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Jef White
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Good Vibes Only

Most everyone in a position of authority has likely heard some version of a quote often attributed to Maya Angelou that states: "People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

A recent Ph.D.-led study by Big Energy Enterprises reinforces just how important that can be for leaders in today's workplace.

After surveying 5,000 professionals in the United States ages 18-64, the study found that the No. 1 reason employees "admire" or "follow" a top leader in their organization is the leader's "vibe" or "way of being."

Now, that sounds plenty vague, but it's still important—study officials state the characteristic outranked other factors such as education, connections, experience, skill set, creativity, hours worked and even a moral compass.

The research team believes the findings mark a significant shift in what makes a leader effective, particularly in the age of AI, where humans can't always compete with computers in terms of sheer competency.

The personal energy a leader projects is no longer seen as a "woo-woo" attribute—it is now recognized as one of, if not the most critical element in determining success or failure in the workplace.

"This research underscores a key trend in leadership—it's not just about what leaders know or how hard they work, it's about how they show up," says Erin King, an author and lead research partner on the study. "As AI takes over more technical and operational tasks, energy-dependent skills like empathy, intuition, creativity and adaptability will be the competitive edges that set successful leaders apart."

Now, it's not likely computers or AI will take over the very human tasks of accessorizing a vehicle in an aftermarket shop. But it's fair to recognize that leaders who display proficiency in managing and optimizing their personal energy are poised to lead their organizations into the future.

The main takeaway, the study suggests, is that leaders who understand their own energy and how it impacts their teams are "more effective in fostering loyalty, inspiration and engagement among employees."

Curious where you rank? Big Energy Enterprises offers a free, 5-minute assessment at theenergyexam.com. The company says the quick tool also helps leaders understand how to manage different energy styles within their teams to boost performance and achieve lasting success. ***TS***

THE SHOP

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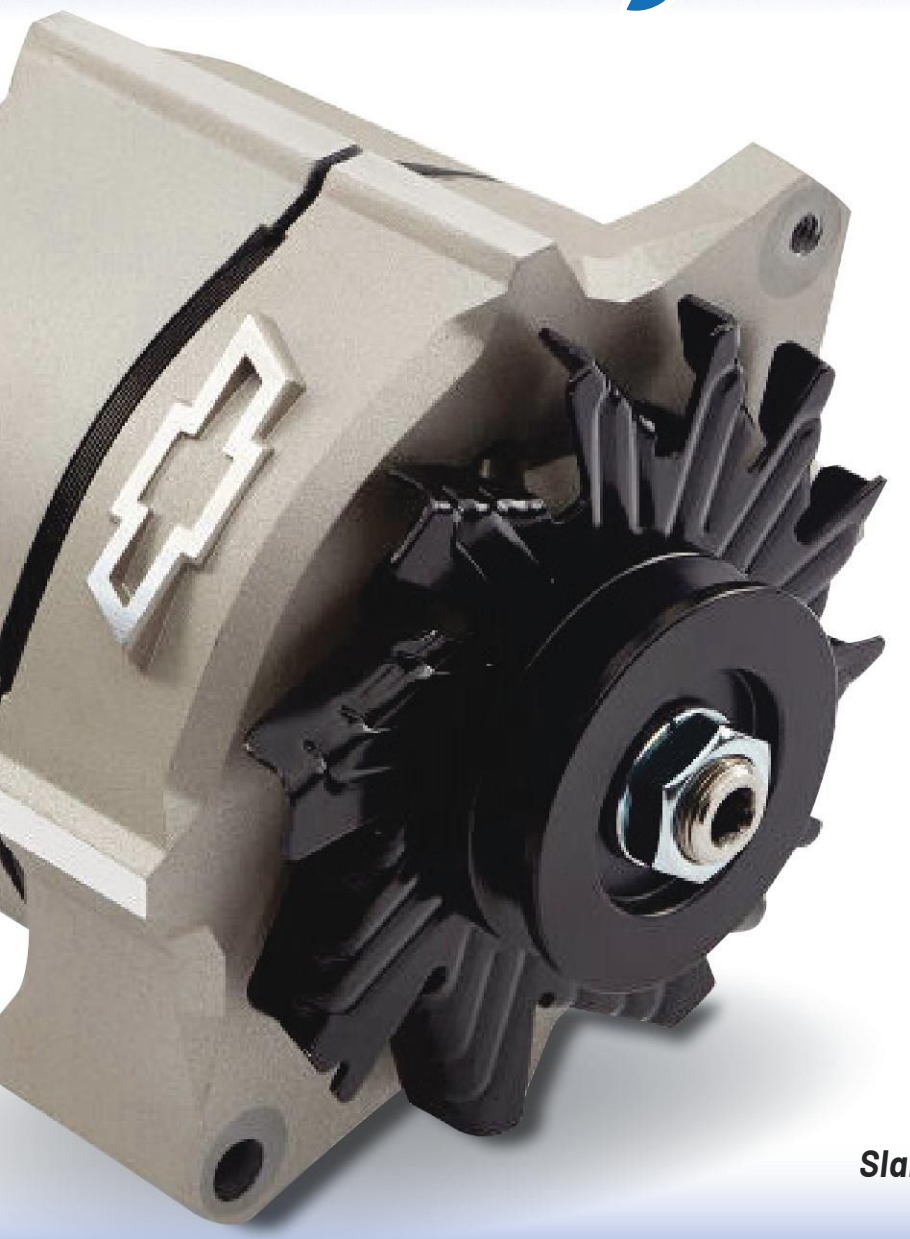
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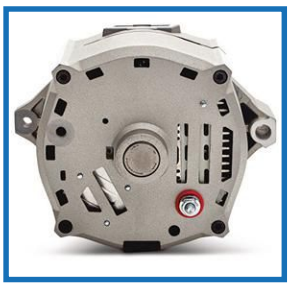
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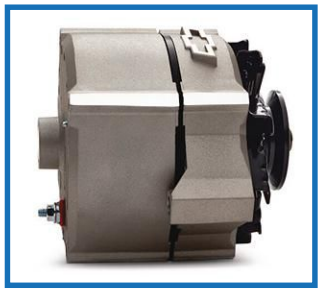




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CREATING A WELL-ROUNDED MARKETING STRATEGY PART II



Tips for helping your shop stand out in a crowded online marketplace.

By Barry Alt & Dean Heckman

Editor's note: This is the second in a two-part series highlighting The Four Pillars of Effective Business Marketing for Auto Restoration, Performance, Racing and Restyling Shops. Part I appeared in the November 2024 issue of THE SHOP.

A well-designed strategy will help you build your reputation, grow your customer base and ultimately make your business successful.

But what, exactly, does a well-rounded strategy look like?

A solid strategy involves integrating the Four Pillars of Effective Business Marketing for auto restoration, performance, racing and restyling shops into your approach.

Those pillars are:

- Branding
- Photography
- Videography
- Digital Marketing & Messaging

Last time we tackled the first two. Now, let's look at the others.

VIDEOGRAPHY

While video may demand more effort to perfect than snappy copy or sharp photos, it's undeniably the best way to showcase your shop's incredible work or review products on your website.

When paired with high-quality images and compelling text, video becomes an unbeatable tool for capturing attention and driving engagement.

Video is important in auto restoration, performance, racing and restyling shops because it not only increases your visibility and connects with your audience on a much deeper level, but it also improves your relationship with existing clients.

Think about it.

Videos let you show off your expertise in action. Whether it's a time-lapse of a restoration project, a walk-through of your shop, how you're performing specific performance upgrades, on-track video or customer testimonials, video can bring more life to your brand.

Videography proves that you know what you're doing, highlights the great products you carry, and lets potential customers see the quality of your work up close and personal. With a video, they can clearly envision what you can do for them and their vehicles, inspiring them to get started.

Data shows that videos perform well on social media, stopping scrollers in their tracks and prompting them to interact with your content.

A good video will be shared, liked and commented on, getting your shop in front of more people. According to Search Engine Journal's 2023 Social Media Statistics report, 70% of viewers become aware of new brands because of YouTube videos

By focusing on branding, photography, videography and digital messaging, you can build a strong, engaging digital marketing presence. Photo Credit: CROCOTHERY - stock.adobe.com

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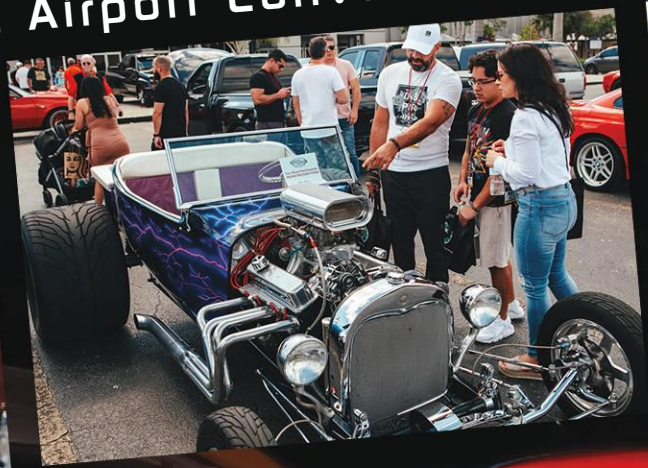




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and viewers are twice as likely to buy something because they saw it on YouTube.

Types of videos to create if you're an auto restoration, performance, racing or restyling shop include:

- ***Behind-the-scenes footage:*** These videos give customers a look into your daily operations, introduce your team and show the care that goes into your work. They're a great way to build trust and connect with your customers.
- ***Project update videos:*** These are videos you take periodically during a project to update a client, create an archive for the project and share on your site or social media.
- ***Product videos:*** These can be video reviews of a new product or service you offer.
- ***Explainer videos:*** These are great for breaking down complex services or processes. For example, a video showing the step-by-step process of a popular performance upgrade or custom fabrication on a build can educate potential customers and showcase your expertise.
- ***Promotional content:*** Use these videos to promote special offers, new products or unique aspects of your shop. A high-energy video promoting your shop's latest offerings or a new service can attract attention and drive action, but use them sparingly.
- ***Event content:*** These can be videos letting people know to come out and visit you at a car show or event.

Tips for creating great video content:

- ***Invest in quality:*** High-quality visuals and sound make a big difference. Invest in good equipment or get professional help so your videos look and sound professional. Today's mobile devices are great for taking videos, but nothing compares to high-quality audio and video equipment designed specifically for the task.
- ***Tell a story:*** Whether you're explaining a process or promoting a product or service, make sure your video tells a clear and engaging story. A well-structured narrative keeps viewers interested and makes your message more memorable.
- ***Include a Call to Action (CTA):*** Remember to tell viewers what to do next. Whether it's to schedule an appointment, visit your website or call your shop, a clear CTA will turn viewers into customers.

But first, a warning—as with images, videos are also subject to copyright law, so it's important to proceed with caution. We strongly recommend creating and using your own original video content whenever possible.

PRO TIP: Keep it short and sweet. According to information from Forbes' Top Social Media Statistics and Trends of 2024, short-form video clips are 2.5 times more engaging than longer videos, and 34% of consumers appreciate the more genuine nature of the shorter form.

Shorter videos are more likely to hold viewers' attention and get your message across quickly, so aim to keep your videos concise and to the point.



Video is a great way to showcase your shop's incredible work or review products on your website. Photo credit: enterdigital - stock.adobe.com

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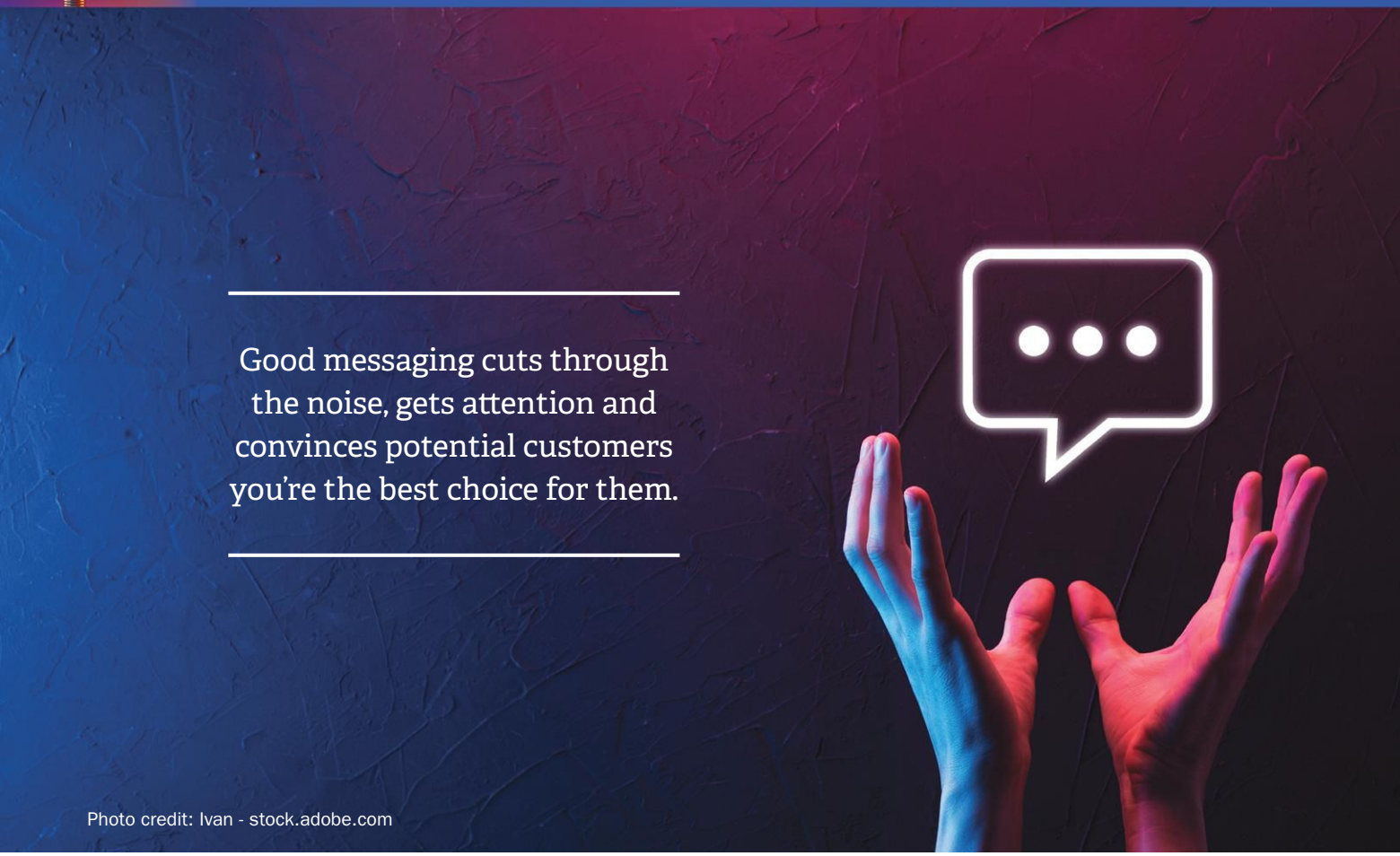
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CREATING A WELL-ROUNDED MARKETING STRATEGY PART II



Good messaging cuts through the noise, gets attention and convinces potential customers you're the best choice for them.

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DIGITAL MARKETING & MESSAGING

Now, let's bring it all together with solid digital marketing and messaging tips you can begin implementing today.

When it comes to making your shop or products stand out when marketing your business and getting customers to act, messaging combined with your branding, photos and video is everything.

Remember, it's not what you say, it's how—and where—you say it! Good messaging cuts through the noise, gets attention and convinces potential customers you're the best choice for them.

