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Jef White
Editor in Chief
theshopmag.com

In-Person Interactions Still Influence Purchasing Decisions

One of the main advantages traditional brick-and-mortar aftermarket shops have over the internet is the opportunity for customers to see and feel the products and meet the installers. While some may wonder whether in-person interactions are overrated in the digital age, a new auto show study reveals that face-to-face conversations between shoppers and sellers still greatly influence auto-related buying decisions.

The Automotive Experience Alliance (AEA), a coalition of auto shows looking to drive innovation and standardization throughout the industry, surveyed attendees during the 2024-25 auto show season, asking about the role live events play in today's car buying journey.

Insights from nearly 20,000 attendees at 27 AEA member shows confirmed that in-person experiences prompt sales. The results include:

- 78% of attendees say the auto show influenced their purchase decision, with 80% of those looking to buy within three months reporting it was a key factor in their choice.
- 25% of all respondents say auto shows have more influence on their decision than any other medium.
- 50% of attendees altered their consideration list after attending an auto show.
- 90% of attendees said they hoped to see a brand that wasn't present, making a brand's absence a missed opportunity to capture in-market buyers.

"Auto shows are one of the most powerful tools in the car-buying journey, giving consumers the hands-on experience they need to make confident, informed decisions—something digital marketing alone simply can't deliver," says Kevin Mazzucola, AEA chairman. "With 80% of near-term buyers saying the show influenced their purchase, the data makes it clear that auto shows don't just showcase vehicles—they drive real consumer action."

Serious shoppers will often spend nearly three hours at a show, according to AEA officials, on average engaging with more than 10 vehicles across nine different brands, The three-hour window is a key indicator of consumer engagement and dwell time, especially for those actively shopping for their next vehicle and comparing options in one place.

The immersive experience allows consumers to compare models, explore new technology and envision themselves behind the wheel, officials add. As a result, auto shows directly shape purchase consideration, with 36% of attendees adding new brands to their consideration list after the show and 14% removing brands that are absent.

Some final data points that support the power of presence:

- 30% of attendees say they are more likely to purchase a vehicle they test drive or ride in at the show, with 61% of those experiences directly influencing buying decisions.
- 35% of attendees say they plan to visit a dealership after the show, jumping to 46% among those intending to buy within the next three months.

"As the automotive industry continues to evolve and buyers seek increasingly immersive experiences, the AEA's new data affirms that auto shows remain a critical part of the consumer decision-making journey by delivering brand discovery, engagement and conversion at scale," the alliance concludes.

Study results are available online at: productions-plus.com/services/research-insights/automotive-experience-alliance-report/. ***TS***

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It is important to select a suitable means of expansion that can improve recognition, reach and profits. (Photo credit: AucArtStudio - stock.adobe.com)

Tax Tips for When You're Ready to Branch Out

Maximizing opportunities when expanding or adding services.

BY MARK E. BATTERSBY

Mark E. Battersby writes on financial and tax-related topics. Learn more at thetaxscribe.com.

Maybe you operate a speed shop and are considering manufacturing a few custom components. Maybe you own an off-road business and are thinking about starting a guided trail ride service. Or, possibly, you'd simply like to expand your current services into another town or state.

Branching out or diversifying means expanding a performance, racing, restyling or vehicle customizing business's operations, products, services or geographical reach to encompass new areas or markets. In other words, branching out is about diversifying and growing beyond the initial scope of the business.

In today's sluggish economy it's not unusual for an existing business to branch out—or for the shop owner or self-employed performance, restyling or customization professional to start another business in the same or a different field.

Few realize, however, that Uncle Sam, in the form of our tax laws, stands ready to become a welcomed partner.

The federal government will not only pick up part of the expense of branching out or starting up that new venture, but will often allow the losses from a secondary activity to be used to reduce the tax bills generated by income from self-employment, wages investments or a primary business.

THE RIGHT PATH

There are various strategies for, and reasons why, a performance, racing, restyling or vehicle customizing business should branch out or expand. However, with most businesses having limited resources and capabilities, it is important to select a suitable means of expansion that can improve recognition, reach and profits.

Among the methods, strategies and options for branching out are acquisitions, mergers, collaborations, joint ventures, partnerships and more.

It is increasingly common for aftermarket professionals to have multiple businesses. In fact, in today's tough economy, more and more people are using—or forced to use—their hobbies, sports or secondary interests to generate additional income.

