although an aftermarket staple, there's still a lot to learn about these products, as today's exhaust systems look to find their place among the complexities of modern vehicles while playing by ever-more-stringent emissions rules.

Shops need strong product knowledge, creativity and willing partners to make it all work. Thankfully, suppliers are ready to help meet your customers' pipe dreams with hot products, sales tips and questions to ask to determine the right system for any project.

STARTING THE PROCESS

Shops new to exhaust system sales may feel pressured to present the perfect solution to every application in the blink of an eye.

At times, however, the transaction can take much longer.

"A common mistake made by shops when selling or installing performance exhaust systems is not spending enough time during the sales process to understand what the customer's needs and wants are," says Tim Sayers, muffler development manager for Borla Performance Industries Inc.

Knowing your products is also important, as not all aftermarket exhaust systems are created equal, says Jesse Kramer, vice president of marketing for AWE.

"Consumers fall in love with wide-open throttle (WOT) experiences, yet 90% of their (time in the vehicle) is spent cruising or driving around town—so customers can become frustrated within days after the initial joy ride if they didn't choose wisely," he explains. "Make sure your customers are buying a system that is engineered with 180 Technology or a comparable drone-canceling technology, T304L stainless steel, and, ideally, includes support and backing from the manufacturer."

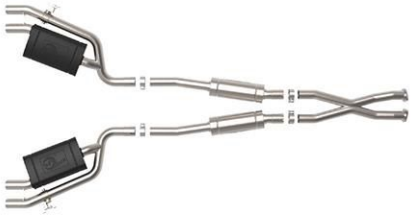
The proper system may not always make the largest splash, advises Rich Waitas, senior manager/spokesman for MagnaFlow.

"Bigger is not always better, just like louder doesn't always mean more performance," he says.

Sara Ford, marketing manager for SpeedFX, notes that shops sometimes overlook the importance of providing clear information about the installation process.



Ask customers what they're looking for in an aftermarket exhaust system. (Photo courtesy aFe POWER)



Show up where local enthusiasts gather to spread the word about your products and services. (Photo courtesy aFe POWER)



PIPE DREAMS

EXHAUST PRODUCTS

■ **HOT PRODUCTS:**
Direct-Fit Aero Exhaust Products
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Applications for late-model muscle cars and light-duty gas trucks; offer fit, form and function; turnkey solutions out of the box; specifically engineered and designed for each application.

Aero Exhaust
Alex Ortega
Director of Business Development

■ **HOT PRODUCTS:**
Gemini XV Series Exhaust Systems
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Dual-mode or active exhaust valve that offers two loudness modes by passing through or bypassing the muffler; made in the USA; mandrel bent using 304 stainless steel; 12V electronically controlled exhaust motor, valve and remote key fob; various tip options.

aFe POWER
John Gray
VP Exhaust & Exterior Products

■ **HOT PRODUCTS:**
Cat-Back Exhausts Featuring 180 Technology
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
"Drone-killing" technology delivers all the power of a straight pipe kit with literally none of the headaches; available for popular models including the Ford Mustang S650, Jeep 392 and Honda Civic Type R FL5; stainless steel construction; fitment guarantee.

AWE
Jesse Kramer
Vice President of Marketing

■ **HOT PRODUCT:**
Active Performance Exhaust System for Electric Vehicles
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Provides acoustical input to the driving experience that is missing in battery electric vehicles; bolt-on, plug-and-play installation.

Borla Performance Industries Inc.
Tim Sayers
Muffler Development Manager

■ **HOT PRODUCT:**
MagnaFlow Overland Series Performance Exhaust
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
High-clearance design; relocated tailpipes with turndown exits; smaller muffler bodies and higher mounting locations; stainless steel construction; tuned to maintain a performance note without drone; adjustable sound levels; dyno-proven performance.

MagnaFlow
Rich Waitas
Senior Manager/Spokesman

■ **HOT PRODUCTS:**
Late-Model Mustang & 1960s-70s Muscle Car Systems
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Complete solutions from manifold downpipes to OE-appearing tips; mandrel bent from either 409 or 304 stainless steel material; come complete with all clamps and hangers.

Pypes Performance Exhaust
Dave Gerard
President

■ **HOT PRODUCTS:**
Maxflow Xtreme Cat-Back Exhaust Systems
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Constructed with T-304 austenitic stainless steel and 300 series stainless steel weld filler; mandrel-bent angles facilitate maximum airflow, delivering optimal sound and performance; TIG-welded chambered muffler produces a robust, aggressive tone.

SpeedFX
Sara Ford
Marketing Manager



Spread the word regarding successful projects via social media to encourage others to check out your exhaust options. (Photos courtesy Aero Exhaust)

"Failing to communicate the complexity of installation or potential modifications required can lead to customer frustration and additional costs," she warns. "To avoid these mistakes, it's crucial for shops to engage in thorough consultations with customers, asking relevant questions about their preferences, vehicle use and budget. Clear communication ensures that customers make informed decisions, leading to a positive experience and satisfaction with their performance exhaust system purchase and installation."

It's important to remember that not all installation processes are the same, says Dave Gerard, president of Pypes Performance Exhaust.

"A lot of performance exhaust systems like our Early Muscle Car kits require installation from back to front, which bucks the trend when you are bending a system on the fly," he says. "We have fixed locations and limited rotation for the tailpipes, so we build the adjustment into the X- or H-pipe in front of the mufflers."

Aftermarket exhaust systems have sometimes been thought of as triple threats, delivering performance, sound and appearance upgrades. That's not necessarily the case, however, for today's highly regulated diesel trucks.

"Most customers don't realize newer diesel truck exhaust systems will not make the truck louder or more aggressive or add horsepower/torque gains," says John Gray, VP exhaust & exterior products, aFe POWER. "Most of the (truck's) sound and performance are limited by the emissions control devices that are not legal to remove or tamper with. Adding a DPF-back system with a custom tip will give the truck a more aggressive, custom look, but it will not make a noticeable sound difference or provide performance gains."

Alex Ortega, director of business development for Aero Exhaust, encourages shops to tackle requested installations, even from customers who buy their products elsewhere.

"Most aftermarket cat-back systems are covered by a warranty that protects the customer's investment against workmanship defects or early deterioration," he says. "Letting the business walk away because the customer did not purchase the product from you is a mistake. Over the past decade, most shop owners have pivoted into other automotive segments. If you believe you have the luxury to refuse the business, your competition will tackle the job."



Look at exhaust as both a standalone sale and an add-on offering to other performance upgrades. (Photo courtesy Borla Performance Industries Inc.)

WE HAVE QUESTIONS

Suppliers agree that asking the right questions will lead to finding the proper system for each application and make customers happy. A roundup of handy questions includes:

- What is your budget?
- How do you plan to use the vehicle—street, race, towing, combination?
- Do you want a custom look, sound, horsepower/torque gains, or a combination of all the above?
- Do you want adjustable sound on the fly?
- What type of driving do you do the most—short trips, long trips, mixed distances?
- What sound level are you looking for—slightly over stock (mild), middle of the sound spectrum (medium), or the loud end of the sound spectrum (aggressive)?
- Do you care about drone?
- Have you ever had a performance exhaust that sounds great until you have to drive it long distances and then suffer from headaches and ear fatigue?
- What other performance modifications have you done to the vehicle—cold air intake, high-flow catalytic converters (emission-legal only), engine modifications, a chip or tune (emissions-legal only)?
- What are your future performance plans?
- What is your anticipated horsepower level?
- Does the vehicle have valves in the exhaust system and, if so, do you want to have valves in the new system?
- How many times do you want to replace this exhaust?

SOUNDS GOOD

Successful shops view exhaust sales as the start of a long-term relationship instead of a one-and-done transaction, says Sayers from Borla.