Think of messaging as the "voice" of your marketing strategy. It's what communicates your business' unique value, the quality of your work or products and why you're better than your competitors. Your digital messaging should tell your audience that you're the right choice for their next big auto restoration, restyling or performance project.

Remember, from the tone of your social media posts and the style of your email marketing to the content on your website and the ads you run, your messaging should be clear, engaging and always on brand. Key elements of effective digital marketing and messaging for automotive restoration, performance, racing and restyling shops include:

- ***A high-quality website:*** Your website is often the first impression potential customers get of your brand. Make sure it features strong messaging that effectively promotes your shop, reflects your brand's personality and provides an engaging experience.
- ***Clarity & consistency:*** For a more professional appearance, ensure that your message is clear and consistent across all platforms. This includes not only text but also your branding, photos and videos that you combine to convey your message.
- ***Audience-focused:*** Tailor your messages to your target audience's needs and interests. Think about what your audience wants to hear from you—be specific.
- ***Value proposition:*** Clearly highlight what makes your shop or products unique and showcase why they should choose you over your competitors.

Tips for effective messaging in digital marketing include:

- ***Tell stories:*** Storytelling techniques make your messages more engaging and memorable.
- ***Use data-driven insights:*** Analyze data to see what works best and fine-tune your messaging accordingly.
- ***Stay adaptable:*** Be flexible and adjust your messaging based on feedback and market changes.

PRO TIP: Add quizzes, polls or interactive features to your digital content. This will boost engagement and provide valuable insights into your audience's preferences.

By focusing on branding, photography, videography and digital messaging, you can build a strong, engaging digital marketing presence for your aftermarket shop. Each pillar plays a crucial role in attracting and retaining customers, boosting your reputation and ultimately making you more successful.

To effectively implement each pillar,

it's best to hire professionals skilled in branding, photography, videography and digital marketing—unless you have someone qualified on your staff. Professionals bring the expertise, tools and experience needed to craft a compelling brand story, capture stunning visuals and execute a consistent marketing strategy.

For a deeper dive into these key pillars, check out our website. ***TS***



*With over 27 years of experience, **BARRY ALT** leads Motorhead Digital, a digital marketing team focused on transforming the online presence of businesses in the automotive aftermarket. Their signature programs—Location, Site and Marketing Maximizer—are designed to enhance websites, social media and digital marketing strategies, attracting quality leads and maximizing revenue for auto restoration, performance and grassroots race shops. Call 585-766-9785, visit motorheaddigital.com or email maximizesales@motorheaddigital.com.*



Think of messaging as the "voice" of your marketing strategy.
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PERFORMANCE

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LAP AFTER LAP

The circle track market stays consistently strong.

By John Carollo

Another circle track racing season has come and gone, and just like drivers and crew members, shops that serve the market are always seeking ways to improve consistency.

Winter build season is a great time to take stock of what's working, what can be tweaked and what's to come. Checking in with like-minded professionals can help identify trends and sort through the clutter.

We've put together a collection of information regarding current market happenings and opportunities professionals may want to pursue. But first, let's start with some insights from a pair of industry suppliers closely watching the circle track market with an eye on ways to help shops take full advantage.

MORE TO LEARN

It may be human nature to want to take a moment to relax after a grueling oval track season, whether your customers ride the asphalt or the dirt. But, with competitive edges extremely thin, now's also the time to brush up on the latest innovations to help your customers start next season strong.

"The old adage of, 'If it ain't broke, don't fix it' doesn't always hold true," notes Bob Florine, executive vice president at ARP. "Racers should and do always look to improve."

And that means aftermarket shops and builders need to do the same to keep pace with an ever-evolving industry.

"There continues to be technological improvements in engines and chassis development, resulting in performance increases and elevated stresses on products such as fastened components," Florine notes.

Mike Ramy, owner of Precision Epoxy Products, agrees that technological advancements have revolutionized circle track racing.

Bridgestone Americas and Penske Entertainment announced a long-term extension to Firestone's role as the exclusive tire supplier of all IndyCar-sanctioned racing. (Photo courtesy Bridgestone Americas)

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LAP AFTER LAP



The agreement will keep Firestone as the sole tire supplier for all NTT INDYCAR SERIES races, the INDY NXT by Firestone developmental series and the annual Indianapolis 500. (Photos courtesy Bridgestone Americas)



"Gone are the days when race preparation and vehicle setup were done by good ol' boys using 'X' marks on the shop floor for grain scale placement and strings for wheel alignment," he says. "In the modern circle track scene, from local Saturday night races to top-tier competitions, staying competitive requires keeping abreast of the latest technologies. This necessitates the use of proper tools, skilled technicians and readily available in-house resources."

Taking advantage of professional offerings such as flooring products can elevate shops to another level, opening doors to attracting more serious racers as repeat customers.

"Shops new to circle track racing, whether on dirt or asphalt, might not realize that achieving the optimal and consistent setup requires working on a flawless surface," Ramy reveals. "That's where the significance of a high-quality surface plate comes in. A perfect surface enhances all aspects of car setup, including scaling, weight distribution, alignment, ride heights, suspension geometry, bump steer and so on."

Knowing your stuff is the most important attribute to connecting with circle track racers, the suppliers agree. But a close second is creating trusting relationships with customers looking to build fast friendships.

"Racing has always been a 'people sport,'" Florine reveals. "Get out to the track and interface with the competitors. It means so much to them that you are taking the time to visit with them and tend to their needs."

Only someone like you who knows what it takes to race consistently can understand and relate to what they're going through, observes Ramy, mixing the desire for top equipment with the realities of budget constraints.

"Shops seeking to attract circle track enthusiasts must recognize the impact of escalating costs on the typical weekend racer," he says. "The inability to afford certain items does not diminish a true racer's drive to chase their passion. In fact, this drive is often intensified by the competitiveness and the tangible chance of victory."

A full-service shop, then, can attract a broader customer base by offering more than just parts sales.

"It should also provide the necessary tools, equipment and technical know-how to assist customers with race vehicle preparation and setup," Ramy continues.

Of course, the parts are important, too. From ARP, some to keep an eye on are engine fasteners (head and main studs, rod bolts, etc.) and wheel studs.

"They are manufactured in-house from heat-treated 8740 chromoly that's rated at



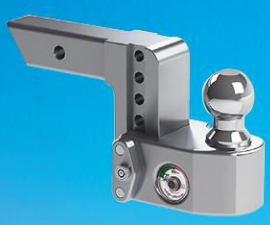
To build a customer base, hit the track and interface with competitors. (Photo courtesy ARP)

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LAP AFTER LAP



Staying competitive in the modern circle track scene requires keeping abreast of the latest technologies. (Photo courtesy Precision Epoxy Products)

190,000 psi tensile strength," Florine notes. "The threads are rolled (not cut) after heat-treat, which provides significantly increased fatigue life, and cadmium plated for extra durability. They are available for press-in or screw-in applications, as well as a Sprint car-style drive pin."

Meanwhile, Ramy points to the Precision Epoxy Set-Up Surface Plate, a tool perfected for and used by leading teams in NASCAR, IMSA, IndyCar, F1 and NHRA, as well as in aerospace and metrology applications.

"The epoxy surface plate is an indispensable setup tool that completes your shop, ensuring all other setup tools function optimally," he explains. "It boasts superior flatness and aesthetics and it won't flex with temperature changes or sag under its own weight."

The company also offers a Steel Plate Mounting Platform for shops requiring a dual-purpose steel plate for setup and fabrication tasks.

PART OF THE COMMUNITY

One thing to know about your racing customers is that while drivers can be fierce competitors on the track, after the checkered flag falls they are one big family, supporting each other and their communities.

This spirit of giving was on display in full force following the recent dual disasters of Hurricanes Helene and Milton. As an example of racing enterprises supporting their neighbors, Ryan Pritt wrote about how Hendrick Motorsports employees came together to help out with Hurricane Helene relief efforts.

"Humanitarian and charitable initiatives are in the DNA of Hendrick Motorsports and Hendrick Automotive Group, thanks to the longtime efforts of Rick Hendrick. From cancer research to disaster relief efforts, the owner, chairman and CEO leads by example," Pritt wrote. "Certainly, it starts at the top, and never has the trickle-down effect been on display more than when teammates throughout the company stepped up to aid victims of Helene."

The racing organization joined Charlotte Motor Speedway, North Wilkesboro Speedway, NASCAR and other teams throughout the sport to gather and send truckloads of vital supplies including water, diapers, clothing and food to those in need.

Meanwhile, Dave Dudley, the organization's vice president of flight operations, directed the company's two helicopters for special flight missions in coordination with Samaritan's Purse, while Brandon Black, Hendrick Motorsports' transportation coordinator, helped organize things on the ground, providing a truck for internal donations and joining caravans taking supplies from donation hubs in Charlotte to North Wilkesboro.

"We're incredibly proud of our aviation team and all of our teammates who have volunteered and donated," says Jeff Andrews, president and general manager. "The impact of Hurricane Helene has been truly devastating, and our neighbors in western North Carolina face immense challenges in rebuilding their homes and communities. It's been inspiring to see the relief initiatives across the NASCAR industry, and we intend to continue supporting these efforts as long as the critical need exists."

Meanwhile, shop owners and aftermarket professionals in need of assistance following the hurricanes can reach out to the Automotive Aftermarket Charitable Foundation (AACF).

For the past 65 years, the AACF has provided support to those within the aftermarket industry and their families during times of hardship and challenges. Forms and more information are available online at aftermarketcharity.org/get-help.

65 YEARS AACF

LET'S WORK TOGETHER

Partnerships are also an important part of circle track racing, as shown by the recent announcement by Bridgestone Americas and Penske Entertainment of a long-term extension to Firestone's role as the exclusive tire supplier of all IndyCar-sanctioned racing.

The agreement will keep Firestone as the sole tire supplier for all NTT INDYCAR SERIES races, the INDY NXT by Firestone developmental series and the annual Indianapolis 500.

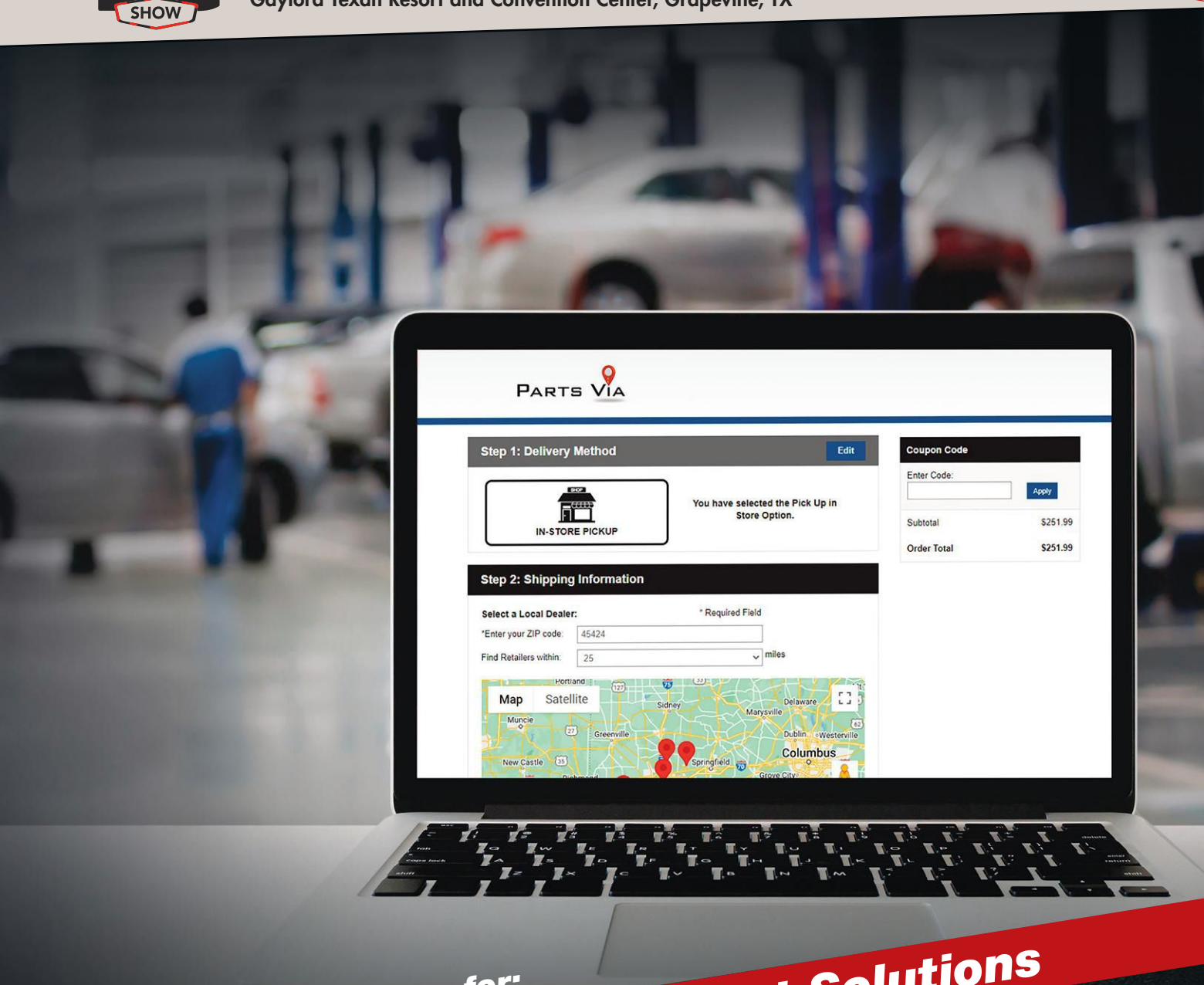
Firestone is currently in its 25th consecutive season as the exclusive tire supplier for the series, and officials say the extension reinforces Bridgestone's ongoing commitment to driving innovation through motorsports. The Firestone brand's open-wheel racing history dates back more than a century.