While many professionals routinely use losses from their secondary activities to offset income from their primary businesses, few professionals realize that with or without the extra income, Uncle Sam stands ready to pick up part of the expenses of many of those extracurricular activities.

If an activity is operated as a business, tax laws permit expense deductions to the point where they may offset wages, savings and investment income—and the tax bill on that income from other sources.

STARTUP COSTS

In most cases, the ordinary and necessary expenses of carrying on a trade or business are tax deductible. Of course, if there is no business, there can be no tax deductions for business expenses.

Don't despair, however, because special rules exist for the expenses incurred when starting a new business.

Anyone who pays or incurs business startup costs and who subsequently enters the trade or business can choose to expense and immediately write off up to $5,000 of those costs. However, the $5,000 deductible amount is reduced, dollar-for-dollar, when the startup expenses exceed $50,000.

The so-called "organizational" costs of business entities are a separate class of expense from startup expenses, although subject to similar rules. An incorporated

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There are various strategies for, and reasons why, a performance, racing, restyling or vehicle customizing business should branch out or expand. (Photo credit: cac_tus - stock.adobe.com)

Whether starting a new venture or expanding an existing one, it may be wise to formalize the operation by incorporating or forming an LLC. (Image credit: iQoncept - stock.adobe.com)

performance, restyling or customization shop or business can, for instance, choose to deduct up to $5,000 of any organizational expenses incurred in the tax year business begins.

The balance of startup or organizational expenses, if any, are amortized (written off) over a period of not less than 180 months, starting with the month in which the business begins.

BUSINESS ENTITIES FOR FUN & PROTECTION

Whether starting a new venture or expanding an existing one, it may be wise to formalize the operation by incorporating or forming a limited liability company (LLC) to provide personal liability protection and give the new operation an edge when it comes to sales, financing and, of course, taxes.

And no, the LLC, incorporated startup or branching out enterprise won't escape IRS scrutiny under the hobby rules.

Corporations (both S and C), LLCs and limited partnerships offer protection to owners for the debts of the operation. But this protective veil can be pierced if the creditor can show that the entity was the alter ego of the owners.

Sometimes it is enough that the owners are majority shareholders, exercise substantial control over the incorporated operation or regularly use corporate funds to finance personal expenses.

A BUSINESS OR JUST A HOBBY?

While it is increasingly common for business owners or self-employed professionals to have multiple business activities, in almost every situation comes the question of whether the new activity is merely a branch or subsidiary of the existing business, or will the IRS view it as a separate activity?

In order to be treated as a business for tax purposes, a profit motive must be present, and some type of economic activity must be conducted.

According to lawmakers, among the factors that would ordinarily be taken into account include:

- The manner in which the activity is conducted
- The expertise of the taxpayer, or his or her advisers
- The time and effort expended by the taxpayer in carrying on the activity
- The expectation that assets used in the activity may appreciate in value
- The success of the taxpayer in carrying on other similar or dissimilar activities
- The taxpayer's history of income or losses with respect to the activity
- The amount of occasional profits, if any, which are earned
- The financial state of the taxpayer
- Elements of personal pleasure or recreation

Remember that when it comes to determining whether an activity is engaged in for profit, all the facts and circumstances are to be taken into account.

INTANGIBLES STILL DEDUCTIBLE

Often overlooked by many are tax deductions for the secondary operation's "intangible" assets. The purchase of a going business usually includes "goodwill," an intangible asset that, because it was purchased, can be amortized over a 15-year period.

An intangible business asset that does not qualify as purchased or acquired may be amortized only if it has an ascertainable value and a measurable, useful life.

Other, often deductible, expenses are the costs for developing the all-important website. Generally, the cost of website development must be capitalized and deducted over many years. The expenses of operating and maintaining the site are deducted in the year incurred.

Despite the IRS's reluctance to provide

definitive guidance, it is clear that many businesses that pay large amounts to develop sophisticated sites have been allocating their costs to items such as software development (currently deductible, like research and development costs) and currently deductible advertising expenses.

YET ANOTHER TRAP FOR THE UNWARY

Our voluminous tax rules limit the deduction for losses from so-called "passive activities." Generally, losses from passive activities may not be deducted from nonpassive income (for example wages, interest, dividends or profits from the business).

A passive activity is one that involves the conduct of any trade or business in which the taxpayer does not materially participate. Materially participating can be measured in a number of ways including putting in more than 500 hours each year.