There are even systems available that produce an exhaust sound for electric vehicles. (Photo courtesy Borla Performance Industries Inc.)

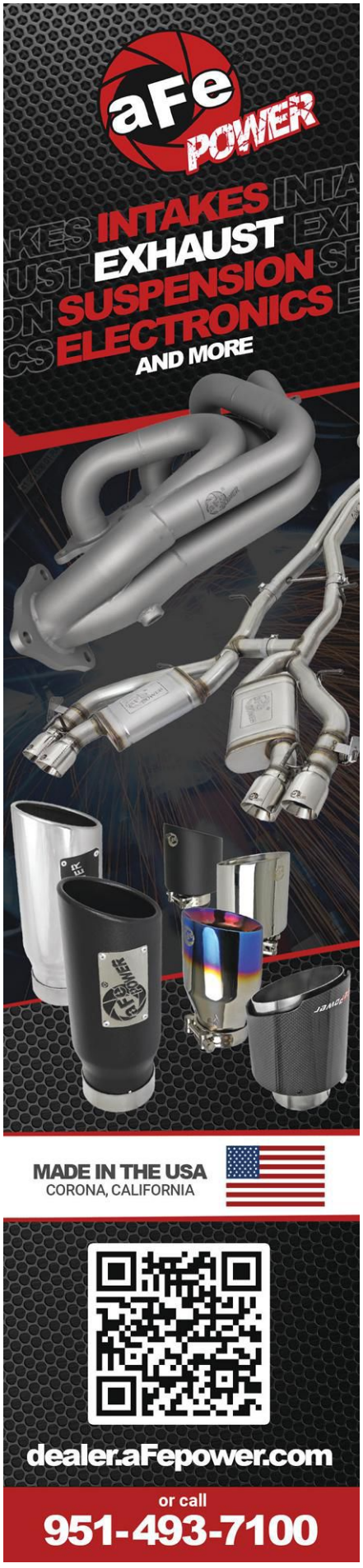
"Look at exhaust as both a standalone sale and as a related sale. If your customer is currently not in your shop to purchase a performance exhaust system, does their vehicle already have, or are they in the process of purchasing, any of these performance parts—wheels/tires, cold air intake, engine modifications, a chip or tune (emissions-legal only), performance suspension components, etc.?" he asks. "If so, a performance exhaust system could be either their next purchase or become a related sale to what they came into the shop for originally."

Knowing your customers and their desires is key, says Gray from aFe, which can mean meeting them in their world.

"We recommend supporting your local car clubs and attending related events," he says. "Shops that cater to specific groups and are familiar with the products they are selling have a better chance of keeping customers happy and acquiring new customers."

A lot goes back to that list of questions, notes Waitas from MagnaFlow.

"Dig deeper than just how a customer wants it to sound and see how they intend



PIPE DREAMS

EXCLUSIVE RADFORD TRACK CAR BUILDS ON PIKES PEAK SUCCESS





Radford Motors introduces the company's new Type 62-2 Track Car Edition series.

Following last summer's Exhibition Class win at Pikes Peak with driver Tanner Foust posting a record-breaking time of 9:37.326, Radford Motors is introducing the company's new Type 62-2 Track Car Edition series.

With a limited production run of only 12, the new speed demon represents a custom coachbuilt racer engineered for track day thrills, the company notes. With commissions from Radford Motors starting at $1 million, each 710-hp bespoke Type 62-2 Track Car is a race-ready work of art.

"Our Pikes Peak-winning car this year was the first example of our new Type 62-2 Track Edition car—a single-seat weapon born to tame the mountain," says Jenson Button, F1 champion and Radford Motors co-founder. "The Pikes Peak car received an additional cooling package to combat the overheating risks at altitude, as well as F1-engineered aero to keep the car planted. Tiptronic controls at the steering wheel and an increased turning circle to tackle the bends and curves of Pikes Peak all combined to not only allow us a class win, but to set a new class record. Quite the debut."

Each car presents clients the opportunity to work with the company's team that includes automotive and motorsports luminaries such as Button, Ant Anstead and Roger Behle. The vehicles can be designed and targeted for a specific race such as Pikes Peak or The Hillclimb at Goodwood's Festival of Speed, if desired.

"Under the skin of each Radford Motors Type 62-2 Track Edition is a highly tuned supercar that leans into our F1 partners and engineers as well as Colin Chapman's ethos of simplifying everything and adding lightness," Anstead notes. "Our cars are some of the lightest supercars on the planet and offer an exhilarating driving experience that we believe has been lost in recent years. As increasingly complex features seem to be added more and more by many car manufacturers, Radford Motors works to actively remove them."

The model boasts an array of enhanced engineering and chassis upgrades that depart from the road car version, encompassing a broader body constructed with a full carbon composite monocoque, an updated underbody design, revamped subframes, a fresh suspension system and a newly integrated rear airfoil.

Each Track Edition car can produce up to 710 hp, with a 0-60-mph time under 2.2 seconds and a top speed of 160 mph. Both solo and twin seats are available in both lefthand and righthand drive versions.

The package includes a personalized Sparco racing ensemble and an intimate driver handover experience led by Button.

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A knowledgeable, skilled sales team enhances the overall customer experience. (Photo courtesy SpeedFX)

to use it," he says. "Are they looking for the racier sound at any expense or the right sound for the right situation? Is it a daily driver? Do they take it on long highway trips? Find out the total usage to make sure the customer doesn't take home a modification that will result in long-term buyer's remorse."

Through it all, Kramer says it takes work to become known as the local go-to exhaust expert.

"AWE works with quite a few dealers that may have had a successful presence in lighting, for instance, but the true growth happens when content starts to be developed by the shop to position itself as a resource for exhaust purchases," he says. "Blogs, videos, installations, etc., are all parts of that puzzle."

Some steps that help with becoming that trusted resource, he adds, include: installing exhaust systems on shop and/or employee vehicles; aligning with brands that have quality data and strong distribution and can add you to a dealer map; choosing products with easily communicated advantages such as made in the USA; and building partnerships.

Once successful, Ortega from Aero Exhaust encourages shops



Ask about future plans for the exhaust path, and other power upgrades. (Photo courtesy AWE)

to spread the word about performance upgrades.

"Let your work speak for itself via the major social media channels. If you own a shop, you have the opportunity to capture and share the before-and-after magic (sound difference) with future customers via social media," he says. "Ultimately, you are casting a net that will only result in increased sales or, at the very least, build your business name. We live in the age of information."

A thorough understanding of the products creates a smooth process, says Ford from SpeedFX.

"Ensure that your sales staff has comprehensive knowledge about the different performance exhaust systems your shop offers. They should be familiar with the specifications, materials used and the benefits associated with each system. This includes understanding the various options of systems on the market and the resources available—including sound bites and videos to show customers," she says. "Train your staff to anticipate and address common concerns or questions that customers might have about performance exhaust systems. A knowledgeable and skilled sales team enhances the overall customer experience, fostering satisfaction and loyalty."



Align with exhaust brands that have quality data and strong distribution. (Photo courtesy AWE)

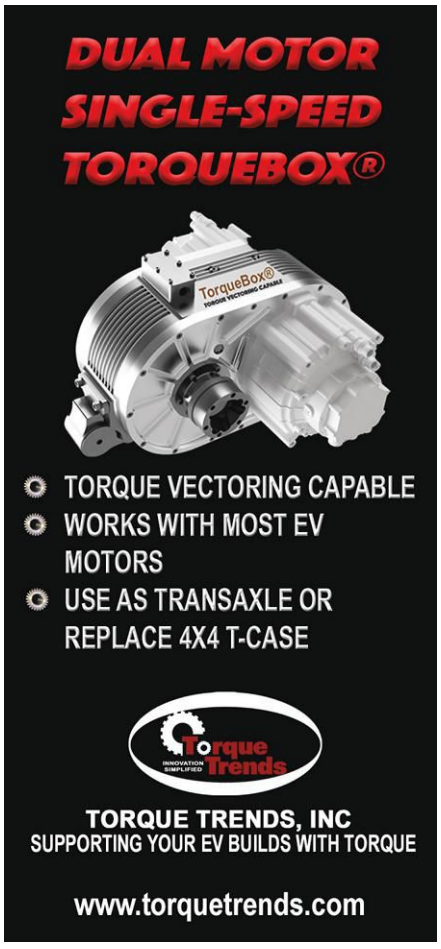
Finally, supplier relationships are an important factor to success as well, says Gerard from Pypes.