"At Bridgestone, motorsports are our passion—always have been and always will be. This is particularly true for our Firestone

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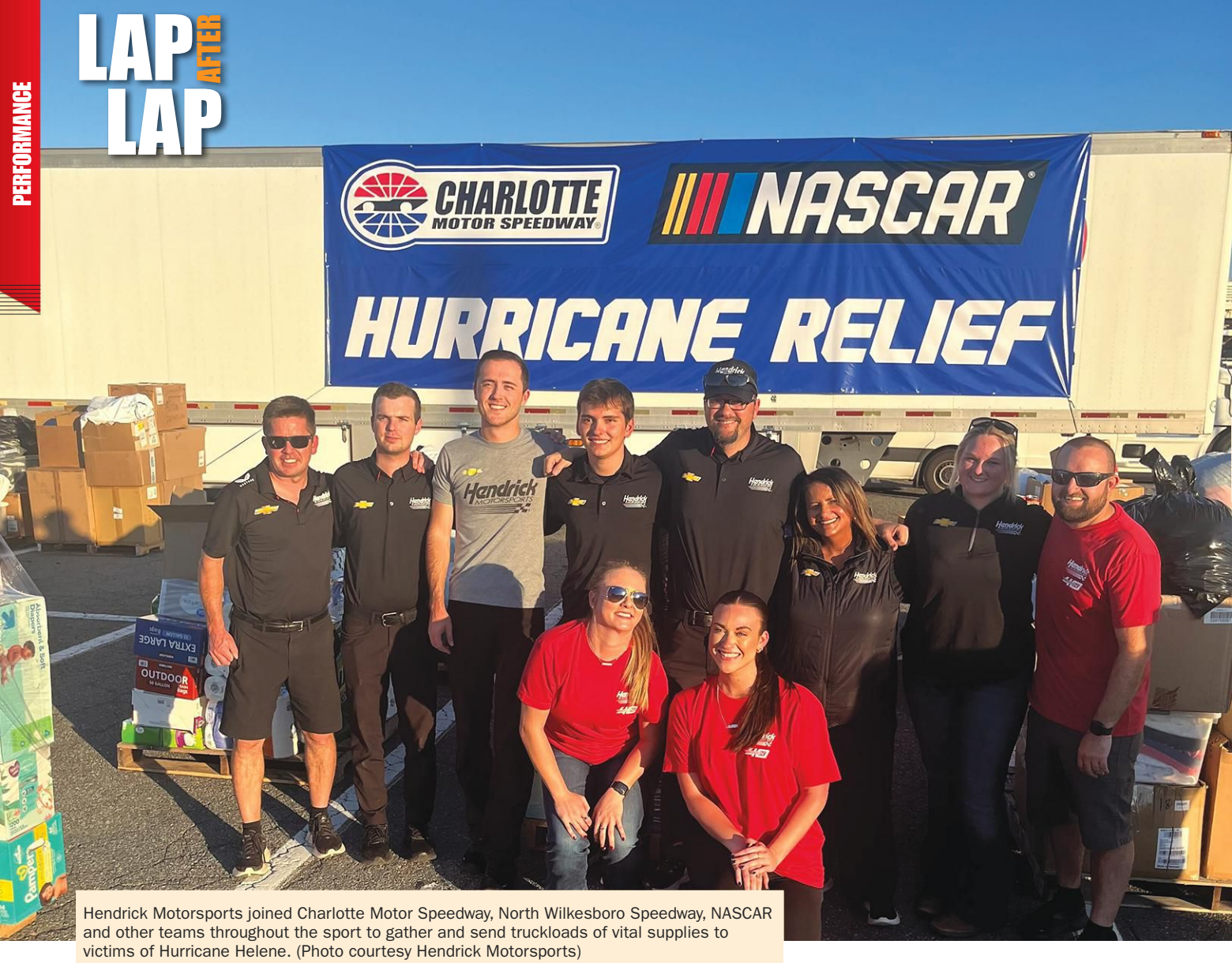
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Hendrick Motorsports joined Charlotte Motor Speedway, North Wilkesboro Speedway, NASCAR and other teams throughout the sport to gather and send truckloads of vital supplies to victims of Hurricane Helene. (Photo courtesy Hendrick Motorsports)

brand, which has been part of world-class racing since winning the first Indy 500 in 1911," says Paolo Ferrari, executive chairman and CEO, Bridgestone Americas. "We believe motorsports are the ultimate challenge for premium performance and a proving ground for advancing in our goals towards sustainable innovation. Our relationship with the NTT INDYCAR SERIES has been a critical part of these efforts, and we are proud to keep driving forward together."

Through the Firestone brand, Bridgestone has worked closely with the NTT INDYCAR SERIES and partners across the paddock to help advance developments in more sustainable racing.

Bridgestone incorporated certain materials made from hard-to-recycle plastics and palm oil waste residue in Indy 500 race tires in 2023 and 2024. The company has also used guayule-derived natural rubber in the sidewall of alternate race tires the past two seasons.

Bridgestone's motorsports initiatives are aligned with the company's long-term sustainability goals, officials add, and demonstrate alignment with IndyCar's efforts to work toward making the sport more sustainable.

"Our relationship with the team at Bridgestone continues to set an industry standard for success and innovation," says Roger Penske, chairman of Penske Corporation. "Firestone has been a foundational partner for our sport, from the very first Indy 500 to now, playing an integral role in the development of the NTT INDYCAR SERIES and its highly competitive racing. We're extremely proud to carry this long-term partnership forward into a very exciting and productive future together."

The long-term extension includes Firestone's role as presenting sponsor and sole tire supplier of the top-tier development series, INDY NXT by Firestone. The brand signed as presenting sponsor in 2023 to help the sport develop the next generation of racing talent and engage new audiences.

The agreement also renews Firestone's status as official partner and tire supplier of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, the largest spectator sporting facility in the world.

PRI SHOW RACES BACK TO INDY

One way to catch up on the latest trends, industry education and new products in the circle track market is to attend the PRI Show, billed as the "world's largest gathering of motorsports professionals."

Set for Dec. 12-14 at the Indiana Convention Center & Lucas Oil Stadium, the PRI Show has offered a chance for peer-to-peer connections since 1988, serving as the industry's platform for innovation, net-



The PRI Show brings thousands of stakeholders from across the world together to drive innovation, fuel business growth and celebrate the passion of racing. (Photo courtesy Performance Racing Industry)

working and business development. From manufacturers, retailers and race teams to track operators, sanctioning bodies, promoters, and media, the event brings together thousands of stakeholders from across the world to drive innovation, fuel business growth and celebrate the passion of racing, according to officials.

"With a legacy dating back to 1988, the PRI Show is more than just an exhibition and more than just a trade show—it's the pulse of the motorsports industry," says Mike Good, PRI president. "Whether you're involved in drag racing, Sprints, stock cars, open wheel or off-road, this event is where business gets done, relationships are built, innovation comes to life and the future of racing is shaped."

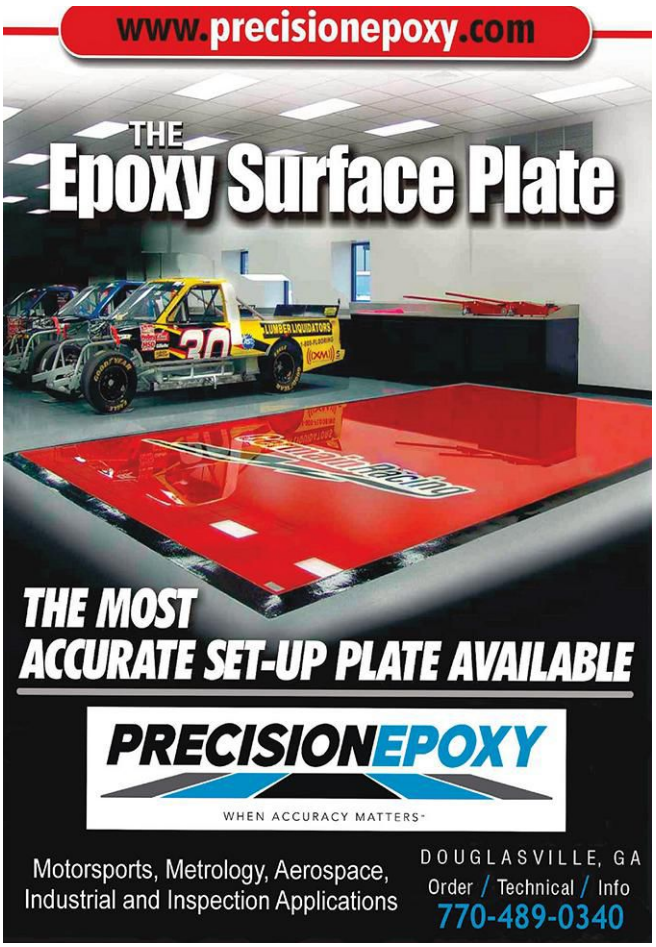
Officials outline the 2024 PRI Show as featuring:

- Over 1,000 exhibitors across more than 1 million gross square feet of exhibit space showcasing the latest in performance products, equipment and services.
- Exclusive educational sessions offering insight on motorsports trends, marketing strategies and technological advancements.
- Networking events designed to connect professionals from every corner of the industry.
- PRI SIM Racing Arena, expanded this year to 40,000 gross square feet, spotlighting 11 sim racing equipment makers and e-racing series.
- Grand Opening Breakfast starring motorsports and action sports icon Travis Pastrana and hosted by Ralph Sheheen.
- PRI Podcast Studio offering top industry podcasters filming and broadcasting.
- Featured Products Showcase highlighting the newest and most popular motorsports products.
- T.O.P.S. HQ (Track Operators, Promoters and Sanctions) presented by myracepass.com, the headquarters for track promoters, operators, and sanctioning body leadership and staff.

Several key racing organizations also hold their events in conjunction with the show each year, including Women in Motorsports North America (WIMNA), Race Track Business Conference (RTBC), International Council of Motorsports Sciences (ICMS), and the American Engine Rebuilder Association (AERA).

"This collective presence highlights the event's role as the central hub for motorsports and underscores the critical role it plays in shaping the future of racing," show officials state.

For more information visit pri2024.com/attend. ***TS***





FLYING HIGH

Regal Roadsters is looking for someone to build on its 43-year legacy.

By Maura Keller. Photos courtesy Chuck Siewert.



Chuck Siewert is looking for someone to carry Regal Roadsters forward, continuing the company's legacy of producing high-quality, handcrafted T-Bird customs and reproductions.

For over 40 years, Charles "Chuck" Siewert, owner of Madison, Wisconsin-based Regal Roadsters, has been building award-winning Ford Thunderbird (T-Bird) reproductions and restomods that he crafts to be "far better than the original."

Initially focusing on the 1955 and '56 styles, he added the venerable '57 model after hundreds of requests to do so. As a result, Siewert has made a name for himself and his business, earning accolades and awards aplenty throughout his extensive career.

Over the years, Regal Roadsters' clients have consisted mostly of T-Bird owners looking to celebrate the classic design of a revered automobile while also seeking modern-day amenities including power rack and pinion steering, power disc brakes and air conditioning.

As part of his offerings, Siewert has developed various chassis configurations from which clients can choose to make their



Siewert has made a name for himself and his business, earning accolades and awards throughout his extensive career.









The shop has developed various chassis configurations from which clients can choose to make their T-Birds truly their own.

T-Birds truly their own. Using 21st century technology, the customized classics range from classy and understated to over the top and with power to spare—from a practical small-block Ford to a fire-breathing, 1,150-hp big-block Chevy engine.

"I have really tried to help my clients realize the exact type of vehicle they are looking for," Siewert says. "If you call me up and say, 'Chuck, I want a pink '57 with a big engine and pink and black leather interior,' I can walk you through the process and proceed with creating the car of your dreams."

FULL CIRCLE

Unsurprisingly, during 43 years in business, Regal Roadsters has captured the attention of many fans throughout the industry for some of its awe-inspiring creations. At one point, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the shop employed 23 people.

"Many of my staff were young and sometimes I felt like a professional babysitter, but I just love to train young minds and teach them this craft and I love to share the success," Siewert says. "In the beginning it was a lot easier to find a fresh, young person and train them to be the best they









Customers want classic designs but with state-of-the-art technology.

could be. It's obviously become more difficult, but if you love it, you stick with it, no matter how frustrating the challenges."

Right before the pandemic hit, Siewert had decided, with the help of his wife and office manager, Joni, to dial back his business to only six employees as he began contemplating retirement and handing the business over to the next generation.

It proved to be proper timing for both of them, especially since Joni had complications from a lung disease and simply could not be exposed to COVID-19.

"I said, 'Honey, we're just going to have to shut down. And you're not going to be managing the showroom or the offices anymore. Let's put the guys off for a while,'" Siewert recalls. "So, we set up an office in one of the bedrooms in our home to handle the office work."

Chuck continued to slowly reduce the square footage of his shop, eventually selling his building and shrinking his company's footprint to about 3,000 square feet.

"Eventually, I made the conscious decision just to come back very lean with my shop," he says.

With a smaller staff, Siewert found he was once again able to focus on the "fun stuff." However, in October 2023, Regal Roadsters' longtime employee Charles "Randy" Steinberg passed away unexpectedly. He had worked as a fabricator for Siewert for over 40 years, nearly since the inception of the business.

"I really built the company brand with Randy," Siewert says. "When you wake up one day and your right-hand man, someone you've worked side-by-side with for over 40 years, isn't there, it really makes you question everything."

READY FOR A HANDOFF

Today, Siewert still loves what he's doing—namely, helping his clients realize their visions of T-Bird ownership—but he recognizes it's time to hand the reins off to the next individual or company who can carry Regal Roadsters (regalroadsters.com) forward and continue the company's legacy of producing high-quality, handcrafted T-Bird customs and reproductions.

After four decades in business, Siewert says he has invested a tremendous amount of money and energy into giving clients what they truly desire. Therefore, Siewert is eager to keep the Regal Roadsters legacy alive.

The ideal candidate to take over, he says, will see the value in taking custom-built, award-winning 1955 through '57 T-Birds to the next level.

"We were doing mods before the original Thunderbird people started thinking about doing restomods," Siewert says. "And that's really cool. It's not about restoring a Thunderbird to what it was originally. People don't want that anymore. They want the classic design but with state-of-the-art technology. That's the heart and soul of our company and that's what I love to do. I love designing and engineering, implementing all the tooling to be able to get a vehicle to a point that it is really an amazing piece of work."

Looking back, Siewert says it's hard to identify a favorite build, as there have been so many during the life of the company. Each project has been unique and well-defined, he says.

Still, he admits to learning many lessons along the way.



Over the years, Regal Roadsters' clients have consisted mostly of T-Bird owners looking to celebrate the classic design of a revered automobile while also seeking modern-day amenities.

"Underpromise and overdeliver," Siewert advises. "I've seen so many associates and businesses fail miserably just because they underestimated what it was going to take. That's one of the biggest mistakes you can make in this industry."

Looking ahead, Siewert is eager to celebrate the longevity of his company, the impact he and his team have made on the lives of many Thunderbird owners and to find the next person who embraces his vision and can bring the Regal Roadsters brand into the future.

"If I had somebody who wanted to buy the business or if I had somebody that was going to come in and take the reins from me, how would I guide them? Basically, I'd split the business structure into two sections—continuing to manufacture reproductions with new fiberglass bodies and custom tube chassis, because we have the tooling and fixtures and everything required to produce the '55 to '57 body of the T-bird for somebody who doesn't have a Thunderbird to start with," Siewert says. "And the other half of the business, which has been very good to us and people really respect, is restoring the originals and creating restomods."

He references a family wanting to upgrade the favorite car of a father or grandfather.

"Maybe someone has their dad's '55 Thunderbird and wants to keep it in the family, or a grandpa's '55 Thunderbird, but they want power rack and pinion, power disc brakes, tilt, air, cruise—all that sort of stuff," he says. "It's about keeping these cars alive, whether the original cars or reproductions. They are amazing vehicles, and it has been so rewarding working on them, creating them and keeping their design alive for so many people to enjoy."

And a testament to longevity.

"One thing that speaks volumes about what we've created is that we are currently the only T-Bird body and chassis manufacturer in the world today," he says proudly. "When we started out there were over a dozen." ***TS***

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By Tony Thacker

PARTS INTO ART

Katie Buttera uses her love of racing as inspiration for AppleGirlArt.com.

At the PRI Show a few years back, many attendees had the same question: "Who built that nuts-and-bolts engine in the Brown and Miller booth?" The answer was Katie Buttera of AppleGirlArt.com.

But wait. Doesn't that Buttera name sound familiar?

If you've ever used a Snap-on Speed Handle, then you will have handled something that Lil' John Buttera had a hand in developing. If you don't recognize the name, you should, because Buttera was one of the most innovative race car and hot rod builders around, creating fast machines for the likes of Don "The Snake" Prudhomme and Tom "Mongoose" McEwen, Don Schumacher, Mickey Thompson and Blue Max.

He even raced a Gurney Eagle as an independent at Indy from 1982 to '87.

John Buttera passed away in 2008 and two years later was inducted into the International Drag Racing Hall of Fame. Then, in March 2018, he was inducted into the Motorsports Hall of Fame of America.

His legacy lives on in the hands of his granddaughter, Katie, a fourth-generation artist focusing on automotive-inspired creations that often include old car parts as part of their structure.