Materially participating also occurs when the individual's participation constitutes substantially all of the participation in the activity.

The IRS can both tax and help underwrite a secondary, part- or spare-time activity. On the one hand, it stands ready to tax all of the activity's income. On the other hand, many of the activity's expenses may be used to offset "hobby" income.

Operate the activity as a "business" and the amount by which the activity's expenses exceed its income—the "losses"—can be used to offset income from other sources such as a business. So, is your secondary activity a tax business?

JOINING FORCES

Joint ventures, partnerships and collaborations involve working with others on a new project rather than having your business go solo. Two similar or complementary shops or companies can decide to share resources and reduce costs by opening a branch in a new location or undertaking a specific new project.

Collaborations and joint ventures can also be very useful where expenses in a location might be high. And, of course, collaborations and joint ventures are excellent ways for smaller businesses to compete with much larger and better-equipped local or national competitors.

ON THE DOWNSIDE

Understand that expanding your business into a similar or altogether different field may upset your operation's current customers. Some could view it as abandoning them or selling out.

Good communication and transparency can help.

Aftermarket professionals should be flexible, ready to make a quick recovery and prepared to cut back quickly if demand drops. Also know that the future may see changes in customer preferences, prices from suppliers or in ways of doing business.

Thus, the first step is to ensure that the shop can survive under the new conditions. Once that's achieved, you can look to grow.

Having access to legal, accounting and other expertise is extremely important when expanding or creating a new business as well as helping your current business survive and to grow as rapidly or efficiently as possible. ***TS***



PERFORMANCE

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With today's connectivity options, shops and customers can enjoy lasting long-distance relationships. (Photo courtesy HP Tuners)

TOTAL Control

BY JEF WHITE

Tuners & programmers can be a winning part of any performance or accessorization project.

For customers seeking total control, today's tuning and programming devices offer a chance to personalize the driving experience.

With updates and presets for everything from towing efficiency to speedometer calibration to throttle response and more, tuners and programmers can be a winning part of any performance or accessorization project. They typically install easily and provide application-specific upgrades that can help shops build repeat business.

Quality suppliers know there's lots to learn about the various tuning and programming devices available and are happy to provide their thoughts on common misconceptions, unexpected benefits and sales strategies to help professionals get in tune with their specific markets.

TUNING OPTIONS

While many shops and vehicle owners may believe tuning and programming products are only for advanced users, suppliers explain that there's actually something available for everyone.

"Many people think that the vehicle should be modified before a tune is installed, but the devices work great on stock vehicles," says Johnny Johnson, vice president of sales and business development for Derive Power, parent company of SCT/Bully Dog. "Additionally, there is a misconception that the shop must know how to 'tune.' Our preloaded solutions include easy-to-follow instructions on the device and typically install in under 30 minutes. There are also opportunities to partner with accomplished custom tuning dealers within our dealer network to pro-



Proper education, for the customer and the shop, builds trust and leads to future tuning partnerships. (Photo courtesy HP Tuners)

vide solutions based on vehicle build and consumer needs."

There may be others who believe the devices are intimidating or difficult to use.

"HP Tuners has spent a lot of time making our MPVI3 and VCM Suite software user-friendly and has organized it in a way that makes navigation simple," says David Griffin, business development manager. "We have taken the time to clearly label and describe each parameter or table in the software. It is even customizable to tailor the layout to your preference as a user."

Quality suppliers take steps to convey exactly what the devices can and cannot do, so shops and drivers can stay compliant with laws and regulations at all levels.

"A common misconception is that tuning products are in some way 'defeat devices' or that they are not emissions compliant. That couldn't be farther from the truth, especially where our products are concerned," says Michael Litsch, senior product manager for domestic tuning for Holley Performance Brands including DiabloSport, Edge Products and Superchips. "Through rigorous testing and thorough calibration development, we ensure that every tuning product we release will pass emissions and will eventually pass CARB testing once it gets to that point. We put in the work to ensure we have reasonable basis to sell the products, as the CARB approval process does not happen overnight. Clean power is a reality, and we are here to deliver it to the masses."

The products also install easily, notes Chris Kruckenberg, general manager of PSI Power, a division of aFe POWER.

"Our Scorcher Blue module interacts with the vehicle's ECU without modifying it or leaving a trace," he says. "It is designed with factory-style connectors to easily install and set up, giving the customer the biggest bang for their money on performance enhancements."