"You can sell it if you believe in the brand, so look for brands that support you—support you not only with discounts, but with tech support and inventory readiness and take pride in their products. Develop those relationships and sales will follow." ***TS***



Bigger is not always better, just like louder doesn't always mean more performance. (Photos courtesy MagnaFlow)





FUELING THE Passion

Work with customers to make fuel pump selection easy. **By Jef White**

Performance engines of all shapes and sizes require the proper fuel pump to keep things flowing smoothly. Today's offerings can handle everything from routine street machines to high-horsepower numbers that would have been thought of as unachievable just a few years ago.

Shops in the know recognize the pump's contributions to total fuel system success and overall performance and reliability.

If you have customers coming in with a "bigger is better" attitude, take the time to find out their long-term plans for each project to determine the just-right fit for their application. Suppliers pitch in with their latest products and tips on how to successfully fuel the passion of clients thirsty for more.

KNOW THE FLOW

Customers love big power and big numbers, which sometimes leads them to request bigger fuel pumps and systems than their projects require.

"A very simple mistake we see is a pump with a higher flow rate than needed. Though our 290-gph system is extremely quiet, the lower-flowing systems will be even quieter," says Josh Thornton, research and development engineer for FASS Diesel Fuel Systems. "If a truck is fairly stock with just a simple tune, then there is no need to utilize a FASS (unit) that would generally be for trucks with 1,000-plus hp, as the customer can notice additional sound output."

Suppliers often suggest customers and shops take the entire fuel system into account when planning a build.

"Having all the correct parts in the system working together is key. Customers might try to save by using parts they have lying around or trying to use a cheaper part and end up costing themselves more money and frustration later," says Phillip VanBuskirk, national sales manager for Aeromotive.

Educating the client on why it's



Recommend a fuel pump that will support the customer's total power package. (Photo courtesy DeatschWerks)



Vehicle use, fuel type and power goals all come into play when choosing a fuel pump. (Photo courtesy Aeromotive)

important to use the correct parts the first time creates a successful project and helps build trust.

"Having all the parts (for a complete system) will save you time installing the system and prevent delays while waiting on delivery," VanBuskirk says. "The pump is the heart of the system and shops can use the Aeromotive Power Planner to help them build out the remaining parts."

Brandon McDaniel, senior technical product specialist for DeatschWerks, recommends paying particular attention to total fuel system pressure.

"Pump flow decreases as pressure increases," he explains. "If you are running 30 psi of boost on top of a 58-psi base system, you have a total system pressure of 88 psi. Your pump might flow enough at 58 psi but fall short at 88 psi for your power needs."

THE APPLICATION IN QUESTION

The only way to really know what a project requires is to ask a lot of questions.

"When helping a customer with their fuel system build, fully understanding the customer's goals is key," says VanBuskirk. "Vehicle use, fuel type and power goals all play into what the best fuel pump choice will be."

Suppliers are happy to offer some of the most effective questions to get the sales process rolling:

Q *How much power are you trying to make? What type of fuel are you going to use? What base and boost pressures are you going to run?*

"If a customer is purchasing injectors or other fuel system components, recommend a fuel pump that will help support those purchases," says McDaniel.

FUEL PUMP PRODUCTS

HOT PRODUCT:
Aeromotive Regulator Fuel Filter Combo
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Combines our time-tested A1000 regulator and filter to simplify plumbing while providing steady fuel pressure and high flow capabilities that will support high horsepower that an OEM Corvette filter can't handle; works with 12305 or 12701 filter brackets.

Aeromotive
Phillip VanBuskirk
National Sales Manager

HOT PRODUCT:
DW810 Brushless
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
High-flowing in-tank brushless fuel pump; brushless for maximum fuel compatibility and reliability; small form factor makes installations easier.

DeatschWerks
Brandon McDaniel
Senior Technical Product Specialist

HOT PRODUCT:
FASS Titanium Signature Series
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Capable of flow rates of 100-290 gallons per hour; lift pump system offers improved filtration, longevity and quietness; Extreme Water Separator removes more than 99% of emulsified and free water and filters down to 2 microns absolute.

FASS Diesel Fuel Systems
Josh Thornton
Research & Development Engineer



FUELING THE Passion

GULF OFFICIAL APPAREL HEADED TO THE US



It's not your average gas station attendant's uniform.

Executives with GrandPrix Originals USA have signed a licensing agreement with Gulf Oil Limited Partnership that brings a line of official Gulf-branded apparel to the United States.

The gear debuted last fall during the international Rennsport Reunion 7 Porsche event, according to an announcement, with a strong response from motorsports enthusiasts and Gulf racing fans.

"From Gulf Oil's first Le Mans victory 55 years ago with the Ford GT to the mighty Porsche 917s that kept the livery in the winner's circle, the light blue and orange have become beloved worldwide," says Jonathan Sieger, CEO of GrandPrix Originals. "Previously, Americans could only purchase those handcrafted exclusive items in Europe, like at Le Mans Classic. We are excited that this new agreement allows us to bring this heritage Gulf line to the U.S."

Through the agreement, these products will be offered in both men's and women's sizes:

- Lambskin, leather, cotton & lightweight jackets
- Polos & T-shirts
- Shoes
- Hats
- Leather & canvas bags/luggage

Over the years, the Gulf Racing livery has appeared in sports car racing, Formula 1 and other motorsports. It has adorned factory entries from Porsche, Ford, Aston Martin and McClaren, according to the company, and privateers and enthusiasts have often added the blue and orange scheme to their vehicles.



"Steve McQueen's character, Michael Delaney, and the unmistakable blue and orange Gulf logo on his driver's suit and Gulf livery on the infamous 917 in the 1971 film 'Le Mans' are some of the most memorable looks in motorsports," says Jeany Zhao, co-owner and CFO at GPO. "Our Michael Delaney series in the Gulf Collection celebrates that era of racing. We are immensely proud and excited about our new relationship with Gulf Oil LP and look forward to what we can bring to American racing and fashion enthusiasts."

GrandPrix Originals USA has signed a licensing agreement with Gulf Oil Limited Partnership that brings a line of official racing apparel to the United States.

Q *What is the primary use of your vehicle and what are your plans for it?*

"If the truck is stock and the customer is just looking to improve long-term reliability, then the (fuel system) will be sized for the appropriate lower horsepower range," says Thornton. "If the truck is a toy and the customer is looking to increase the horsepower substantially, then we will recommend a higher flow rate to ensure adequate fuel delivery."

MAXIMIZING SALES

When talking about the goals drivers have for their projects, it makes sense to take a comprehensive approach.

"Laying out the whole system for the customer not only helps get the best combination, but also leads to related sales—everything from the main components, pump, regulator and filter to the things often overlooked like filter mounts, fittings, hose and wiring," says VanBuskirk from Aeromotive.

One way to increase sales is by focusing on benefits that go beyond horsepower numbers.

"A FASS Titanium Signature Series is not just a fuel pump but rather a complete fuel system that improves filtration over OEM substantially and can triple the life of fuel injection system components," says Thornton. "For customers looking to improve reliability, this is the absolute first modification that should be added to their diesel."