"I grew up around race cars," she says, "and when it came time for college, I



Katie Buttera is a fourth-generation artist focusing on automotive-inspired creations that often include old car parts as part of their structure.



Her business grew during the pandemic with art pieces such as wrench bottle openers, bracelets and rings, keychains and even race car-shaped cookie cutters.

wanted to get my art degree. It took me a while to get there, but about the time I graduated with my Fine Arts Sculpture degree from Indiana University, I started AppleGirlArt.com to fuse everything together."

RACE-INSPIRED ARTWORK

Katie Buttera grew up in San Juan Capistrano, a beautiful beach town between Los Angeles and San Diego. When she was 19 her mom, Leigh Buttera, decided to move to Indiana to be closer to the racing action.

Katie was OK with that, saying, "That's cool, let's go."

"I was getting involved in racing and California is a logistical nightmare. All the good stuff happens back here (in Indiana), so the move made sense for me," she says.

One of the first things she did after landing in the Midwest was teach herself to weld.

"I was already making some jewelry before I left California, but I wanted to make it better and make a business out of it. I figured I could make stuff referencing my granddad's work, which is often tagged 'Lil' John's Stuff.' I didn't want to directly reference John's work or use his name for social clout, but as the old saying goes, 'The apple doesn't fall far from the tree.' Hence the name AppleGirlArt.com—it's a funny story to tell."

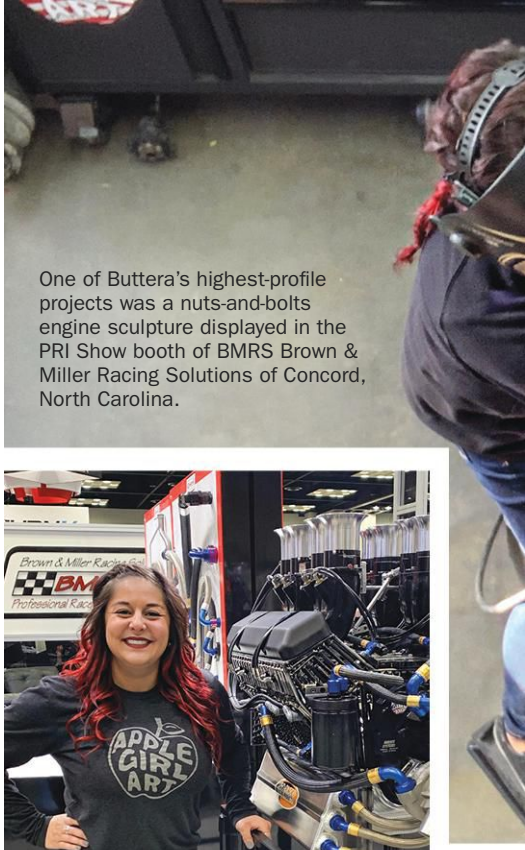
Buttera had been creating art pieces all through school and when she graduated in 2018, she decided to take a year to see if it could turn into a career.

"If I proved to myself that I could do this then I would go full-blown," she says. "If I couldn't make it, I would get a job. That didn't happen. I was in at the deep end. That first year was crazy and work hasn't slowed down since."

Buttera is friends with drag racer Krista Baldwin, the daughter of the late Bobby

PARTS INTO ART

After creating art pieces throughout her school years, Buttera learned how to weld and gave herself a year to turn her art into a career.



One of Buttera's highest-profile projects was a nuts-and-bolts engine sculpture displayed in the PRI Show booth of BMRS Brown & Miller Racing Solutions of Concord, North Carolina.

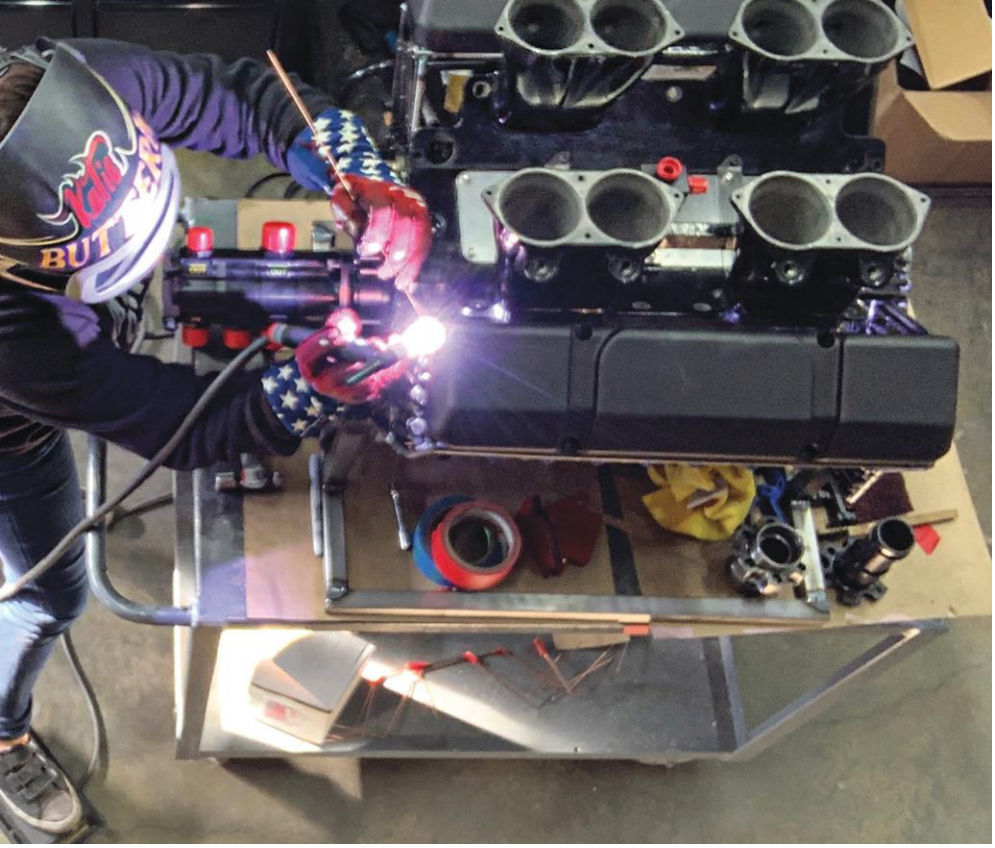
The granddaughter of hall-of-fame racer and builder John Buttera, Katie's business got off the ground selling jewelry and other pieces at the track.

Baldwin and granddaughter of drag racing legend Chris "The Greek" Karamesines. When Buttera went racing with her, she started selling her work out of a backpack.

"It just took off," Buttera says. "My jewelry sold and then people started messaging me to deliver orders to the track. There was no big moment, but it just grew—and quickly."

About that time, she also befriended Tom Patsis of ColdHardArt.com. Another artist who uses discarded race parts as inspiration, Patsis graduated from the University of Northwestern Ohio after studying automotive high performance, welding and alternate fuels, and moved to Indianapolis to work for Don Schumacher Racing (DSR) on the Pro Stock Motorcycle teams of Angelle Sampey, Antron Brown, Chip Ellis, Craig Treble and Matt Smith.

Patsis worked on the Pro Stock team for six years before switching to the fabrica-



tion shop at DSR. ColdHardArt.com is his creative outlet.

Buttera went to Patsis and said, "I have no desire to compete with you. I want to make girly stuff, jewelry and decor. I have no desire to be the trophy kingpin. I'd like to work together."

PIECING IT TOGETHER

One day Patsis called Buttera and said he had a project for the hose and fitting company BMRS Brown & Miller Racing Solutions in Concord, North Carolina.

"They need a display; I don't have the time, so you're going to do it. You have two weeks," Buttera recalls Patsis saying. "I had never made anything that big in 3D before. But Tom said, 'You can do it.' I borrowed an engine on a stand, began to measure and gathered parts. BMRS plumbed it and I delivered it to the PRI Show on time and it was a huge hit. That was a big moment and if there was a turning point, that was it."

Amazingly, things didn't slow down for Buttera through the COVID-19 pandemic, and she found herself putting in full days making random stuff such as wrench bottle openers, bracelets and rings, keychains and even race car-shaped cookie cutters.

Her creativity using discarded race car parts seems to know no bounds.

"I have even made jewelry and lamps using injector parts from Dan Gurney's 'Alligator' and, for the 2024 Winternationals, I got to design and make some special snowflake medallion trophies," she reports.

When she's not fabbing art in her Indianapolis shop, Buttera can most often be found at the drag races working the hectic schedule of Baldwin's DSR Top Fuel canopy dragster.

"Our grandparents were tight friends," said Buttera, "so we were destined to be besties since we grew up in the stands at Pomona. When Krista went for her alcohol license, I told her I would be there for her, and I think I have only missed two races in 10 years. I'm her backup girl and typically we race eight to 10 times a year—while we look for the big money. We travel the world together and look out for each other. That's what friends are for."

In a world of mass-produced plasticity, Buttera's art and enthusiasm for what she does is infectious and, besides, she's recycling all that racing junk we burn up. What's not to like? ***TS***



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

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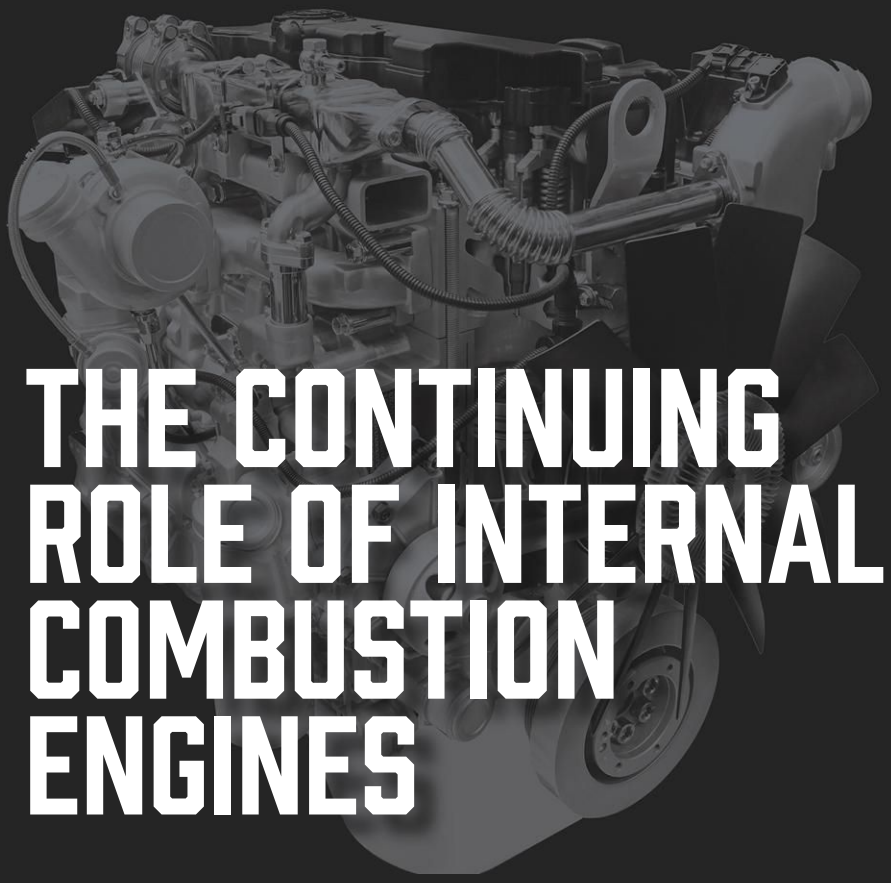


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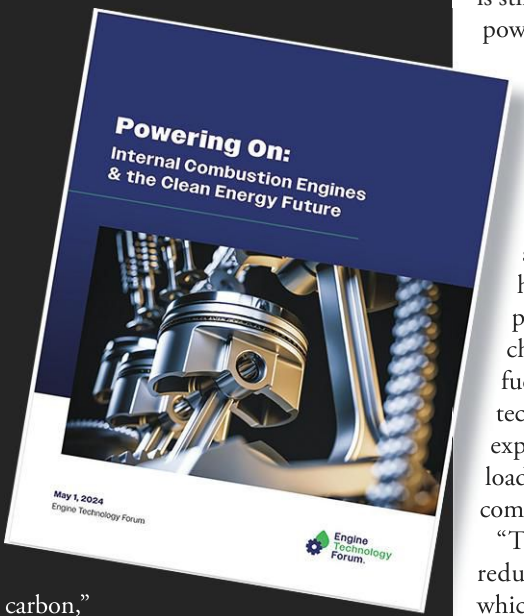
THE CONTINUING ROLE OF INTERNAL COMBUSTION ENGINES

Arguments supporting ICE's staying power. ///// **By Jef White**

Internal combustion engines (ICE) are the standard, and often the only, power option in hundreds of applications serving every corner of the globe.

The magnitude of the global reliance on ICEs and the challenges of transitioning to different energy systems strongly suggest a continued role for traditional engines many decades into the future, even as new fuels and technologies emerge, according to the Engine Technology Forum's (ETF) recent whitepaper "Powering On: Internal Combustion Engines & the Clean Energy Future."

"Our global economy relies almost solely on internal combustion engines for all of its power and mobility needs. All decarbonization technologies that are being implemented, or considered, face various limits and barriers. ICEs are uniquely positioned for the future, leveraging today's fossil fuel-based economy and adapting to tomorrow's more sustainable one that relies on renewable fuels and dramatically reduced carbon," says Allen Schaeffer, ETF's executive director.



According to the report, ICEs will continue to thrive and dominate most sectors of the economy for years to come for three reasons:

- Near sole reliance on ICE and its supporting infrastructure across wide sectors of the global economy, for which there is currently no suitable alternative.
- Continuous improvements in efficiency and lower emissions, as well as significant opportunities for using lower-carbon fuels that position it to compete with emerging alternatives.
- Delays and uncertainties due to funding support, infrastructure and market acceptance, as well as other factors inherent in introducing new fuels and energy systems.

"We will need an increasingly diversified energy and technology portfolio that embraces advanced internal combustion engines with a greater reliance on low-carbon renewable liquid and gaseous fuels and hydrogen," Schaeffer states.

The report projects ICEs to not only have staying power in the marketplace, but to continue to grow for another decade or more. Various market forecasts predict combined annual growth rates for internal combustion engines of as much as 9% from 2023-30.

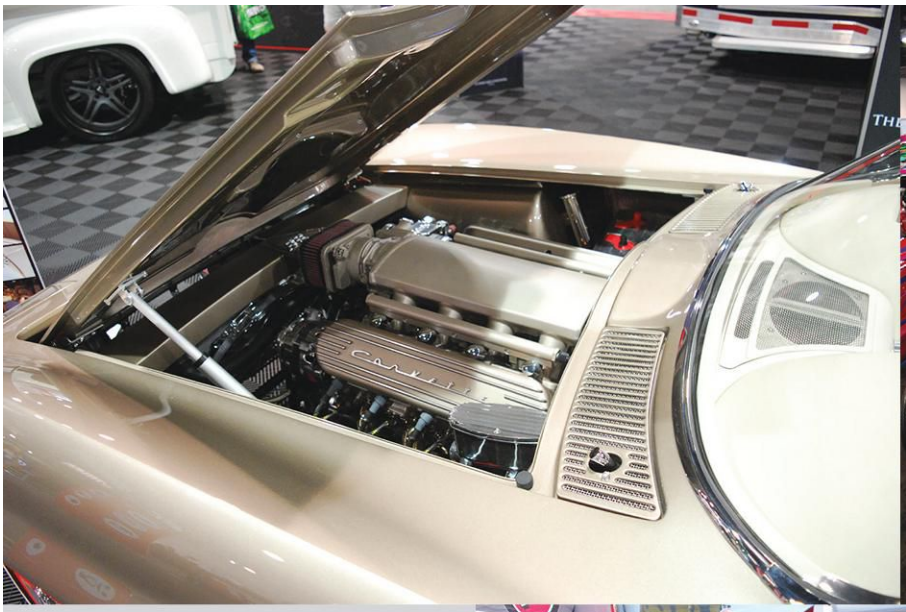
Though increasingly stringent future standards are designed to accelerate the introduction of zero-emissions vehicles, it is still projected that ICE technology will power one-third to one-half of the new vehicle fleet in 2032.