Tuning and programming devices provide drivers added control behind the wheel. (Photos courtesy aFe POWER)

For modern vehicles, there are numerous electronic functions that can be adjusted to enhance the driving experience, including specific upgrades like throttle control.

"Many resellers believe throttle controllers function like traditional tuning/tuners or especially modules, chips and/or programmers," notes Bob Shymkiw, president of Pedal Commander. "However, the Pedal Commander does not alter ECU data or increase horsepower—it simply enhances throttle response, providing a faster, more engaging driving experience and/or helps eliminate that dreaded throttle delay or lag, without affecting factory settings."

IN TUNE WITH CUSTOMERS

Johnson says offering tuners and programming products allows shops an entryway into increased customer interactions through:

- Cross-selling
- Upselling
- Being able to sell a complete package
- Customer retention
- Expertise in a niche market
- Attractive profit margins
- Word of mouth advertising

"A major, but often overlooked, benefit of offering handheld devices is increased revenue per tune," he says. "Unlike a one-time custom tune, a handheld device reassures customers that their tuning solutions are always within reach. It also enables you to provide multiple tune files for diverse needs, such as Valet Mode, Fuel Type, Fuel Economy, Towing Mode, Alternate Drivers and more."

Litsch explains how the devices can be a stepping stone to further vehicle enhancements.

"Tuning can be the first taste that ignites a passion for vehicle modification. The real-world results delivered





Offering tuners and programming products allows shops an entryway into increased customer interactions to build loyalty. (Photos courtesy Derive Power)

TOTAL Control

TUNER & PROGRAMMING PRODUCTS

■ **HOT PRODUCT:** Scorcher Blue Module for 2022-25 Toyota Tundra & Land Cruiser J300
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:** Used with the 3.4L V-6 engine it adds 93 hp and 153 pound-feet of torque; true plug-and-play power adder; Bluetooth app offers the ability to change the module on the fly, monitoring boost levels and custom tuning switch settings.

aFe POWER
Chris Kruckenberg
General Manager of PSI Power, a division of aFe POWER

■ **HOT PRODUCT:** Dual-Branded Bully Dog/SCT BDX
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:** Ability to connect over Wi-Fi, allowing for remote cloud custom tuning and software updates; holds 20 custom tunes; large, bright screen; five device unlocks; competitive price; offers the ability to return the vehicle to the stock calibration.

Derive Power LLC
Johnny Johnson
VP of Sales & Business Development

■ **HOT PRODUCT:** Pulsar Modules
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:** Available for a wide range of gas and diesel applications; big power gains; on-the-fly adjustability; tire size adjustment; easy installation.

Holley Performance Brands – DiabloSport, Edge Products and Superchips
Michael Litsch
Senior Product Manager for Domestic Tuning

■ **HOT PRODUCT:** Private Label RTD (Remote Tuning Device)
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:** Combined with the TDN (Tune Delivery Network) phone app, it enables customers to send vehicle read files and share data logs and the shop to send calibration revisions; customers can read DTCs and readiness monitors; tamperproof design.

HP Tuners
David Griffin
Business Development Manager

■ **HOT PRODUCT:** Pedal Commander Throttle Response Controller
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:** Designed to eliminate throttle lag or delay and provide instant acceleration response; four adjustable modes and 36 settings including Eco, City, Sport and Sport+; no ECU modification or voiding of warranty; Bluetooth app control; anti-theft mode.

Pedal Commander
Bob Shymkiw
President



Quality suppliers take steps to convey exactly what the devices can and cannot do. (Photos courtesy Holley Performance Brands)

through tuning will ensure you have happy customers who keep coming back for more performance solutions to customize and upgrade their vehicles."

And Kruckenberg notes that those that leave no permanent modifications can be targeted at all vehicle buyers.

"You have the ability to sell to customers with new vehicles with a factory warranty," he says. "Our modules are warranty-friendly and do not flash your ECM, so you won't lose your factory warranty on your ride."

Griffin states that with today's connectivity options, shops and customers can also enjoy lasting long-distance relationships.

"They do not always need to come back to you (physically) for tune revisions or diagnostics. For example, the vehicle may begin acting up a year later, or something sets off a Check Engine light. With HP Tuners' RTD, they can simply send the diagnostic report and/or data log back to the shop remotely to determine if an appointment needs to be scheduled to get the vehicle back into the shop," he says. "Many times, it could be something simple such as a faulty spark plug or coil pack, which can be diagnosed remotely with no appointment needed, saving you time. All of this can be done by simply pulling out their cellphone or tablet and connecting with the TDN phone app—no laptop or special tools needed. This especially comes in handy when your customer is not local."