Don't forget to check with your suppliers for assistance and expert guidance, says McDaniel from DeatschWerks, and plan according to your numbers.

"Utilize your dealer network and internal sales history to stock high-volume products for quicker sales," he says. ***TS***





Performance engines of all shapes and sizes require the proper fuel pump to keep things flowing smoothly. (Photos courtesy FASS Diesel Fuel Systems)

DODGE CONTINUES 'LAST CALL' WITH SPECIAL EDITION DURANGO



The 2024 Dodge Durango SRT 392 AlcHEMI is the first in a series of "Last Call" models commemorating the final calendar year of the V-8 Hemi SUV.

Dodge is kicking off a yearlong celebration of the brand's high-performance SUV with the introduction of the 2024 Dodge Durango SRT 392 AlcHEMI, the first in a series of "Last Call" models commemorating the final calendar year of V-8 Hemi engine production for the Durango.

Production of all V-8 Hemi-powered Durangos, including the 710-hp Dodge Durango SRT Hellcat and 5.7L Hemi-powered models, will wrap up at the end of 2024, officials note in a press release.

"Just as we did with the Dodge Charger and Challenger, it's time to celebrate the V-8 Hemi engine that has powered Dodge domination of the performance SUV segment," said Tim Kuniskis, Dodge brand chief executive officer – Stellantis. "Special-edition Last Call models of the Durango will roll out during 2024 as we honor the most powerful SUV ever."

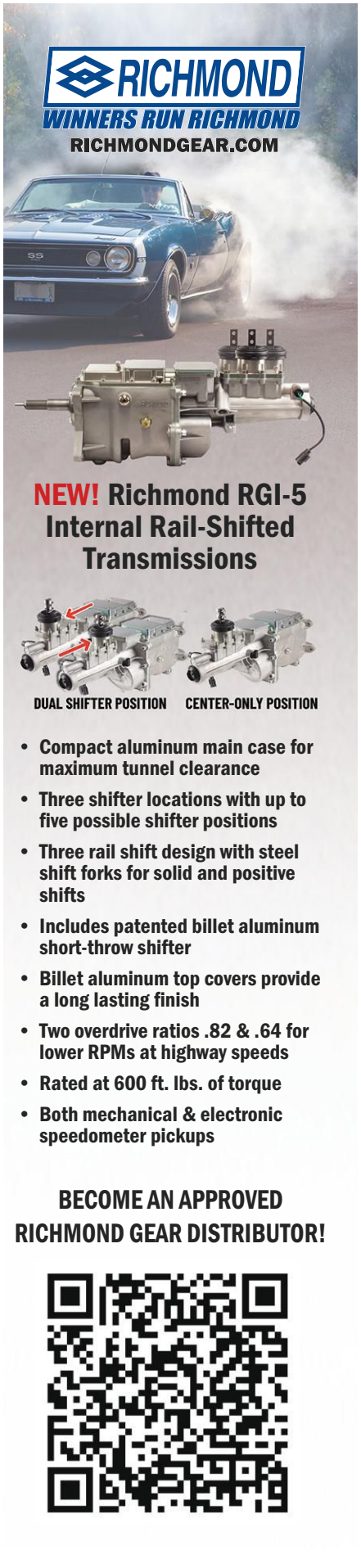
The Dodge Durango SRT 392 AlcHEMI's transformation from a Durango SRT 392 premium model was achieved through an abundant sprinkling, both inside and out, of unique custom content.

Production of the all-wheel drive SUV will be limited to a run of up to 1,000 units, with a planned 250 each of four available exterior colors: Diamond Black, Destroyer Gray, Vapor Gray and White Knuckle.

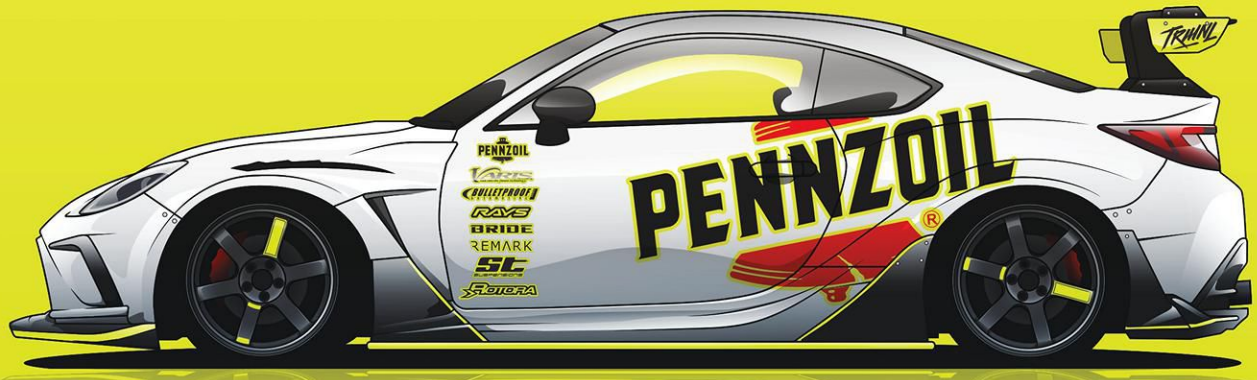
Highlights include:

- 20-by-10-inch Satin Black forged SRT wheels
- Yellow SRT Brembo brakes
- Satin Black "392" vinyl fender decals with yellow accents
- Honeycomb-textured dual exterior stripes with yellow-accent borders
- Black exhaust tips
- Midnight Metallic grille & liftgate badges
- Unique SRT interior accented with yellow & silver stitching
- SRT "392" logo embroidered on seatbacks; seats embellished with yellow & silver stitch
- Leather & suede steering wheel featuring white LED SRT logo
- Forged carbon-fiber interior accents

Details on additional 2025 model-year Dodge Durango "Last Call" special-edition models, including vehicles based on the Durango SRT Hellcat, will be shared throughout the year,



Q&A AUTOMOTIVE CREATOR JONNY GRUNWALD



A passion for rotary engines started an influencer career. ///// **Photos courtesy Pennzoil**

Automotive creator Jonny Grunwald is driven by passion—one that began during childhood and has taken him on an automotive journey. That passion is contagious, as the influencer has captured the hearts and minds of car enthusiasts worldwide.

With a thriving presence on social media and a growing portfolio of projects, Grunwald continues to establish himself as a big voice in car culture. Whether he's debuting a unique car build, collaborating with fellow ambassadors or developing new products for enthusiasts, he seems determined to push the boundaries of automotive creativity.

One of the companies he works with, Pennzoil, sat down with Grunwald to discuss his career path and current projects, and to get a glimpse into what lies ahead in 2024.

WHERE DID YOUR OWN JOURNEY IN THE AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY BEGIN?

JONNY GRUNWALD: Shortly after graduating high school and working summer jobs, I purchased my original FD RX7, which I now use for Time Attacks across the country. I later went to work at AQ Motorsports, one of the most popular tuning shops and Time Attack race teams in the area, and Bulletproof Automotive while I was in college.

At Bulletproof, I specialized in project management of high-end vehicle projects and importing some of the most coveted Japanese brands in the world.

Looking back, I never could have dreamed of having my own tuning shop or building countless "viral" cars, let alone rubbing shoulders with so many icons of the trade at events like the SEMA Show and Tokyo Auto Salon less than a decade later.

WHO WERE SOME EARLY INFLUENCES THAT PLAYED A SIGNIFICANT ROLE IN SHAPING YOUR CAREER?

JG: My mother, because she was the one who taught me how to drive a stick shift and gave me the strength to follow my passion.

I've always loved imported cars. Growing up overseas, I spent a lot of time in various karting series in Shanghai, China, so naturally I fell in love with motorsports. Attending the Redline Time Attack events in Southern California in 2005 was another key factor in solidifying my passion for motorsports.