For the largest commercial vehicles, ICE technology is predicted to be the power source for 75% of new vehicles.

The paper provides a comprehensive look at critical ICE technology, how it is evolving and how it competes with emerging alternatives. Major challenges are discussed, electric and fuel cell alternatives are identified, and technical, policy and market issues are explored. It can be viewed and downloaded at enginetechforum.org/internal-combustion-engine-primer.

"There is no single best solution to reduce carbon emissions in all sectors, which is why we must embrace all steps toward reducing carbon," Schaeffer says. "Internal combustion engines are clearly part of the solution."

(left) A new whitepaper from Engine Technology Forum explores the future of internal combustion engines. (Photo courtesy enginetechforum.org)





In August, the Specialty Equipment Market Association (SEMA) requested a review of the lawfulness of the EPA's decision to grant California the authority to limit the sale of internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles.



Various market forecasts predict combined annual growth rates for internal combustion engines of as much as 9% from 2023-30.

OPPOSING CALIFORNIA'S ICE VEHICLE BAN

One organization taking a proactive approach to ICE preservation is the Specialty Equipment Market Association and Performance Racing Inc. (SEMA), which on Aug. 7 filed with the U.S. Supreme Court an amicus brief in the case of Diamond Alternative Energy LLC v. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

The brief outlines the association's support for a review of the lawfulness of the EPA's decision to grant California the authority to limit the sale of internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles.

(Generative AI defines an amicus brief as a legal document submitted to a court by a person or organization that is not directly involved in a case. The brief can include legal arguments, recommendations or advice, or demonstrate how the court's decision might impact people outside of the case, whether socially, politically, legally or economically.)

Using its EPA waiver, California—and, by extension, the 16 states that opt into California's regulations—seeks to adopt Advanced Clean Car II regulations that would limit the sales of ICE vehicles from model years 2017 through 2025, culminating with a complete ban on the sale of ICE vehicles by 2035.

Requesting that the court grant review, SEMA contends that California's nontechnology-neutral decision to limit sales of ICE vehicles will have a "devastating" impact on the automotive aftermarket industry and the association's 7,000 members. Studies show the automotive aftermarket brings $337 billion in annual economic impact to the U.S. economy and supports 1.3 million jobs nationally.

"If granted, the ICE waiver will kill, rather than foster, innovation that can help produce cleaner, safer automobiles," SEMA argues, adding that the fallout would also touch many associated industries including motorsports, vehicle restoration and automotive technology, "each of which make immeasurable contributions to the nation from an innovation and cultural standpoint."

"California has already declared the winner of the race and, by extension, begins to foreclose on the innovations and unique contributions to cleaner vehicles and parts that the aftermarket for years has been providing," SEMA states. "The question presented is important not just to the specialty equipment aftermarket, but to consumers and the public at large who seek out these inventive products."

As an organization, SEMA stands as technology-neutral, adding that the specialty aftermarket has a history of leading the way on alternative-fuel innovations by replacing older engine technologies with newer, cleaner versions and converting older ICE vehicles to new electric or hydrogen-powered vehicles.

"The industry represents the tip of the spear for delivering to consumers new automotive fuel and propulsion solutions," it states. ***TS***

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BORLA Performance Industries, Johnson City, Tennessee, presents its Cat-Back Exhaust System for 2024 Ford Mustang Dark Horse models that improves horsepower and torque. System 140965CFBA features active exhaust valves and delivers an aggressive ATAK sound without any drone or resonance inside the vehicle. The system is made from T-304 stainless steel with carbon fiber tips, featuring all-welded construction for durability and long life.



Complete Shock Assemblies

KYB, Greenwood, Indiana, presents its new Complete Shock Assemblies, designed to help service professionals reduce installation times and simplify ordering while providing OE-replacement quality. Soon to be available for a wide range of vehicles that use rear shock mount technology, the shock assembly units come with shock, mount and boot already installed. The initial release includes several high-VIO late-model vehicles.

Camaro ZL-1/Cadillac CTS-V Clutch Kits

Advanced Clutch Technology (ACT), Lancaster, California, presents a full range of 10.5-inch Mod-Twin Style Clutch Kits for 2012-15 Camaro ZL-1 and 2009-15 Cadillac CTS-V (LSA) models. The durable, customer-serviceable, long-lasting clutches offer high torque capacity without the trade-offs often associated with a twin-disc clutch. Kits feature a modular hub system, providing versatility and customization options of spring or solid hubs and Street or 6-Puck race discs. The kits are engineered to handle up to 1,496 pound-feet of torque at the engine.





Fox Body Mustang IRS System

Ridetech, Jasper, Indiana, presents its Independent Rear Suspension System for 1979-93 Fox Body Mustangs, designed to deliver premium ride quality. The 100% bolt-in IRS kit utilizes 2015-24 Mustang driveline components to deliver strength, OE reliability and modern performance. Designed to accept an S550 center section, the system also uses shortened S550 axles (sold separately) and OEM S550 hubs. Tubular upper and lower A-arm construction keep weight down.



Jeep Axle Swap Kits

Artec Industries, North Salt Lake, Utah, in partnership with **Dana/Spicer**, presents its new UD80 APEX Rear Axle Swap Kits for Jeep Wrangler and Gladiator models. The patented APEX Truss system is designed to offer a combination of strength, lightness and ease of installation. With a unique peaked top design, it improves rigidity while reducing weight and weld seams, making installation faster and more straightforward. The kits are crafted in the USA from high-quality 1/4- and 3/16-inch mild steel and accommodate factory component locations.

Performance Brake Kits & Rotors

Baer Brakes, Bowling Green, Kentucky, a **Holley Performance Brand**, presents its Baer BIG Claw Performance Brake Kits and Baer Claw Rotors. Engineered to match today's trends of larger-diameter wheels and tires and heavier vehicles, the platform delivers enhanced braking capability and shorter stopping distances in an easy-to-install, packaged kit format. Popular vehicle fitments include the Ford F-150, Ford Bronco, Ram trucks, Jeep JL/JT models, Chevrolet Silverado 1500 and Chevrolet Suburban.



New 4x4 K5 Blazer 4-Link Chassis



Total Cost Involved Engineering (TCI), Ontario, California, introduces its new 1969-72 4x4 K5 Blazer Pro1 4-link chassis. On- and off-road-capable, the setup is strong and multifunctional, built as a direct replacement for a worn or rusted K5 Blazer or Jimmy chassis with the potential to use up to 37-inch-tall tires with full turning radius, travel and articulation. The new chassis design is built around late-model LS/LT engine/transmission platforms using a driver-side output Atlas Transfer Case.



BMW Fuel Pump Modules

DeatschWerks, Oklahoma City, presents its DW400 Pump Module for BMW F2x, F3x and F87 applications. The 415-lph drop-in performance pump module flows 80% more fuel than the factory system, ensuring optimal performance. The module is a complete factory replacement and retains all OEM functionalities.



Keyless Ignition Kit

Flaming River, Berea, Ohio, presents its iKey next-generation keyless ignition kit. The advanced RFDI keyless system replicates the complete keyless operation found on today's most advanced luxury vehicles, combining OE-quality hands-free keyless access, keyless security and keyless ignition into one system. The company's tilt steering column integrates the pushbutton needed to communicate with the system to start the vehicle.

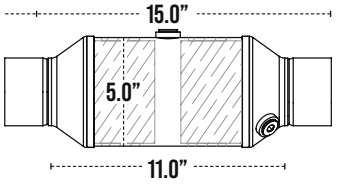


Half-Ton GM Brakes

SSBC, Elma, New York, presents its Brawler LT Brakes for 2007-19 GM 1/2-ton pickups with external parking brake. The six-piston, U.S.-made calipers increase stopping power and feature an aircraft-grade aluminum body. Designed to fit OE wheels and rotors, they include dual square-cut custom seals and are available in red or black powder-coat or clear anodized finishes.

Catalytic Converters





Street Series, Benicia, California, presents its R-CAT Series 2 EPA-Compliant Catalytic Converters. Featuring a 5.0-inch round body and 15-inch length, the Series 2 line is offered in 2.0-, 2.25-, 2.5- and 3.0-inch diameters. Made in the USA, the converters include a 400-cell ceramic substrate with precision-placed rear and center section O2 sensor ports to optimize exhaust gas treatment and effectively reduce harmful pollutants while enhancing engine efficiency. Features include a dual substrate design and fully welded necks.



Nissan VR30 Piston Kit

MAHLE Motorsport, Fletcher, North Carolina, presents a POWERPAK Piston Kit for Nissan VR30 applications, designed specifically for the extreme loads of today's highly boosted direct-injected engines. The pistons are forged from 2618 alloy and deliver a 10.3:1 compression ratio. Each POWERPAK kit comes complete with nitrided steel 1.2mm top ring, 1.2mm second ring and 2.8mm oil ring set, precision CNC-machined pin bores, and a heavy-duty wrist pin and locks. The pistons are dual coated with phosphate and MAHLE's GRAFAL skirt coating. ***TS***



It only takes a few add-on accessories to change the look, feel and/or ride of a crossover vehicle. (Photo courtesy Küat)

In a time when everyone seemingly has a side hustle, crossover vehicles are the automotive market's multitasking masters.

Appealing to everyone from young families to outdoor enthusiasts to dog lovers and more, CUVs have the ambition of their truck and SUV big brothers, just with a smaller footprint.

Every day, more and more aftermarket shops are spotting the potential in serving these crossover customers. Focusing on everything from suspension, wheel and tire upgrades to interior enhancements, cargo carrying solutions and even mild body modifications, CUV drivers are looking for ways to maximize their potential.

For shops eyeing the crossover market, product manufacturers are happy to make introductions, offering market insights, sales tips and information on hot new products.

STARTING OUT

Everywhere you look, it seems the CUV market is booming.

"Vehicles like the Subaru Outback, For-

Restyling
AFTERMARKET ACCESSORIES

Towing & Hauling p. 40 | Final Sale p. 46 | Products p. 48 | EV Roundup p. 50



CROSSOVER APPEAL

The versatility of today's CUVs make them ideal platforms for accessorization.

By Jef White

ester and Crosstrek (Wilderness editions) are offered with more off-road capabilities straight from the factory," says John Gray, vice president exhaust and exterior products for aFe POWER. "Features like AWD, extra ground clearance, off-road suspension and heavy-duty roof racks allow the average person a more capable vehicle. This allows the aftermarket to develop and offer performance and accessory products to make them even more capable and enjoyable to drive. This also drives demand for aftermarket products for the base-model vehicles."

In particular, crossovers have shown to be a comfortable fit for those just starting their outdoor adventures.

"They've become more popular as the years have gone by," says Chris Walls, product development coordinator for Body Armor 4x4/The Wheel Group. "They are great entry-level platforms for adventure seekers and outdoorsmen alike. Due in part to economic changes, CUV platforms offer great value and capability."

They can also be strong second options for families sticking to a budget.

CROSSOVER APPEAL



Today's crossovers are offered with more off-road capabilities straight from the factory, making them an ideal platform for accessorization. (Photo courtesy aFe POWER)

CUV PRODUCTS

■ **HOT PRODUCTS:** Terra Guard Off-Road Sliders for Subaru Outback
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:** Patent-pending rock sliders co-designed from patent-pending Terra Guard Trail Steps for the same vehicle platform using heavy-gauge tubular steel; increased ground clearance; full rocker and door panel protection; act as a step to reach rooftop gear.

aFe POWER
John Gray
VP Exhaust & Exterior Products

■ **HOT PRODUCT:** HiLine Series Front Bumper for Subaru Crosstrek
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:** Flat drum-style, 5,500-pound winch compatibility; optional bull bar; light integration; recovery points.

Body Armor 4x4/The Wheel Group
Chris Walls
Product Development Coordinator

■ **HOT PRODUCT:** The Küat Piston Pro X
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:** E-bike-rated bike rack conceived for road trips, family group rides and backcountry expeditions; integrated LED taillights for enhanced rear visibility and on-road safety; Kashima-coated pistons.

Küat
Craig Metcalf
Automotive Manager

■ **HOT PRODUCTS:**
X-Act Contour Floor Liners
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:** Made in the USA; manufactured using a rubberized material that allows the liner to be soft underfoot and provide a comfortable ride while being durable; raised ribs throughout to keep feet above the mess; Stay-Put Cleats; raised edge near the door.

RealTruck/Husky Liners
Joey Scelza
Regional Sales Manager

■ **HOT PRODUCT:** SmartTV Seatback Rear Entertainment System
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Streaming content through favorite apps; plays old DVD movies; app-based remote control allows parents to fully control the system monitors for rear seat passengers that are too young to operate the system themselves.

VOXX Electronics Corp.
Joe Caltabiano
Vice President Vehicle Entertainment

"Consumers are looking for less-expensive SUV-type vehicles in a volatile economic market where standard SUVs are too expensive," says Joe Caltabiano, vice president vehicle entertainment for VOXX Electronics Corp.

Still, when it comes to heading out on long weekends, they are more than up for the challenge.

"We are seeing plenty of crossover vehicles enter the market due to their capability and capacity. These vehicles have given consumers the confidence to have a vehicle that they can take their kids to school in and later hit a trail to have a picnic in the mountains," says Joey Scelza, regional sales manager for RealTruck/Husky Liners. "Crossovers are also gaining popularity due to the capacity of the vehicles—while they look small and not practical, the interiors offer a plethora of storage options for everything from backpacks and gym bags to strollers. The ability of these vehicles to travel seamlessly from different terrains while providing great options to accessorize to your personal lifestyle makes the crossover more desirable to a consumer."

Because everyone seems to have one these days, selling upgrades to stand out in a crowd is a popular approach, says Craig Metcalf, automotive manager for Küat.

"It only takes a few exterior accessories to change the whole look, feel and ride of the vehicle," he notes.

GEAR UP

When it comes to most people's



CUV platforms offer value and capability for new and experienced accessorizers. (Photo courtesy bodyarmor4x4.com)

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LIPPERT

CROSSOVER APPEAL

SUBARU EARNS LEAVE NO TRACE CORPORATE EXCELLENCE AWARD

Outdoor protection nonprofit Leave No Trace recently honored Subaru of America Inc. with its 2024 Corporate Excellence Award for the carmaker's work as a leader in corporate responsibility.

Subaru representatives were presented with the Corporate Excellence Award during the Leave No Trace Global Summit, held in Boulder, Colorado. The award honors individuals, agencies, businesses and organizations dedicated to "furthering the Leave No Trace mission, going above and beyond for the Leave No Trace movement and inspiring others to do the same."

"At Subaru, our commitment to environmental sustainability and conservation remains steadfast, and we're proud to have been Leave No Trace's largest and longest-running corporate partner for the past 25 years," says Alan Bethke, senior vice president of marketing, Subaru of America Inc. "Developing a strong connection with the country's leading environmental education program has helped advance access to environmental resources and education for 240 million outdoor enthusiasts of all ages and backgrounds, ultimately benefiting the world for future generations."

Since 1999, Subaru/Leave No Trace education teams have served as the nonprofit's mobile education arm. They are comprised of paired individuals who live and work on the road, delivering cutting-edge educational programs from coast to coast to children and adults of all experience levels and ages, according to company officials.