Simple solutions are also available for clients looking to make the driving experience more enjoyable.

"Our throttle response controller will provide your customers the biggest bang for their buck," says Shymkiw. "And, with power turned off before or during driving, the factory settings are restored, as if the Pedal Commander is not even there, making it one of the safest performance tuning products out there."

SALES ON THE UPSWING

Johnson from Derive Power believes successful tuning transactions begin with a conversation about the customer's performance and drivability goals, allowing professionals to craft personalized power plans.

"Shops can bundle our programmers with aftermarket parts and upgrades in stages. Each stage would add another level of custom tuning for you to offer while creating a road map for your customers to follow on their high-performance journeys," he adds, further outlining sales steps:

- Have the product on display in the shop and on your website.
- Recommend or ask about existing modifications.
- Ask if power and fuel economy are important.

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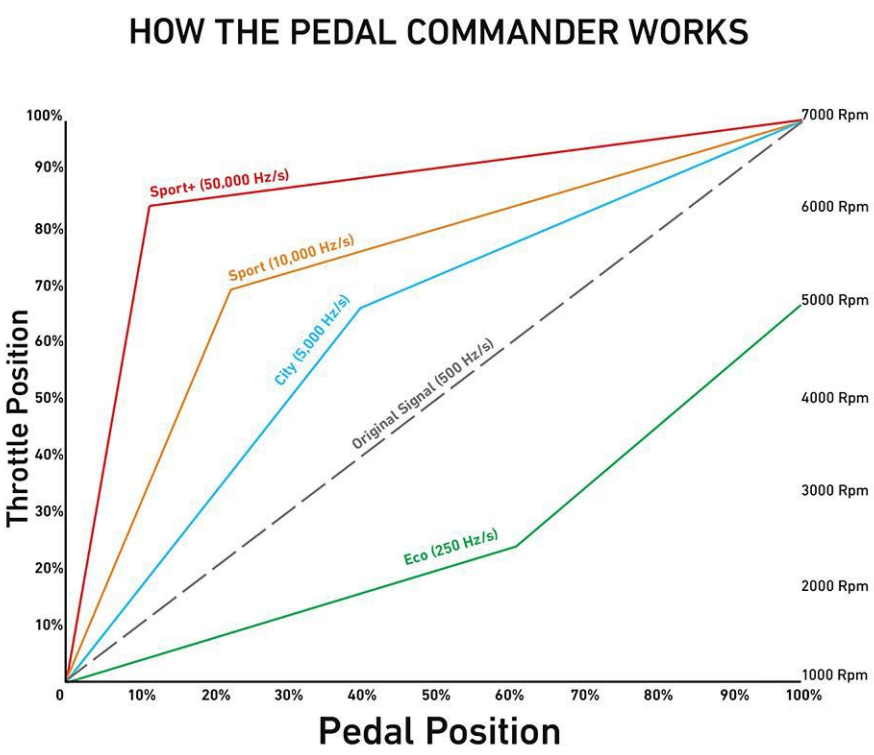
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TOTAL Control





Use displays and supplier information to show how devices can offer more than expected. (Photos courtesy Pedal Commander)

- If the consumer has already purchased the programmer, try asking about that customer's other vehicles or friends they can recommend.
- Use the product on your own shop vehicles and show customers you also use the products.
- Ask if the customer tows or wishes to monitor PIDS (Parameter Identifiers).

"Understanding your customers, how they plan to use the vehicle and their expectations are key to long-time customer retention and satisfaction," he says.

Shops can become local tuning experts by explaining the solutions they have for common issues, says Litsch from Holley Performance Brands.

"Consider problems your customers are facing and how they can be solved with tuning. Does the vehicle have Active Fuel Management (AFM) and aftermarket exhaust? It probably sounds terrible in V-4 mode—did they know they could disable that with tuning? They have taller tires—is their speedometer correct? If not, tuning can reprogram it. Those taller tires are also robbing them of real-world horsepower due to the added weight, so would they like to get that power back? Tuning has you covered. Poor throttle response, not enough power, poor shifting or a desire for improved performance are all reasons to promote tuning to your customers."