Grunwald's partnership with Pennzoil offered the opportunity to connect with like-minded individuals who share a passion for car culture.

During childhood, I fell in love with the cult classic Initial D anime series and Japanese car culture from my travels overseas. But, as I got older, I became more invested in hunting down "Option - Hot Version" DVDs with driving legend Keiichi Tsuchiya and reading Hyper Rev magazine to learn about Japanese tuning, parts and culture.



Even though I couldn't read Japanese, the pictures were enough eye candy for me. While I had a pulse on what tuning companies were doing globally and differently than typical U.S.



With a thriving presence on social media and a growing portfolio of projects, Jonny Grunwald continues to establish himself as a big voice in car culture.

builders, these inspired me to choose rotary engines as my platform of choice.

WHICH ASPECTS OF WORKING IN THE AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY ARE YOU MOST PASSIONATE ABOUT?

JG: I love the ability to educate newcomers and legacy enthusiasts about what's possible with the modern tuning of our favorite heritage import cars.

We're now seeing a huge resurgence in car culture, specifically with the muscle car era, that's transcending into popular culture.

There are so many misconceptions about aspects of maintenance and performance, so to be able to teach enthusiasts makes me smile because it's the information that I struggled to find during my childhood.

I like to remind enthusiasts that we're blessed to be in the era of technology, so you're not in the dark! Build that project car, get out and drive.

YOU SEEM TO HAVE A GROWING PORTFOLIO OF CAR PROJECTS, INCLUDING PIKES PEAK, TIME ATTACK FD RX7, THE NEW MAZDA FC RX7 PENNZOIL BUILD, AND GYMKHANA GRID 20B MAZDA RX7. WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE PROJECT THAT YOU'VE WORKED ON SO FAR?

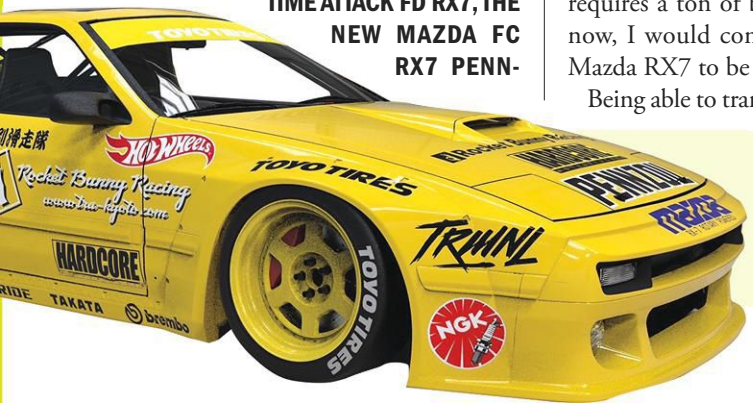
JG: Last year was wild. I've had the pleasure of moonlighting as a project manager for Team Magic with Red Bull, Mazda and Toyo Tires. It was our rookie year at Pikes Peak attending with our 4 Rotor Twin Turbo Mazda 3 with Mad Mike Whiddett of Red Bull as the driver and Rhys Millen as his mentor.

Through testing and the event, I spent some time with the driver as well as Rhys, receiving valuable insights on his experiences and what's required for the dangerous feat. Our team broke two Pikes Peak records for the fastest Mazda and rotary-powered vehicle to make the attempt and, to top it off, Rhys broke his own production car record in his M4.

It was an unforgettable experience and a dream of mine to attempt the Pikes Peak International Hill Climb one day.

But it's hard to focus on a specific project and say it's my favorite, because each one requires a ton of blood and sweat. Right now, I would consider the Time Attack Mazda RX7 to be my favorite.

Being able to transition that vehicle from



Grunwald encourages fans and enthusiast to build their project cars, then get out and drive.

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Q&A

AUTOMOTIVE CREATOR JONNY GRUNWALD





Grunwald loves educating newcomers and legacy enthusiasts about what's possible through modern tuning techniques.

an award-winning show car into a Time Attack weapon was a new challenge for me. I've driven at racetracks across the country, connecting with fellow Pennzoil ambassadors and enthusiasts, and most people are shocked to see such a beautiful-looking car being driven on the track after demonstrating simple routine maintenance in the pit.

It puts a smile on my face to show enthusiasts what's possible with a vehicle that's been with me since high school and has changed my life all these years later.

YOUR COLLABORATION WITH PENNZOIL AND KEI MIURA IN JAPAN WAS ALL OVER SOCIAL MEDIA. WHAT WAS THE FUEL THAT IGNITED THIS EXCITING PROJECT?

JG: Back at SEMA 2022, Pennzoil surprised me with an epic rendering of the IMSA FC RX7 re-envisioned to match my Pennzoil Gymkhana Grid FD RX7 livery. Miura San has been a close friend for almost a decade and is a huge fan of the Shell and Pennzoil vintage racing heritage and, of course, the FC RX7.

I reached out to him to design the next evolution of his RX7 product line, which was an exciting experience. After having worked together over the past year we have a lot in store for 2024.

WERE THERE ANY OTHER ASPECTS OF KEI MIURA'S WORK THAT INSPIRED YOU FOR YOUR OTHER PROJECTS?

JG: Kei Miura has been a ghost designer for some of the most popular aero brands in the world. His unique perspective on exotic, imported, domestic and classic vehicles are each universally recognized, although hidden between different popular and viral brand names.

While Miura continues to succeed in his work, he always remains focused and driven to the next project and never takes time to celebrate any unique accomplishment. I think this highlights his drive and motivation for the industry—much like the campaign from Pennzoil, "Long May We Drive."

I find Miura to be an inspirational piece of modern car culture and a key player in the popular automotive culture resurgence.

AS A LONGTIME MEMBER OF THE PENNZOIL FAMILY, HOW HAS THIS COLLABORATION POWERED YOUR CAREER?

JG: The collaboration with Pennzoil has been life-changing and a career highlight. The opportunity to connect with so many like-minded individuals who are also passionate about car culture is a unique experience.

Pennzoil has given me the ability to push my creative limits beyond my wildest dreams in terms of world-debuting proj-

ects, the ability to research and develop new products for enthusiasts and, most importantly, be a part of a growing team that is cultivating the best direction together.

HOW DOES THE NEW CAMPAIGN FROM PENNZOIL, "LONG MAY WE DRIVE," RESONATE WITH YOU?

JG: Long May We Drive is the epitome of who I am as an enthusiast, builder and driver.

I view cars as a representation of who we are as individuals, pushing ourselves to be the best in our respective disciplines in life and empowering and maintaining our vehicles with the best to navigate life's roads.

DO YOU HAVE A FAVORITE CAR? IF SO, WHICH ONE AND WHY?

JG: My favorite car, of course, is the FD RX7. It has gorgeous styling that people still mistake for a new vehicle. It's extremely lightweight and a momentum-based vehicle that can easily be converted into a loud powerhouse.

Nearly 30 years later, the sound and feeling are so unique that it can't be ignored.

WITH THE DEPTH OF EXPERIENCE AND KNOWLEDGE YOU'VE GAINED IN YOUR CAREER, WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO ASPIRING CONTENT CREATORS IN THE AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY?

JG: There are no shortcuts in any industry you choose. But, if you're dedicated and have a specific vision of how you can leave an impact and help others, you'll be surprised how things may turn out.

The automotive industry is smaller than you think. It may take time, but don't let off the gas.

ANYTHING YOU CAN GIVE US A SNEAK PEEK AT HERE IN 2024?

JG: A new world debut body kit from Kei Miura that'll debut on my Pennzoil 20B FD RX7 for Gymkhana Grid is in the works.

Also, there's a lot in store for the Toyota GR86 project in collaboration with Pennzoil and Varis Japan that debuted in the Toyo Tires Treadpass at SEMA 2023, so make sure to stay tuned.