Leave No Trace recently honored Subaru of America Inc. with its 2024 Corporate Excellence Award. Pictured from left: Dave Adams, regional vice president for the western region of Subaru of America; Dana Watts, executive director of Leave No Trace; and Kirsten Anderson, brand partnerships and experiential marketing specialist with Subaru of America Inc. (Photo courtesy Leave No Trace)

"This Subaru-sponsored program has inspired widespread stewardship of our shared public lands," says Dana Watts, executive director, Leave No Trace. "I'm so proud of what this partnership has accomplished, and I'm thrilled to acknowledge their enduring support."

typical adventure use, CUVs more than fit the bill.

"While crossover vehicles may not be as off-road-capable as some SUVs and trucks, they can meet the demands of most consumers," Gray says. "Not everyone needs a Jeep or truck to enjoy off-road adventures."

Product manufacturers were quick to spot the "soft-roading" trend, creating new parts and accessory lines that match the bodylines and smaller profiles of today's CUVs.

"Some people mistakenly believe that there are not many accessory options for the crossover community. We manufacture plenty of direct-fit or vehicle-specific accessories for crossovers, as well as universal products," says Scelza. "Accessorizing is not just for fun, it's for your lifestyle."

Crossover accessories may be a little less prominent in the market currently, leading to hesitancy due to unfamiliarity. But suppliers say not to worry.

"A big misconception is parts installations being more complicated than a truck or SUV part install," notes Walls. "Most truck and SUV product installations, even on some of the most popular models such as Toyota 4Runners and Tacomas, for example, require trimming and careful measurements on body panels, just the same as CUVs."

Overall, CUVs fit the same profile as any other vehicle segment—mainly, uninspired factory offerings often leave room for aftermarket upgrades.

"Not all vehicles, including crossovers, come fully loaded with all the bells and whistles, so there is always a product to attach a product to," Caltabiano observes.

EVERYONE WELCOME

As mentioned earlier, some crossover owners may be taking their first steps into the world of automotive accessorization. Walls from Body Armor 4x4/The Wheel Group advises the industry to welcome these new customers with patience and open arms.

"Be as open-minded as possible to their requests and questions. Adapt as much as possible to the trends of CUV customers and enthusiasts," he recommends. "Again, CUVs are great on value and a great starter platform. If these customers are coming to you with needs and ideas for their CUVs and love



Displayed at the 2023 SEMA Show, Nissan's "Project Rugged Rogue" reimagined the crossover SUV for family adventures with wheel, tire and suspension upgrades, body styling and a variety of racks and guards. (Photo courtesy Nissan)



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CROSSOVER APPEAL

VEHICLES STAYING ON THE ROAD LONGER

Recent research by the Specialty Equipment Market Association (SEMA) shows that vehicles are staying on the road longer.

Of the more than 289 million vehicles on the road, the average U.S. vehicle age is now at 12.6 years, its highest number in over a decade. Passenger cars are now an average of 14 years old (up from 13.6), while light trucks rose slightly to 11.9, from 11.8.

One reason for the extended ownership trend is that carmakers have been building increasingly dependable vehicles over the past two decades. SEMA research shows that since 2003, vehicles have exhibited fewer problems, highlighting a growing reliability that is a boon to consumers and may trigger a greater desire to accessorize.

Of those new cars, trucks, SUVs and CUVs, fewer are entry-level vehicles. While new vehicle inventory in 2024 reached a three-and-a-half-year high, small cars and other entry-level vehicles (those priced below $20,000) make up just 0.7% of the market, compared with 7% five years ago.

Overall, the nation's fleet of vehicles is growing. The past year saw the net addition of 3 million more vehicles to the roads, with crossovers (72.7 million) closing the gap with passenger cars (89.2 million) as the dominant segment of the entire fleet.

However, compared to 10 years ago, vehicle registrations skew more heavily toward light trucks than cars.

Meanwhile, the specialty equipment aftermarket is expected to keep growing. Specialty equipment retail sales in 2023 surpassed $52.3 billion and are forecasted to grow to more than $57 billion by 2026.

Find more in the SEMA Vehicles Lifecycle Report, available online at sema.org/research.



This past year saw the net addition of 3 million more vehicles to U.S roads, with crossovers (72.7 million) closing the gap on passenger cars (89.2 million) as the dominant segment.



When it comes to getting out and getting dirty, CUVs are more than up for the challenge. (Photo courtesy RealTruck/Husky Liners)



Show customers what they can add that they do not already have in their vehicles. (Photo courtesy VOXX Electronics)

what they do, they will potentially be customers for life. They may trade in for a new truck or SUV platform or they may keep the CUV for their entire time exploring the wilderness. Either way, they will come back to you for help to keep their vehicles up to date on the trail. A customer for life is the best customer to keep happy. We need to keep finding even more customers like this to keep growing."

Whether on your website, through showroom displays or on upfitted shop vehicles, find ways to introduce aftermarket accessorization to this driver base.

"Show customers what they can add that they do not already have in their vehicle," says Caltabiano from VOXX Electronics.

If they still need convincing, Metcalf from Küat suggests appealing to their inner adventurer.

"My advice is to 'sell experiences' and let customers know what is possible and achievable with only a few accessories," he says.

In some areas, you may have to be proactive in the search for crossover customers, notes Scelza from RealTruck/Husky Liners. But the effort is worth it, he believes.

"Diversify any marketing you are doing. Whether it's social media, radio or TV, the consumer needs to know that 'Joe's Truck Shop' doesn't just specialize in trucks," he explains. "Continue to ask your customers about their family members and what they drive to get them into the shop for accessories. Provide great service to gain more customers—for every single great interaction the customer tells 10 people; for every single bad interaction, they tell 100. Again, continue to push the narrative that you aren't just a truck shop and that you service every vehicle platform."

Joining the market is as simple as meeting customers where they are most often found.

"Educate your shop on knowing what the CUV owner's interests are," says Gray from aFe POWER. "Network your business through local CUV dealerships. Also, supporting CUV car clubs and groups will improve awareness and help acquire new customers." ***TS***

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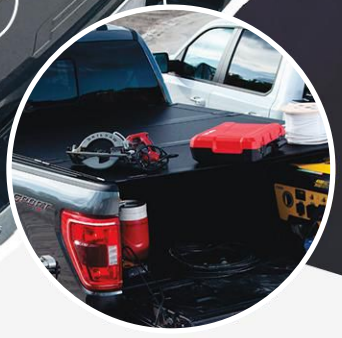
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Customers look to professional shops for recommendations regarding quality and features. (Photo courtesy GEN-Y Hitch)

Yes! No! THE TOWING AFTERMARKET

Understanding what it takes to help customers hitch up & go. ////////////By Jef White

The right products, systems and setups are vital to a successful towing experience, meaning many customers turn to professional shops for answers and solutions.

But sometimes, retailers and installers have questions of their own, including what it takes to successfully serve the growing towing aftermarket. To help, industry suppliers outline some common misconceptions and best practices for serving those looking to hitch up and go—and highlight some hot products to keep an eye on as well.

IS THE TOWING MARKET GROWING?

Yes! A segment of the population will always be in the market for towing-related accessories and service. More than ever, that group includes outdoor enthusiasts.

"We have seen an increase in new families towing and hauling recreational vehicles and toys for weekend fun," says Melanie Hellwig-White, CEO of Hellwig Products. "Towing things like campers, boats and flatbeds can be intimidating for first-timers. The team at Hellwig Products and auto shops have a unique opportunity to capture a new audience and help equip them for a safe ride to their next adventure."

DO NEW VEHICLE DESIGNS AFFECT THE TOWING AFTERMARKET?

Yes! Outdoor recreation has become more popular since the pandemic. Carmakers are meeting demand through more technically advanced and capable vehicles. Aftermarket towing product manufacturers are adapting to keep pace.

"We've seen a shift in vehicle suspension design from leading manufacturers, increasing the demand for aftermarket suspension solutions," says Justin Coulter, director of sales for SuperSprings International. "More people are camping with lighter towables and models like the Ford F-150 continue to dominate the light-truck market, making it ideal for newcomers to recreational towing."

Tim Watts, vice president of sales for Rough Country, sees many towing jobs being performed by half-ton and light-duty vehicles.

"There are more people towing medium to moderate loads today and, when set up correctly, most half-ton vehicles are capable and up to the task," he says, adding shops will want to "make sure you are asking the customer what their towing needs are and make sure that the truck is set up and equipped with the right products to do the job."



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TOWING PRODUCTS

HOT PRODUCT:
Towtal View Wireless HD Camera
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Towable aftermarket camera solution; quick-connect system; IP68 waterproof rated; completely wireless with the use of a suction cup mount with a 5-plus-hour lithium-ion battery; interface broadcasts its own Wi-Fi network with over 100 feet of range.

Air Lift Company
Laurel Brown
National Dealer Services Manager

HOT PRODUCT:
Patented Trailer Hitch
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Fast, easy way to swap to any size ball or step feature; utilizes a proprietary safety locking spring pin that allows it to be switched instantly in less than 3 seconds; made from 300 series stainless steel and aircraft aluminum billet material; self-aligning pins.

Bradley L. Pennington Hitch Co.
Brad Pennington
Owner

HOT PRODUCT:
BOSS Adjustable Drop Hitch
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Improves control and safety for towing any bumper-style trailer, whether standard couplers or pintle style; proprietary TORSION-FLEX cushioning technology; offers more than 20 inches of drop and rise; towing capacities from 10,000-32,000 pounds.

GEN-Y Hitch
Luke Stump
Director of Wholesale

HOT PRODUCTS: Helper Spring Kits for Chevy Silverado/GMC Sierra
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Designed to sit on top of the rear leaf springs and work in conjunction with the stock spring pack to effectively increase the level load rating up to the truck's gross vehicle weight rating; adjustable and easy to install; made in the USA.

Hellwig Products
Melanie Hellwig-White
CEO

HOT PRODUCTS: Rear Air Spring Kits
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Airbags incorporate a robust design featuring heavy-duty, double-convoluted construction with an internal bump stop and standard aluminum bead plates; available as standalone units, paired with a compressor, or compressor controlled via a wireless remote or mobile app.

Rough Country
Tim Watts
VP Sales

HOT PRODUCT: SumoSpring Rebel
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Suspension enhancement system featuring two-piece construction that allows unrestricted wheel travel for uneven terrain and heavy loads; made from durable microcellular polyurethane; provides progressive load-leveling support; reduces rear end sag.

SuperSprings International
Justin Coulter
Director of Sales

HOT PRODUCTS:
Custom-Designed Receiver Hitches
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Made in Pender, Nebraska; premium textured black powder-coat over e-coat is designed to shield against rust and corrosion; built to rigorous SAE J684 standards.

Blue Ox
Chad Cole
Director of Automotive Sales



Technology in the towing aftermarket continues to evolve. (Photo courtesy Air Lift Company)

CAN AFTERMARKET TOWING PRODUCTS BE CONSIDERED "HIGH-TECH?"

YES! Laurel Brown, national dealer services manager for Air Lift Company, has seen technology in the towing aftermarket continue to evolve at an ever-increasing speed, pointing to the company's wireless towing cameras and wireless compressor kits as examples.

"As consumers become more comfortable relying on their cellphones and leveraging smartphone technology, we have been able to add more features into our products and provide more value in a smaller footprint," she explains.

CAN AFTERMARKET TOWING PRODUCTS BE CONSIDERED "COOL?"

YES! Many drivers take great pride in the appearance of their tow vehicles. Outfitting them with quality, attractive accessories allows owners to tow safely and securely and look good while doing it.

"The hitch market has changed in the last few years to be somewhat of a fashion show of sorts," says Brad Pennington, owner of Bradley L. Pennington Hitch Co. "The hitch has historically been a simple utility device, but it has also evolved into 'truck jewelry.' Who has the coolest looking hitch? Who has the strongest hitch? Who spent the most money on their hitch? When people walk by vehicles on display in a parking lot or parking garage, what do they see? Why not hang the coolest, most awesome hitch off the back of your pride and joy?"



Suppliers have the latest info on new products and service tips. (Photo courtesy Blue Ox)

SHOULD DRIVERS EXPECT A DEGRADED DRIVING EXPERIENCE WHEN TOWING?

NO! "One common misconception is that air springs ruin the ride



A segment of the population will always be in the market for towing-related accessories and service. (Photo courtesy Hellwig Products)

quality," Watts observes. "When properly installed and pressure-adjusted correctly, rear air springs will help assist/compensate for an additional load, but they will not destroy your ride quality. Rough Country also offers an Air Spring Cradle Kit that provides an inexpensive solution to limiting the droop travel of your rear suspension for those who perform multiple tasks with their rigs."

DO CUSTOMERS ALWAYS KNOW BEST WHEN IT COMES TO THE TOWING SETUP THEY ENVISION FOR THEIR VEHICLES?

No! Assuming the role of local expert will increase your shop's standing and can lead to increased sales.

Chad Cole, director of automotive sales for Blue Ox, supports that approach, noting that "one common misconception faced by shops is that all towing products are perceived equally by consumers, which is not always the case."

Meanwhile, Brown says to not be afraid to make recommendations to customers, even if they are outside of the original inquiries.

"While retail customers are more educated pre-sale than ever, the salesperson cannot assume that the consumer knows everything about a product or category. Typically, they only have surface-level information and are



YES! NO! THE TOWING AFTERMARKET



Quality towing products can offer a safe, secure towing experience and look good at the same time. (Photo courtesy Bradley L. Pennington Hitch Co.)

looking for your advice as the professional," she explains. "By understanding the customer's use case, you can suggest complementary products to improve their towing experience. They might not be interested in purchasing the product today, but by mentioning it, you have planted seeds for possible future sales and growing your business with this person."

SHOULD POPULAR SOLUTIONS BE VIEWED AS "ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL?"

No! Coulter uses suspension airbag systems and their alternatives as an example.

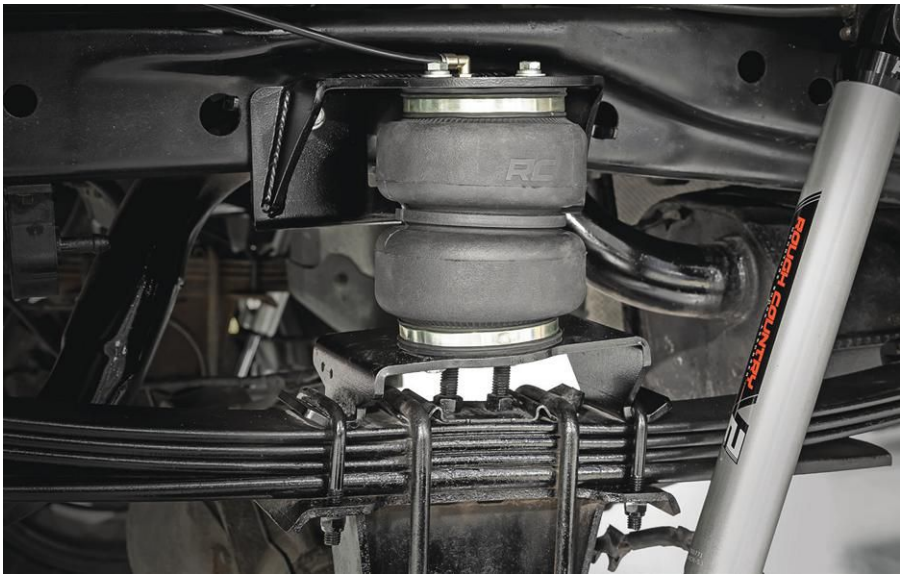
"While airbags can be effective, they're not always the best fit for every customer. Shops should take the time to understand their customers' needs—whether they're weekend warriors or towing more frequently—and offer tailored solutions."