Putting drivers at ease is the first step to a successful sale, says Kruckenberg from PSI Power.

"Let your customers know how to utilize these modules for optimum performance and that the Scorcher Blue modules are safe, proven performance adders that are warranty-friendly," he advises. "This gives shops the ability to sell tuners/modules to customers that don't want to lose their factory warranty."

Proper education, for the customer and the shop, creates lasting relationships, says Griffin from HP Tuners. Highlighting the features and benefits of the products also makes a difference.

"On the marketing side, sharing customer testimonials and informational videos online tends to spark people's interest. Focus on what may set you apart from your competition," he recommends. "For example, if you have a calibration that helps a transmission survive long term or fixes a known problem, focus on that and create an informational video on how your calibration changes make a positive impact."

His company offers a Private Label RTD program as well, allowing a shop's logo to be placed on the device, packaging and app, helping with brand recognition.

"We have also partnered with third-party educational companies such as Elite Tuned School, The Tuning School and the High-Performance Academy that have done an outstanding job putting together materials on how to get the most out of our software," he adds.

Versatile and effective, electronic upgrade devices appeal to a wide customer base and can offer drivers more control and personalization than expected, says Shymkiw from Pedal Commander.

"Throttle response controllers are one of the safest, easiest upsells in the performance market. Plus, our built-in Anti-Theft Mode adds a security selling point, making it a practical choice beyond just performance," he says. "It offers a very quick, simple install on a customer's vehicle by downloading the app for easy profits." ***TS***

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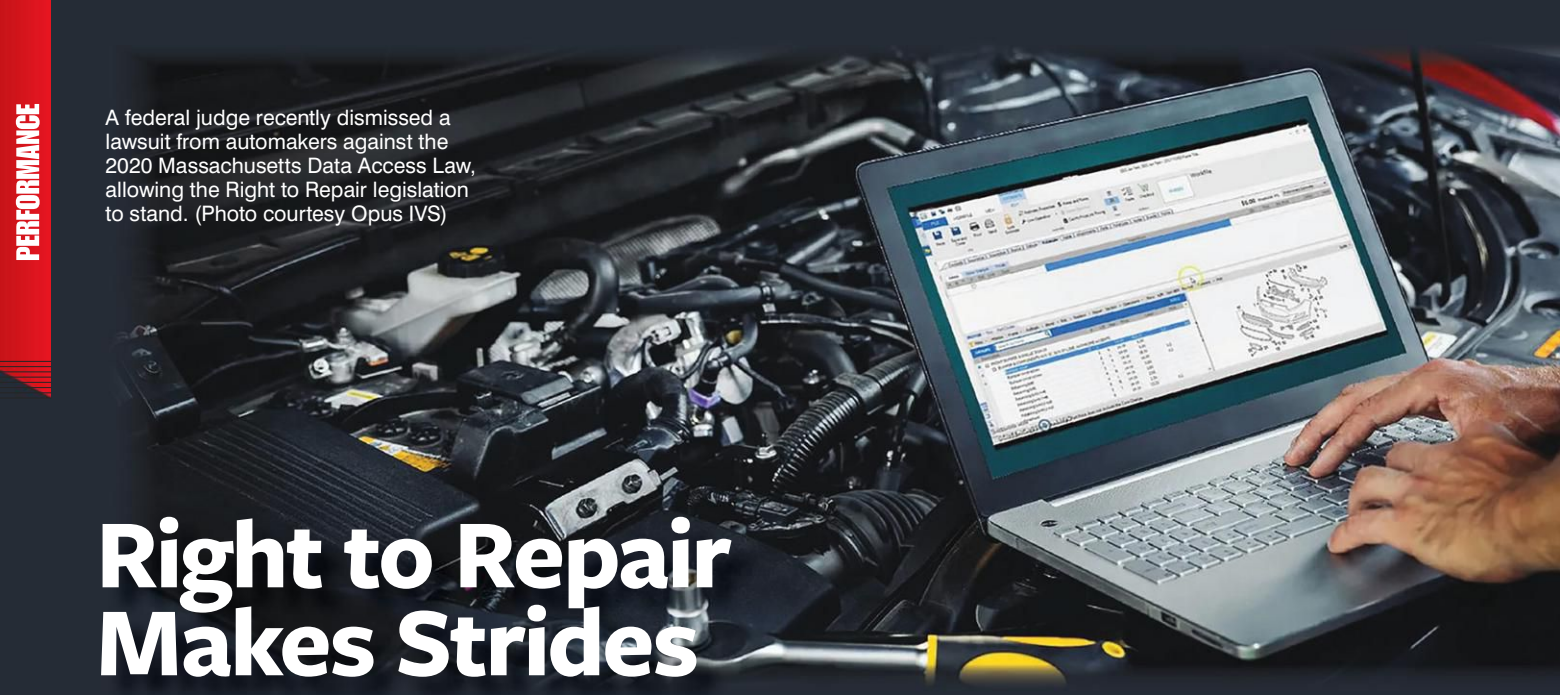