Follow Jonny Grunwald on the web at jonnygrunwald.com and on Instagram at instagram.com/jonny.grunwald . **TS**



Grunwald views cars as a representation of who people are as individuals, pushing themselves to be the best they can be in life.





Keys of the Kingdom

Unlocking the mysteries of these little items that are of big importance.

By John Gunnell



You may see a code such as Y-152 on an old Chrysler key blank.

Car keys. We take them for granted—until the day we have a customer car in the shop and break the key, lose the key or lock the customer's keyring in the car.

Then, a thing as simple as a key creates a crisis. Maybe even a huge crisis, if the car is an antique or classic model requiring a particular type of old key.

Gone are the days when you could cruise down to the corner hardware store and get a key made for a 1932 Ford, a 1953 Corvette or a 1963 Chrysler 300. But, not long ago at a vintage car show, we caught up with Mike Granlund, who operates Vintage Lock in Cambridge, Minnesota.

Granlund's key blank-loaded trailer is a fixture at large events such as the Iola Old Car Show, where he makes hundreds of keys for car collectors and also provides lockout services for owners of classic and new cars who lose keys or lock them in their cars.

While talking to Granlund about his exploits in Iraq and Afghanistan (where he was an Army medic and picked up Master Sergeant stripes from Gen. Richard Meyer), customers asked him if he had key blanks for a '60s T-Bird and if he could unlock an older Volvo.



Old key blanks.

He had the T-Bird key blanks back at his shop, he said, but needed more information to make up the Volvo keys.

"Those can be tricky," he told the Volvo owner, "so let's make sure we do it right the first time."

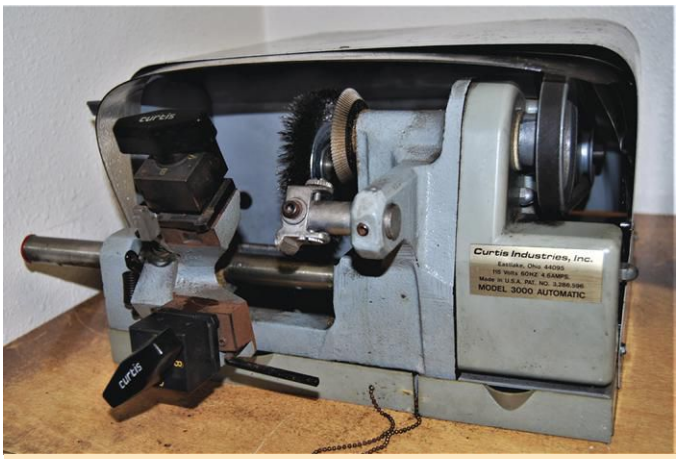
KEY INGREDIENTS

Granlund is among a small number of suppliers of hard-to-find key blanks for classic cars, both American and foreign. Companies also stock keys for antique buses, motorcycles and a few old airplanes.

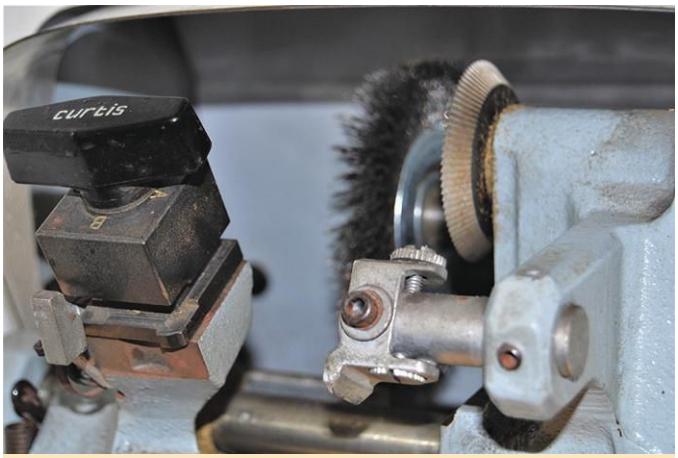
Some of the key blanks these outlets offer are no longer manufactured anywhere. Vintage Lock has thousands of keys in its inventory to help meet demand.

When it comes to the blanks, original equipment manufacturer (OEM) key blanks are the best, experts say. Over the years, automakers ordered keys from many vendors such as Briggs & Stratton, Curtis, Yale and Hurd. Meanwhile, records show companies including Union, Sipea and Huff made keys for import vehicles.

Searching for blanks, you'll sometimes find the OEM offerings, replicas that can be shaped like original keys but aren't labeled the same, and/or crest key blanks that may feature the car or truck maker's logo or some other promotional design. We've seen unique designs, like early



Curtis Industries of East Lake, Ohio, sold this Model 3000 Automatic key maker.



A close-up photo showing details of the Curtis 3000 Keymatic machine.

postwar Pontiac keys with Pontiac's old Indian head logo stamped into them.

There are several ways to identify the right key blank for a car. You may see a code such as Y-152 on a Chrysler key or 8-50 over C on a GM key made by Curtis. These are called "key codes" and they tell locksmiths how to cut a key without needing to see the original.

The code may be stamped on the key, stamped into the lock cylinder or handwritten in the factory owner's manual, if available.

There are three basic types of key codes:

- **Direct Codes** have numbers that correspond to cuts on the key and tell the locksmith how deep to make each cut. Some keys for older American cars and some foreign car keys use Direct Codes.
- **Interpreted Codes** require the locksmith to do some simple math. He or she may have to subtract something from the stamped number to get to the real code. Reference books tell locksmiths how to determine Interpreted Codes.
- **Book Codes** are the numbers stamped on the key that must be looked up in a code book. The code book index lists the numbers for the cuts that need to be made.

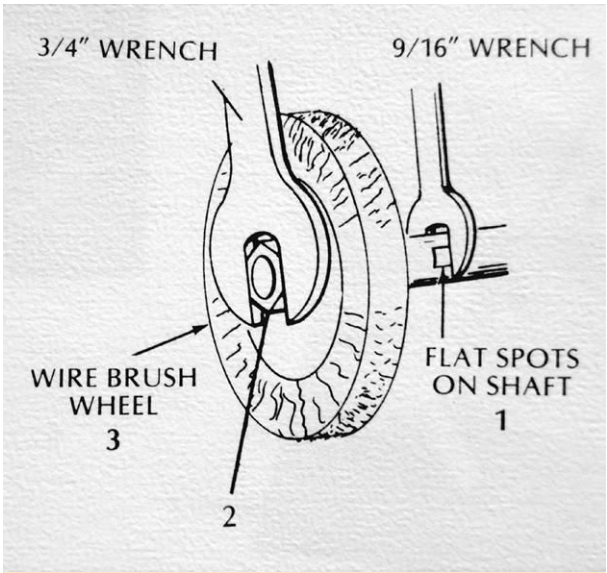
Once a key code is "broken," the locksmith refers to a guide that identifies the depth and spacing of the cuts to be made in the key blade. Key cutting machines are then set for a certain key.

There are so many types of car keys that a setup for every key is not possible. Each key code has a depth and space guide, sometimes shared but many codes.

For cars built after 1990, key codes can be determined via Vehicle Identification Numbers. This system can be misused, however, so owners should put tape over the VIN plate that shows through the windshield on newer vehicles, preventing a thief from copying the code and having a dealer cut a key.

BACKUP PLANS

Some shops recommend customers have at least two sets of keys for every collector car they own. They can take one set with them when driving the car and bring the other set along in case they lock the first set inside the vehicle.



Replacement of the wire brush wheel is a required maintenance operation on a key maker.

Keys are inexpensive, so having a third set at home is a great idea too, just to be on the safe side.

Experts recommend warning your customers not to label keys with the year, make, model and color of the vehicle. Dealers do this and collectors often copy the practice.