IS IT IMPORTANT TO BE FAMILIAR WITH THE BRANDS A SHOP CARRIES?

Yes! The rise of the towing aftermarket has attracted a growing number of suppliers. To cut through the clutter, customers look to professional shops for recommendations on quality and features.

"We have seen an uptick in manufacturers getting into towing accessories and branching into new segments to expand their offerings," says Luke Stump, director of wholesale for GEN-Y Hitch. "As our market gets diluted by new brands and manufacturers, we must stay on top of innovation and continue releasing new technology to keep our edge sharp against competitive products."

Take a minute to provide a solid solution for the specific needs of the customer. (Photo courtesy Rough Country)



ARE U.S.-MADE PRODUCTS POPULAR?

Yes! Among the market trends witnessed by Cole is an increased demand for American-made parts and accessories.

"This trend is a promising sign for private companies that value customer service and product excellence," he believes.

Stump says shops can take advantage by showing customers the important differences between products.

"A product that is truly tested to its max before launch, combined with quality raw materials, will always outlast bottom-dollar imported products," he says. "Keeping our towing customers safe, educated and on the road is our top priority."

Pennington says while somewhat higher prices reflect his domestic manufacturing, drivers usually have no trouble recognizing the value.

"The (hitches) just simply are not cheap. But the good thing is the upfitter can make a pretty good margin selling high-ticket items. It just takes people who see the quality in the product to help sell it to the public."

CAN AFTERMARKET SHOPS HOPE TO COMPETE FOR SALES WITH THE INTERNET?

Yes! Brown from Air Lift Company says that while internet price comparisons are today's reality, many retail customers still prefer to visit local dealers because they are seeking a professional opinion on products and brands and typically don't feel up to the challenge of installing parts themselves.

"We try to help shops through our mail-in rebates, which consumers can only take advantage of when they buy our products from a local shop and have the item professionally installed by them," she says. "We also have a product called Pro Series, which is only available to brick-and-mortar dealers through select distributors and differentiated against the core product that is available everywhere, which allows them to hold better margins and not have to compete directly with internet retailers."

Pennington suggests creating a display area in your showroom featuring hitch-related products so that customers can see and feel the differences. Savvy consumers will choose quality every time, he believes.

"It will be the last hitch they will ever buy, and, like their grandfather's old Browning

shotgun, it will be something to be proud of for a lifetime."

ARE THERE UPSELL AND ADD-ON OPPORTUNITIES?

Yes! Hellwig-White has seen many shops overlook the opportunity to upgrade sway bars or add helper springs on newer vehicles used for towing, for example.

"It's a little-known fact that many new trucks (even some with tow packages) have a very thin sway bar or no sway bar at all—and it's likely the owner doesn't know either," she says. "It's a great opportunity to educate them on solutions to uncomfortable, white-knuckle towing experiences—and everyone has had one of those."

IS IT IMPORTANT FOR SHOPS TO CATER TO THE "I WANT IT TODAY" CUSTOMER MENTALITY?

Yes! No! A safe and functional system is the required end goal for every towing project. Customers should be prepared to wait for the products they need to do it right the first time.

Still, keeping popular items on hand and ready to install helps shops create happy customers.

"When possible, have a great variety of products for the customer to choose from, eliminating missed opportunities," says Stump from GEN-Y Hitch. "Our most successful shops offer a great variety of brands and products that hit all relevant price points, fitments and features."

DO PROFESSIONALS NEED TO DO THEIR HOMEWORK TO UNDERSTAND THE FEATURES AND BENEFITS OF THE PRODUCTS THEY SELL AND INSTALL?

Yes! Coulter from SuperSprings explains how shops can boost profits by training their sales teams on the latest towing accessories.

"This way they can confidently discuss alternative solutions and highlight key features based on customer needs. Offering complementary products like weight distribution hitches or our Trailer SumoSprings can also enhance the customer's overall towing experience."

Hellwig-White from Hellwig Products recommends starting a conversation to understand each driver's individual needs and then building on their desires.

"The customer may not realize that the white-knuckle, rocking-and-rolling ride they are experiencing, or the squat in the back of their truck, is not normal and there are products that will help alleviate it. In addition, when customers are coming into shops looking for lift kits, tires and wheels there's an opportunity to discuss load and sway control products to assure the customer that their vehicle will still handle smoothly after changing the overall ride height," she says. "Starting a conversation about how the customer's vehicle drives when towing may open their eyes to issues they did not realize could be addressed."

Watts from Rough Country suggests starting by asking clients how they plan to use their tow vehicles.

"Take a minute to provide a solid solution for the specific needs of the customer," he says. "The right products are easily available, and you can be the hero when you get the truck set up correctly."



Consider a customer's overall towing experience when recommending systems and complementary add-ons. (Photos courtesy superspringsinternational.com)

WHEN IT COMES TO SERVING TOWING CONSUMERS, DO SHOPS HAVE TO GO IT ALONE?

No! Cole from Blue Ox notes that customers first need to know a towing shop exists in order to take full advantage of the products, services and expertise it has to offer.

"Reach out to your manufacturer representatives about opportunities to be added to a dealer locator or any other referral program they may have," he suggests. ***TS***



YOUR FINAL SALE

PART I

Steps to smooth the process of selling your business.

By Josh Poulson

Editor's note: This is the first in a two-part series outlining the basics of preparing to sell your specialty aftermarket business.

Ever have one of those days where everything goes wrong, and you drive home wondering if it would just be easier to sell your small business? Of course, the counterpoints are the really good days, when things run smoothly and you make customers and employees happy while putting a little money in your pocket.

If you are in the restyling business, or even just the automotive business in general, you've no doubt experienced plenty of both. A successful year really comes down to one thing—did you have more good days than bad ones?

But what about the future? How long do you want to stay in business or be part of the daily grind? Even if you have good people helping to run your shop, how long do you want to handle the stress and liability of being the owner?

We all have those sleepless nights, wondering what the future will bring with cars, with accessories and products, with employees, with customers and with sales. If, one day, it all becomes too much, do you have an exit plan?

If you don't, you're not alone. Most small businesses don't have an exit plan. It seems we all get so caught up in the day-to-day struggles of running a business that we don't have the time or energy to think about the day when we won't have to deal with them anymore.

Wherever you are in your career, it's always smart to have a plan. I have seen many shops that seemed to be "on top" ultimately crash and burn because they never prepared for the future.

Of course, many factors affect where you are in the process such as your age, your financial position, your family life, your health, etc. After taking all these things into consideration, you can then start thinking about some other aspects of your business.



If, one day, it all becomes too much, do you have an exit plan?
Photo credit: gustavofrazao - stock.adobe.com

Before we get started, however, please note—I am not a business guru! I don't have a master's degree in business acquisitions and am neither a lawyer nor an accountant.

What I do have are 25 years of experience running a restyling business and a few experiences with sales and acquisitions. So, consider this a layman's look at future business plans and areas you might want to start thinking about.



When preparing to sell your shop it helps to understand your numbers, including your profit and loss (P&L) statement and balance sheet. Photo credit: whyframeshot - stock.adobe.com

1 KNOW YOUR BUSINESS

One of the most frustrating things involved with buying or selling a company is when the current owner doesn't really know his/her business. This includes understanding how your business runs, the status of employees, your customer and product bases, ideas on future opportunities and any pending dangers or issues.

It also helps to know your numbers, which include understanding your profit and loss (P&L) statement and your balance sheet. I'm not saying you need to be a complete expert, but you should be able to explain why certain numbers or red flags are what they are.

Knowing and understanding your business will go a long way when it comes time to sell it. Don't try to hide the negatives and oversell the positives because the truth will eventually come out, so be transparent from the beginning.

And if you don't know your business or your numbers, then start learning them. Ask for help, either from employees or third parties. These days, you can even watch YouTube videos on how to read financial statements.

2 CLEAN UP

Many small businesses only get done what needs to get done, pushing off longer-term projects for another day—but that day never comes.

To get on top of your business, start by cleaning up in two areas—your physical shop and your finances.

First, if walk around your shop or business, you'll no doubt find some boxes or products stacked in a corner that someone put there, meaning to get to later. Now is later!

Are they products that need to be returned for credit (or even partial credit)? Do they belong to you, a customer or an employee, and can you get rid of them? Are they products that can be sold or even blown out for a great deal? If so, make a list and get a plan together to sell them.

Are they just take-off parts? Then determine which of them, if any, have real value and take steps to unload them. Believe me, waiting around for the day when a customer walks in out of the blue asking for that specific part never happens.

Once you've completed the physical cleanup, turn to your finances. Make sure your books are clean, which entails not having "junk" numbers and actually knowing what you are putting into your accounting system.

Stop doing "cash deals" under the table that affect your financial performance on paper. Make sure your accounts payable and receivables are current and clean—even if it means making extra phone calls or visits to wholesale customers.

Get started now because, ideally, you are going to want two to three years of good, clean numbers on the books for buyers to give you the purchase price you're hoping to receive.

3 WHAT DO YOU WANT?

When it's time to seriously consider selling your business, start thinking about the type of deal you want. Are you looking for someone to buy 100% of the business? Would you want to take on a partner and take a back seat?

If you do sell the business outright, do you still want to, or would you be willing to, stay on for a set amount of time to help with the transition?

Sometimes shop owners hope to transfer ownership to a family member(s). If there is more than one relative involved, do they get along and are they willing to work together? Do they understand the business the way that you do, and are they capable of running the business and leading employees the way you have?

Perhaps now is the time to start training and mentoring them to go down this path—and find out in the process if company ownership is what they really want as well.

Now consider your price. How much do you want? Do you want it all up front or are you willing to take payments over time and carry a promissory note? Is property (building) involved and is that part of the sale or not?

All of these are crucial points and may require professional assistance to help you make the best decisions. Buyers are going to want to know what it is that you want most out of the deal before any progress is made, so start thinking.

Meanwhile, our next article will be about what your business is worth, what you should sell it for and how to do it. ***TS***



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



Retractable Tonneau Covers

EGR USA, Ontario, California, presents its expanded line of RollTrac Tonneau Covers. Featuring robust construction and a secure, retractable design, the covers are now available for a wide range of truck models including a variety of Ram, Jeep, Ford and Chevrolet applications.



Wrapping Film

Avery Dennison, Mentor, Ohio, presents its fall 2024 Supreme Wrapping Film color collection: Bright Escapes. The three-color collection—crafted to inspire "feelings of joy, excitement and bold self-expression"—includes Pool Party Pink, Tropical Vacation Green and Popstar Concert Purple. The pink and green boast a striking gloss finish, while the purple shines with a gloss metallic sparkle. The films feature Avery Dennison Easy Apply RS adhesive technology for fast application and are available in 60-inch rolls.

Solar Charge Hub

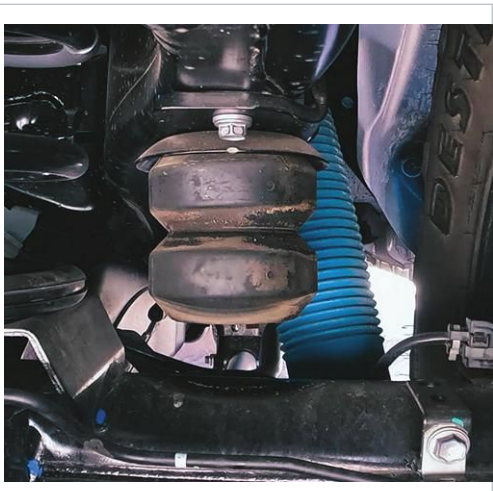


KC HiLiTES, Flagstaff, Arizona, introduces the KC Solar Charge Hub, an all-in-one portable system that keeps 12V batteries charged and ready. The compact, plug-and-play charging solution features magnetic feet for easy placement, SAE cables and wiring for simple connections, and Bluetooth connectivity to wirelessly monitor, set up and update with ease. Combine it with an all-new 150W Bi-Fold Portable Solar Panel and an optional universal mounting bracket for MOLLE panels or roof racks for full energy independence.



Tacoma Caps

Leer Group, Elkhart, Indiana, presents its fresh Truck Cap designs for 2024 Toyota Tacoma models. Designed to deliver innovation and style, the fiberglass caps echo the truck's style lines and help drivers protect, store and organize their gear.



Fourth-Gen Tacoma Bump Stops

Timbren Industries, Whitby, Ontario, presents its Active Off-Road Bump Stop Kit for the all-new, fourth-generation 2024 Toyota Tacoma. Designed to allow trail riding without damaging the suspension, the bump stops dampen blows from bottoming-out, making for a softer, safer ride. They are designed with patented Aeon rubber spring technology for improved performance and ride quality.

Infotainment System



Stinger, Clearwater, Florida, introduces the HORIZON10 Infotainment System, a newly designed, weather-resistant, 10.1-inch floating multimedia display. Engineered for flexibility, the system fits seamlessly into single- and double-DIN openings for use in a wide range of vehicles, including classic cars, golf carts, RVs, UTVs and more. Offering wireless and wired support for Apple CarPlay and Google Android Auto, the HORIZON10 can fine-tune a vehicle's sound system with on-screen control of AudioControl's DM Smart app.



Thin Rooftop Tent

Roofnest, Boulder, Colorado, presents its Meadowlark XL soft-shell rooftop tent. At 30 inches wide—about half the width of traditional rooftop tents—the Meadowlark XL features a longitudinal fold-out design, so campers sleep in line with the length of their vehicle, allowing space next to it for kayaks, bikes or other gear. The tent deploys fully in a matter of moments without any guy lines or ground stakes and sleeps up to three people atop a 2.5-inch, dual-density foam mattress.

Overland Awnings



Overland Vehicle Systems (OVS), Santa Fe Springs, California, presents its XD Awnings. Designed to set a new standard in outdoor shelter, the awnings offer durability, functionality and style, contributing to any overlanding setup. Crafted from aerospace-grade aluminum and equipped with premium blackout fabric and an LED lighting system, they offer 129 square feet of coverage with premium 320G ripstop poly cotton fabric material and a waterproof coating. Passenger and driver's side applications are available.



Camo Hitch

GEN-Y Hitch, Nappanee, Indiana, and **Mossy Oak** present a Bottomland Camouflage hydro-dipped MEGA-DUTY hitch. Designed for outdoor adventures, the hitch is available in 10,000-, 16,000- or 21,000-pound towing capacities and between 5 and 9 inches of drop. Users can choose between a 2- or 2.5-inch shank. The fully adjustable hitch works on multiple applications and is designed with safety in mind for boaters, off-roaders and serious outdoor adventurers. It can accept bicycle and cargo racks, motorcycle carriers and more.



All-Terrain Light Truck Tire

Nitto Tire USA, Costa Mesa, California, presents the all-new Terra Grappler G3, designed to offer enhanced on- and off-road versatility for varying weather and terrain conditions. Features include a 3PMS snow rating, a completely new tread pattern and bold dual-sidewall designs that are both visually appealing and provide increased performance. The tire's new rubber compound improves both wet and dry traction and wear performance. Available sizes range from 16- to 22-inch wheel diameters and are suited for a wide range of OE replacement and plus-sizes.