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A federal judge recently dismissed a lawsuit from automakers against the 2020 Massachusetts Data Access Law, allowing the Right to Repair legislation to stand. (Photo courtesy Opus IVS)

Right to Repair Makes Strides

Massachusetts decision a landmark ruling for the automotive aftermarket.

BY BRIAN HERRON



Brian Herron is president and CEO of Opus IVS, a leader in diagnostics, ADAS calibration, programming and remote services, driving the future of safe, complex vehicle repair. He is the named inventor on over 100 pending patents and has been involved in OEM and aftermarket vehicle diagnostics for 20 years.

A major legal development has reshaped automotive repair rights in Massachusetts, promising broader access for independent repair shops, diagnostic providers and vehicle owners.

A federal judge recently dismissed the automakers' lawsuit against the 2020 Massachusetts Data Access Law, allowing the Right to Repair legislation to stand. This decision has significant implications not just for the state's automotive aftermarket but for the entire repair industry nationwide and beyond.

One might ask: Why do we need Right to Repair? Several automakers already work closely with independent repairers, offering tools and data on a level that's equal or almost equal to dealerships. In some cases, they even exceed basic requirements, suggesting that formal legislation might not always be necessary. I've personally witnessed how certain automakers value collaboration with the repair sector.



As vehicles grow more technologically sophisticated, modifications and customizations must advance in tandem to maintain critical safety features such as ADAS. (Photo courtesy Opus IVS)

However, Right to Repair fulfills two key functions:

- First, it creates a clear framework for those automakers that may not otherwise voluntarily comply, ensuring an even playing field. Industry examples show that, without such a standard, some manufacturers might restrict or overprice tool and data access.
- Second, for those already supporting independent repair, having regulations in place provides internal justification to allocate resources and make repair access initiatives a priority.

Dealerships play a crucial role in vehicle repair. They invest heavily in brand-specific training, infrastructure and franchise fees to support manufacturer repair programs. Right to Repair is not about diminishing the value of dealerships but about creating fair



Collaboration is needed to ensure aftermarket shops have access to the vehicle data they need to keep customers safe and happy. (Photo courtesy Automotive Concepts)

competition and ensuring access to necessary repair information. In fact, many dealerships benefit from Right to Repair as well, since they often service multiple brands beyond the ones they represent.

By ensuring fair access to OEM diagnostics across multiple manufacturers, dealerships that repair off-brand vehicles gain the same advantages as independent repairers, fostering a more level playing field.

At the heart of the recent Massachusetts ruling is fair access to vehicle data. The law requires that independent repairers receive the same diagnostic and repair capabilities as dealerships. This ruling addresses concerns around the rise of secure gateways and telematics-based diagnostics, which could have limited or delayed aftermarket access if not properly regulated.

KEY PROVISIONS DRIVING CHANGE

Under the 2020 Massachusetts law, two core elements reshape the way repairs and diagnostics are handled:

- Secure Gateway Access – Automakers deploying secure gateways must ensure aftermarket repairers can access essential repair data in a standardized, unbiased manner.
- Telematics Access – As some manufacturers shift from traditional OBD ports to cloud-based diagnostics, independent shops now have a pathway to telematics information, keeping them competitive in servicing modern vehicles.

These measures reinforce that vehicle owners and independent service providers should not be locked into dealership-only repair models.

I recall being in Massachusetts more than six years ago, helping industry colleagues draft language for secure gateway access. We were solving an urgent issue when Stellantis (then FCA) first introduced its Secure Gateway Module (SGW), which initially limited key diagnostic functionality outside the OEM network.

THE RISE OF SECURE GATEWAYS

Secure gateways protect vehicles against cyberthreats by regulating access to electronic control units (ECUs). However, this can also impact independent repairers if basic diagnostic procedures—like clearing fault codes or running bidirectional component tests—are restricted without OEM approval.