However, for security reasons, it is far better to number code your vehicles and label the keys with the codes, or give each car a pet name and use the name to label the keys for that vehicle.

You may also have customers who want to keep a spare set of keys inside the car. Popular storage spots are in the ashtray, atop the sun visor or in magnetic cases that stick to the inside of the fuel filler door. A suggestion found in at least one old car magazine was securing keys on top of the air cleaner with the wing nut.

According to the Auto Insurance Center, all of these are bad ideas. The AIC quotes Kevin Kelly of the California State Automobile Association who warns, "Don't leave a spare key in the vehicle because car thieves know where to look for them."

If a customer insists on having a key attached to the vehicle, there are aftermarket options that can be used to hide them in unusual spots.

Meanwhile, the use of a car key vault in a shop, at home or at a garage or storage building is highly recommended. Key boxes with combination locks are available from most office supply outlets and department stores.

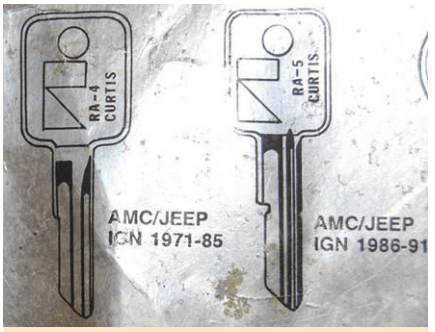
Keys to the Kingdom



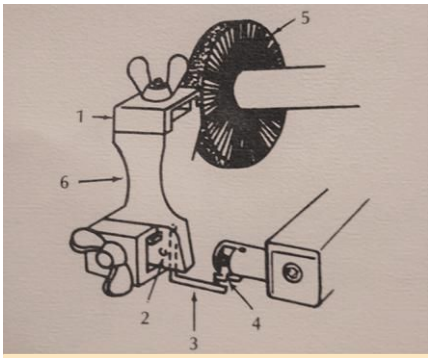
Keys for GM cars and trucks have different styles of codes depending on their age.



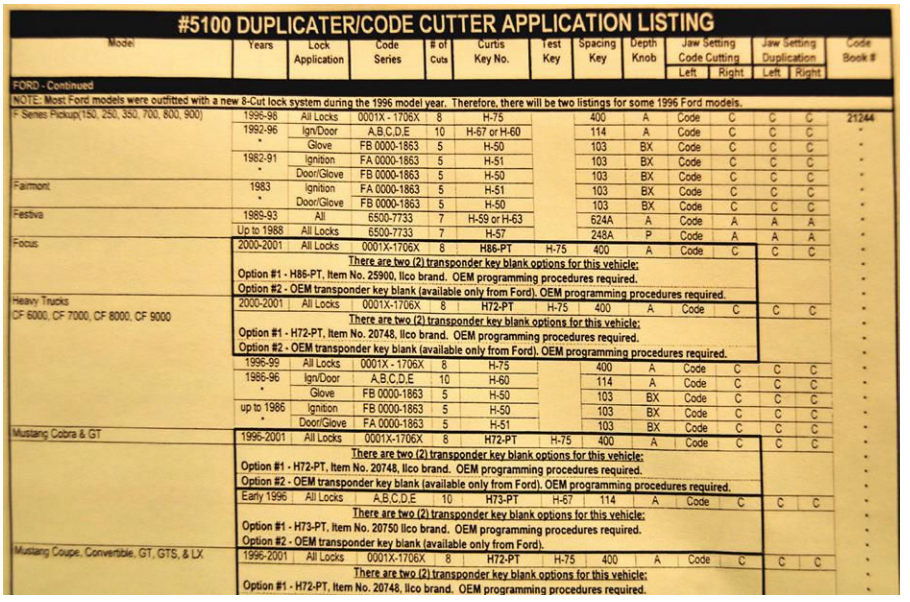
Newer keys have black plastic covers and may have a chip in them.



These are AMC/Jeep key blanks from Curtis shown on an older, soiled, foil paper chart that's a bit hard to photograph without reflections.



Curtis 3000 Keymatic parts include: 1) key clamp; 2) Allen head cap screw; 3) brush guide bar; 4) key guide; 5) wire brush; and 6) rocker assembly.



#5100 DUPLICATER/CODE CUTTER APPLICATION LISTING

Model	Years	Lock Application	Code Series	# of Cuts	Curtis Key No.	Test Key	Spacing Key	Depth Knob	Jaw Setting Code Cutting Left	Jaw Setting Code Cutting Right	Jaw Setting Duplication Left	Jaw Setting Duplication Right	Code Book #
FORD - Continued													
NOTE: Most Ford models were outfitted with a new 8-Cut lock system during the 1996 model year. Therefore, there will be two listings for some 1996 Ford models.													
F Series Pickup(150, 250, 350, 700, 800, 900)	1996-98	All Locks	0001X - 1706X	8	H-75		400	A	Code	C	C	C	21244
	1992-96	Ign/Door	A,B,C,D,E	10	H-67 or H-60		114	A	Code	C	C	C	"
	"	Glove	FB 0000-1863	5	H-50		103	BX	Code	C	C	C	"
	1982-91	Ignition	FA 0000-1863	5	H-51		103	BX	Code	C	C	C	"
	"	Door/Glove	FB 0000-1863	5	H-50		103	BX	Code	C	C	C	"
Fairmont	1983	Ignition	FA 0000-1863	5	H-51		103	BX	Code	C	C	C	"
	"	Door/Glove	FB 0000-1863	5	H-50		103	BX	Code	C	C	C	"
Festiva	1989-93	All	6500-7733	7	H-59 or H-63		624A	A	Code	A	A	A	"
	Up to 1988	All Locks	6500-7733	7	H-57		248A	P	Code	A	A	A	"
Focus	2000-2001	All Locks	0001X-1706X	8	H86-PT	H-75	400	A	Code	C	C	C	"
	There are two (2) transponder key blank options for this vehicle: Option #1 - H86-PT, Item No. 25900, Ilco brand. OEM programming procedures required. Option #2 - OEM transponder key blank (available only from Ford). OEM programming procedures required.												
Heavy Trucks CF 6000, CF 7000, CF 8000, CF 9000	2000-2001	All Locks	0001X-1706X	8	H72-PT	H-75	400	A	Code	C	C	C	"
	There are two (2) transponder key blank options for this vehicle: Option #1 - H72-PT, Item No. 20748, Ilco brand. OEM programming procedures required. Option #2 - OEM transponder key blank (available only from Ford). OEM programming procedures required.												
	1996-99	All Locks	0001X - 1706X	8	H-75		400	A	Code	C	C	C	"
	1986-96	Ign/Door	A,B,C,D,E	10	H-60		114	A	Code	C	C	C	"
	"	Glove	FB 0000-1863	5	H-50		103	BX	Code	C	C	C	"
	up to 1986	Ignition	FB 0000-1863	5	H-50		103	BX	Code	C	C	C	"
	"	Door/Glove	FA 0000-1863	5	H-51		103	BX	Code	C	C	C	"
Mustang Cobra & GT	1996-2001	All Locks	0001X-1706X	8	H72-PT	H-75	400	A	Code	C	C	C	"
	There are two (2) transponder key blank options for this vehicle: Option #1 - H72-PT, Item No. 20748, Ilco brand. OEM programming procedures required. Option #2 - OEM transponder key blank (available only from Ford). OEM programming procedures required.												
	Early 1996	All Locks	A,B,C,D,E	10	H73-PT	H-67	114	A	Code	C	C	C	"
	There are two (2) transponder key blank options for this vehicle: Option #1 - H73-PT, Item No. 20750 Ilco brand. OEM programming procedures required. Option #2 - OEM transponder key blank (available only from Ford).												
Mustang Coupe, Convertible, GT, GTS, & LX	1996-2001	All Locks	0001X-1706X	8	H72-PT	H-75	400	A	Code	C	C	C	"
	There are two (2) transponder key blank options for this vehicle: Option #1 - H72-PT, Item No. 20748, Ilco brand. OEM programming procedures required.												