Off-Road Lights

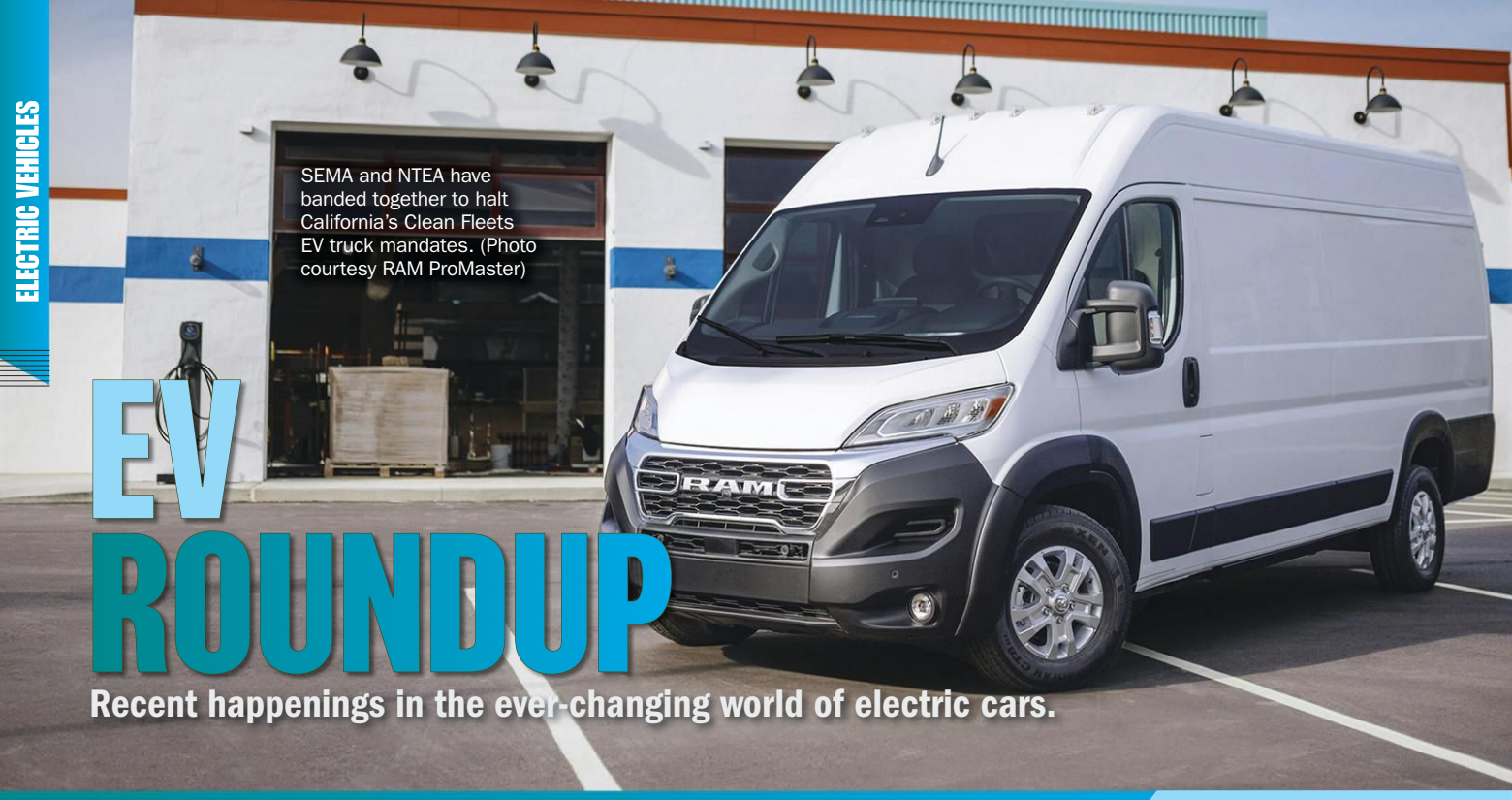


Race Sport Lighting, Ringwood, Illinois, presents its NOVAlm Series LED Kits for off-road enthusiasts. Designed to deliver high performance and rugged durability, the lights offer high brightness and include a waterproof BNC between the bulb and driver that allows for easy installation on vehicles with seal caps behind the bulbs. Features include low power consumption and a long life span, measuring temperatures at the base and tower body of less than 120 degrees.



Amplifiers

Crunch, Libertyville, Illinois, a **Maxxsonics** brand, presents its Crunch V-DRIVE amplifier line featuring all-new Crunch VU Meter Technology. Creating more space and opportunity in the tightest and smallest areas in vehicle builds and setups, the amplifiers bring out concert detail in audio, powering music with higher listening quality and sharper details. V-DRIVE amplifiers are available in mono, 2-channel and 4-channel configurations and feature undistorted power in a smaller space, with an included electronic equalizer. ***TS***



SEMA and NTEA have banded together to halt California's Clean Fleets EV truck mandates. (Photo courtesy RAM ProMaster)

EV ROUNDUP

Recent happenings in the ever-changing world of electric cars.

SEMA, NTEA LOOK TO HALT CLEAN FLEETS EV TRUCK MANDATES

In October, the Specialty Equipment Market Association (SEMA) and NTEA – The Work Truck Association filed suit in the U.S. District Court's Eastern District of California against the California Air Resources Board (CARB), seeking immediate declaratory and injunctive relief to stop electric vehicle mandates CARB intends to implement through its Advanced Clean Fleets (ACF) regulations.

The organizations contend that CARB's actions far exceed California's constitutional and state statutory authority and will have a dire effect on an industry that historically has led the way toward cleaner, safer vehicles.

CARB's ACF regulation includes requirements that only zero-emission vehicles (ZEVs) may cross within California's borders, regardless of which state the vehicle was purchased or registered. Vehicles covered by the regulation include everything from heavy-duty tractors with sleeper cabs to work trucks, pickups and light-duty package delivery vehicles, according to the organizations.



The groups stress they are not anti-EV, but support a technology-neutral approach to achieving lower emissions. (Photo courtesy RIZON)

Interstate motor carriers and others who do not own CARB's vehicle of choice would be barred from operating within the nation's largest single-state economy, according to SEMA and NTEA officials. The issue is currently under consideration by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, whose waiver is necessary for the state to proceed.

"The overreach of California has forced the hand of the automotive industry, making this legal action necessary to protect the interests of the thousands of automotive aftermarket companies whose $337 billion annual economic impact helps drive our nation's economy," says Mike Spagnola, SEMA president and CEO. "The illegal means by which California has sought to tilt the board by siding with just one technology is to the great detriment of a giant swath of the nation's small businesses and threatens a dangerous precedent upon the American people."

SEMA and NTEA are filing the lawsuit on behalf of their members who own and operate vehicle fleets regulated by the ACF regulations, or manufacture, market or sell specialty vehicles, trucks or automotive aftermarket products that may become obsolete in California and other markets if CARB is allowed to proceed in decreeing an end to internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles.

"Ultimately, work trucks must be available, capable and affordable. It is important to reach this desired outcome using a sensible and cost-effective approach so our member businesses can continue to build and supply the vehicles that are essential for commerce," says Steve Carey, NTEA president & CEO. "Left unchecked, the current suite of California regulations will severely curtail the ability of work truck users to obtain the vehicles they need to successfully and efficiently carry out their vital missions and support ongoing business operations."

Officials note that "neither SEMA nor NTEA are anti-EV; rather, the organizations are steadfast in their shared belief that a technology-neutral approach is the best way to achieve lower vehicle emissions. By declaring one technology as the preferred solution of government, California is kneecapping other potential solutions, regardless of their promise for delivering the results the state seeks."

UTI INTEGRATES EV CURRICULUM INTO BMW TRAINING PROGRAM

Universal Technical Institute has announced the expansion of the BMW FastTrack MSAT program to include additional EV curriculum.

The new EV training, developed by BMW North America, uses BMW i3 vehicles provided to UTI by BMW. It encompasses a comprehensive curriculum designed to equip technicians with essential skills for handling high-voltage BMW Group vehicles, according to the announcement.

Students learn about charging modes and settings and how to estimate charging times, perform pre-delivery inspections, determine when to charge a 12V battery, assess vehicle safety and evaluate their qualifications for high-voltage vehicle concerns.

The education will allow UTI's qualified FastTrack graduates to perform EV evaluations currently restricted to Master Level technicians.

"UTI's relationship with BMW spans over 28 years. We are pleased to partner with them on their EV curriculum to help prepare our FastTrack program graduates to work on these complex and evolving vehicles," says Tracy Lorenz, UTI division president. "As EV purchases climb nationwide, the need is increasing for BMW Service Technicians trained to work on hybrid, EV and combustion engines at BMW dealerships across the country."

The UTI campuses that offer the BMW FastTrack program and now teach the new EV curriculum are UTI-Avondale (Arizona), UTI-Exton (Pennsylvania), UTI-Houston, UTI-Lisle (Illinois), UTI-Long Beach (California), UTI-Miramar (Florida) and UTI-Orlando.



Universal Technical Institute has announced the expansion of the BMW FastTrack MSAT program to include additional EV curriculum. (Photo courtesy BMW)

"BMW currently offers four fully electric and an additional four plug-in hybrid electric vehicles for sale in the U.S., with the expectation that both our electric lineup and sales will only continue to grow," says Gary Uyematsu, national technical training manager, BMW of North America. "Our partnership with UTI will not only help ensure that we can meet the need for skilled technicians but also provide the premium level of customer service BMW drivers expect."

KALMAR EV PORSCHE CONVERSION

Kalmar Automotive debuts its first-ever electric vehicle conversion, the 7-97 E-Volt. With faster acceleration, more power and no additional weight added over the original 964-generation Porsche 911, the E-Volt is now powered by a high-performance electric vehicle drivetrain up-cycled and re-engineered from the Tesla Model S.

Kalmar Automotive's "Evergreen" philosophy draws on state-of-the-art technologies to increase sustainability and reuse where possible, according to the company. Alongside carrying over many key parts, Kalmar also looked to reuse some of the raw materials. Examples include aluminum recast from the donor vehicle and glass reformed from the original.

"The idea of creating an EV version came from our customers," says Jan Kalmar, founder of Kalmar Automotive. "But, for us, it had to be more than just dropping an EV motor into a 911. So, we looked to see how far we could take its green credentials. Using an existing car as a base is a good start, but it had to go further, hence recasting parts, reforming the glass and using technologies such as flax fibers that produce lower CO2 in their manufacturing than carbon fiber."



Kalmar Automotive debuts its first EV conversion, the 7-97 E-Volt. (Photos courtesy Kalmar Automotive)



Revised bodywork resulted in improved aero balance, and the vehicle also features interior, suspension and braking upgrades. The EV conversion is fully reversable.

"The 7-97 E-Volt is proof that an electric vehicle does not need to weigh more than combustion cars," Kalmar says. "Thanks to unique, new lightweight plant fiber bodywork and deep attention to general weight savings, the weight remains the same as a 964 Turbo."

EV ROUNDUP

'FIRST CALL' FOR ELECTRIFIED DODGE PERFORMANCE

Dodge has officially opened orders for its next-generation of American muscle: the all-new, electric-powered 2024 Dodge Charger Daytona.

"A new era of Dodge muscle has arrived," says Matt McAlear, Dodge brand CEO – Stellantis. "We are dedicated to pushing the boundaries, and we know our customers are driven by performance."

The 2024 Dodge Charger Daytona R/T and Charger Daytona Scat Pack two-door models—the first all-electric vehicles from Dodge—qualify for full $7,500 federal tax credit when leased, the carmaker notes. Customers who placed an order before Halloween received a "First Call" performance package including a two-day driving experience at the Radford Racing School, a "First Call" welcome kit and custom VIP concierge service.

"First Call" 2024 Dodge Charger Daytona R/T two-door models launched with a standard Direct Connection Stage 1 Upgrade installed at the factory, resulting in a total output of 496 hp and 404 pound-feet of torque.



Dodge's electrified "First Call" Charger models are designed to put performance first. (Photo courtesy Dodge)

The 2024 Dodge Charger Daytona Scat Pack two-door models, which Dodge says retains the title as the "world's quickest and most powerful muscle car," include a Track Package and factory-installed Direct Connection Stage 2 Upgrade resulting in a total output of 670 hp and 627 pound-feet of torque, reaching 0-60 mph in 3.3 seconds while running the quarter mile in an estimated 11.5 seconds.

STUDENTS DESIGN EV CONCEPTS



The Aether convertible and Tyr overland SUV are EV concepts developed and built from the ground up by SCAD students. (Photo courtesy SCAD)

Students in the award-winning industrial design program at Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD) recently created two fully functioning electric vehicle concept cars meant to "engage and encourage the next generation of driving public."

"Over the last 12 months, SCAD Bees have achieved what students elsewhere could only dream of—designing and building not one, but two electric vehicles," says Paula Wallace, SCAD president and founder. "We transform SCAD students into pros by compelling them to create real products for real clients and within the constraints of real time, modeling professional practice. These new electric vehicle concepts answer an essential question for the automotive industry, as more and more young people are choosing not to drive at all, using rideshare and public transportation instead."

Students engaged pros in the automotive industry as well as others in fashion, luxury marketing and "fringe tech"—technology that extends into science fiction, such as controlling a car with eye tracking and hand gestures—to create the Aether, a convertible sports car, and the Tyr, an off-roader overland SUV.

"Our two SCAD EVs present the future of driving for all drivers with commercial appeal. And they're gorgeous," says Wallace.

The project emphasized pooling innovative student talent from across the university's top-ranked degree programs, including interior design, fibers, motion media design, graphic design, user experience (UX) design and interactive design and game development.

The various elements of each vehicle reflect the disciplines involved, as well as the creative ingenuity of students who brought the vehicles from concept to completion. ***TS***


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Irvine Rolls Out Nation's First Police Cybertruck

UP.FIT, a division of Unplugged Performance, has announced the deployment of the nation's first Tesla Cybertruck fully outfitted for law enforcement in collaboration with the Irvine (California) Police Department.

With a look straight out of "RoboCop," the vehicle is being used as part of Irvine PD's D.A.R.E. program, underscoring the city's commitment to innovation, sustainability and community engagement.

"We're thrilled to partner with the Irvine Police Department to debut the nation's first official on-duty Cybertruck for their D.A.R.E. program," says Ben Schaffer, CEO of Unplugged Performance. "The Cybertruck embodies the future of law enforcement, with Irvine paving the way by integrating this advanced vehicle into their fleet."

The Tesla Cybertruck provides unique features applicable to public duty straight from the factory, including ballistic-grade stainless steel for enhanced officer safety, bio-weapons defense mode, HEPA filtration, four-wheel steering and improved maneuverability over traditional police vehicles.

The UP.FIT Cybertruck Next-Gen Patrol vehicle is further designed to meet the needs of first responders, equipped with a comprehensive suite of upgraded features that enhance police work in the field.

For emergency lighting solutions, it includes UP.FIT's roof-mounted Whelen lighting system and integrated rocker panel lighting, plus a remote-operated spotlight system for quick and effective illumination during night patrols.

The company also installed its proprietary electrical system with a specially designed wiring harness that supports the use of essential patrol equipment like the Mobile Data Computer (MDC), police radios and public address systems. The setup is purposefully designed to avoid obstructing rear floor space, allowing for the addition of a rifle mount affixed to the underside of the fold-up rear seats.

Irvine, known for its high adoption rate of electric vehicles, is home to one of the busiest Tesla delivery centers in the world, and the deployment of the Cybertruck reflects the city's commitment to sustainability, public safety and advanced technology, officials note.

"With a robust Tesla user base in the community, it was a natural fit for Irvine PD to become the first department in the country to adopt this vehicle for law enforcement," UP.FIT stated in a press release announcing the collaboration.

Together, Irvine PD and UP.FIT tailored the vehicle to the specific needs of officers, including prioritization of officer ergonomics, comfort and safety; research and development of solutions that work seamlessly with the Tesla ecosystem; and officer training and infrastructure support to ensure smooth integration into fleets, the release noted.

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The Irvine (California) Police Department has deployed the nation's first Tesla Cybertruck fully outfitted for law enforcement. (Photos courtesy UP.FIT)







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