The Direct Code has numbers that correspond to cuts on the key and tells the locksmith how deep to make each cut.

The boxes also keep keys nicely organized.

Keys for older cars are usually pretty simple devices. Owners put them in the door or ignition, turn them and they do their job. If someone needs to make extra keys, they can do it locally or by mail-order through one of the specialty companies.

But what if your customer uses a modern vehicle to tow their collector car? Depending on what kind of door-locking system the vehicle has, it may be wise to proceed with caution when having keys made.

We came across one report of a couple that had the original rubber-tipped GM key for their Pontiac minivan duplicated by a locksmith. The van was equipped with the GM Passkey theft deterrent system, which uses a key with a special electronic chip hidden under its handle.

The duplicate key didn't have the chip. Use of the wrong key should temporarily disable the fuel pump, but in this case, it ruined it, and a $600 repair was required.

So, it's a good idea to have duplicate keys for tow vehicles made at a factory dealership.

For the classic vehicles themselves, look for reputable suppliers online or at a car show. After all, the key to happiness is being able to come and go as you please. ***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.*

Reference books tell locksmiths how to interpret codes. With a Book Code the number stamped on the key must be looked up in a code book.

PERFORMANCE PRODUCTS

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Diesel Filter Kits



FASS EGR Solutions, Marthasville, Missouri, offers FASS EGR Filter Kit upgrades for modern diesel engines. The filtration systems improve long-term reliability by removing 85% of the particulate matter that circulates through the engine. The kits are currently compatible with 2017-22 GM Duramax and 2017-19 Ford 6.7L Power Stroke engines, with additional applications coming soon.

C8 Corvette Cat-Back System



BORLA Performance Industries, Johnson City, Tennessee, presents its Cat-Back Exhaust System for 2020-23 Chevrolet Corvette C8 models that improves horsepower and torque. System 140841BC delivers the aggressive BORLA ATAK sound without any drone or resonance inside the vehicle. It is made from T-304 stainless steel and features all-welded construction for durability and long life. System 140841BC features black chrome on T-304 stainless steel. Systems 140841 with bright chrome and 140841CF with carbon fiber tips are also available.

Thermal Barrier



Heatshield Products, Escondido, California, presents its Sticky Shield Adhesive-Backed Thermal Barrier. Designed to stop up to 90% of radiant heat using specially formulated Kool Core thermal barrier technology with a 3-mil-thick foil top layer, the product is effective with as little as 1 inch of airspace between the heat source and the shield. Made in the USA, Sticky Shield is easy to cut and shape to fit surface contours and can be used to line the underside of transmission tunnels, floor pans and firewalls. It is offered in multiple precut widths and lengths.

Ford Billet Aluminum Door Handles



Speedway Motors, Lincoln, Nebraska, offers Billet Aluminum Door Handles for 1932 Ford roadsters and Phaeton models. The aircraft-style lefthand and righthand door handles include door panel trim plates and '32 Ford control rod links for stock door latches. Their polished finish with aviation-style lightening holes goes with any interior design, and the handles can be used in other hot rods, classic trucks or muscle cars with light fabrication work. ***TS***

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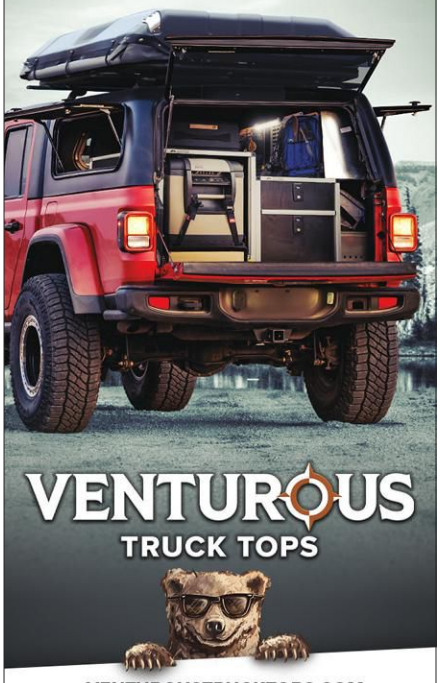
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Car Shoppers Watching Their Budgets, But Ready to Buy

Economic uncertainty and tight inventory levels remain top concerns for car buyers, according to the 2024 Automotive Trends report released by automotive technology company Cars Commerce Inc.

Data shows Gen Z provides a bright spot for retailers, with 80% of young vehicle shoppers moving from online to offline and opting to finish deals in the showroom.

Meanwhile, American drivers are supporting American workers into the new year, with almost 50% willing to spend more on locally made vehicles.

And, despite the government's best efforts, consumers are eyeing EVs, but few are committing.

The main questions steering the automotive retail landscape into 2024 are: Who's buying? What's available? And the biggie: What's the price tag?

"Throughout 2023, the global auto industry, domestically and abroad, faced uncertainty, including a history-making OEM labor strike. Consumers are feeling the impact of broad economic and political forces, especially in their wallets," said Rebecca Lindland, senior director of industry data and insights at Cars Commerce. "As we head into the new year, consumers—regardless of generation or geography—seek affordable solutions to get the vehicle they want with the features they value."

Cars Commerce predicts five trends will influence the auto industry in 2024 and beyond:

1 BUYERS TURN BUDGET-SAVVY.

With affordability top of mind, nearly half of car shoppers plan to spend less than $30,000 on their next vehicle purchase. But only about 12% of new cars are priced in that range, as automakers produce higher-margin products. With high interest in this price range and low inventory, new budget-friendly models on Cars.com are selling faster than pricier rides—new vehicles under $30,000 sell an average of 19 days faster than new cars over $30,000.

2 THE USED-CAR CRUNCH IS REAL, BUT TRADE-IN VALUES ARE A BRIGHT SPOT.

Used-car inventory is sparse and expensive—and likely to stay that way. Why? During the pandemic, manufacturers produced fewer vehicles, creating a deficit of roughly 10.2 million gently used 1- to 3-year-old cars potentially returning to the market in the coming years—prime picks for used buyers. But shoppers looking to leverage a trade-in toward purchasing a new or used vehicle may benefit from this scarcity while also helping to ease the industry's used-car crunch.

3 GEN Z IS NOW REWRITING THE CAR-BUYING STORY.

Despite Gen Z growing up with the internet, it's millennials who are most likely to prefer purchasing their car fully online (16%). Comparatively, only 9% of Gen Zers prefer an online purchase—and 80% affirm they want to finish the deal in person. But Gen-Z bucking norms doesn't stop there—42% bought their first set of wheels between 16 and 18, outpacing 32% of millennials.

4 THE AUTO INDUSTRY WILL HAVE A MAJOR MANUFACTURING PLAY IN THE U.S.

The 2024 presidential race is set to turn the spotlight on U.S. auto production. American buyers are tuning in, ready to spend more on cars that boost local employment—nearly half of Americans will pay extra for a vehicle that creates U.S. jobs.

5 ELECTRIFICATION'S NEXT STOP: WHAT'S THE ROAD AHEAD?

The spotlight is on EVs and their batteries in the U.S. manufacturing push. The government's slicing through EV adoption hurdles with tax breaks and infrastructure funds. Over half of Americans see EVs ruling the roads in less than 20 years, and EVs make up 4% of total new-vehicle search share on Cars.com, up 0.06 percentage points YOY. While shoppers are EV-curious, going hybrid may be the next step some drivers take before going fully electric.

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Economic uncertainty and tight inventory levels remain top concerns for car buyers. (Photo by Dieny Portinanni on Unsplash)

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