FCA's (now Stellantis) SGW in 2018 caused non-OEM scan tools to lose code clearing and bidirectional capabilities, leading to immediate aftermarket concerns. FCA later created a registered-user system, but it entailed additional steps, such as account verifications, fees and licensing requirements.

Other automakers followed suit, each with unique policies. Some also required proof of technician training, which can be challenging for small or remote repair businesses.

Recently, the National Automotive Service Task Force (NASTF) announced that Hyundai and Kia secure gateway access will soon be available—potentially in a standardized way. This could be a positive step forward, so long as NASTF allows any registered aftermarket diagnostic tool to access the secure gateway, much like the FCA solution that was eventually deployed.

However, if NASTF implements the same stringent process it uses for key replacement—requiring user identification, professional credentials and additional OEM-imposed requirements—it could create barriers instead of solutions.

This is an important development to watch closely.

The 2020 Massachusetts Right to Repair law ensures that secure gateways are standardized and not arbitrarily restricted by manufacturer policies. It also opens the door for third-party organizations, such as Equipment and Tool Institute (ETI), NASTF and others, to work with automakers to ensure secure gateway access complies with the open access requirements outlined in the 2020 legislation.



There are still questions regarding how to ensure equitable access to crucial repair information. (Photo courtesy Automotive Concepts)

TELEMATICS ACCESS: A HARD-FOUGHT BATTLE

Telematics access was one of the most contested issues in this law. In trying to avert additional requirements, the Auto Alliance proposed an alternative Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and promoted a federal proposal called SAFE (Safety as a First Emphasis).

However, the alternative MOU and SAFE proposal does not come without compromises. Not only is the requirement missing that independent repairers receive telematics data on equal and identical footing with dealerships, but it also misses elements protecting against secure gateway restrictions or preventing manufacturers from locking out users based on training, experience or other arbitrary OEM-imposed requirements.

This means automakers could still dictate who could service vehicles, undermining the very principles of Right to Repair.

For example, the alternative MOU would only require aftermarket telematics access if no physical OBD port could offer "the same data" as telematics. Since Right to Repair focuses on giving dealers and the aftermarket truly equal access, the SAFE approach has been seen by some as a step backward.

COMPETING APPROACHES

To address telematics, two main models emerged:

- Secure Vehicle Interface (SVI): Supported by Autocare and the Right to Repair Coalition, SVI calls for direct in-vehicle access, offering real-time, comprehensive diagnostics.
- Extended Vehicle (ExVE): Preferred by some automakers, ExVE relies on a cloud-based "digital twin" of the vehicle, with the manufacturer controlling the flow of data to independent repairers.

The Massachusetts 2020 law specifically supports SVI, promoting direct access rather than an OEM-managed cloud model. However, achieving SVI for all automakers is a significant undertaking and will likely take years to finalize.

A PATH TOWARD NATIONAL & FEDERAL REFORM

The Massachusetts decision builds on the original 2012 law that led to a national MOU in 2014, but it also acknowledges that rapid technological changes weren't fully anticipated back then. This ruling might inspire other states or even federal lawmakers to consider nationwide Right to Repair legislation—such as the Right to Equitable and Professional Auto Industry Repair (REPAIR) Act.

The REPAIR Act and SAFE Act are exciting legislative developments, but it is critical that any national law moves the industry forward without compromising the protections already established in the 2014 MOU or the 2020 Massachusetts law regarding secure gateways.

Many stakeholders—automakers, repairers and consumers—were deeply involved in crafting those regulations, which are vital to preserving competition and ensuring independent access to essential repair data. Any new legislation should enhance these rights, not erode them.

COLLABORATION OVER LITIGATION

While automakers can still appeal the ruling, many industry observers see this as a chance for cooperation instead of ongoing legal battles. OEMs, aftermarket groups and other stakeholders could work toward a modernized MOU that addresses cybersecurity, telematics and fair pricing.

Tools like SAE J2534—an industry standard for vehicle and tool communication—exemplify how standards can streamline and democratize data access.

For any MOU to be successful and both sides of the debate to reach harmony, a 2025 MOU should bring the key parties from the 2014 MOU together to resolve the open issues, make compromises and deliver on the concept of Right to Repair—that the independent aftermarket and those companies that develop tools for the market have access to the same capabilities as the dealerships, at a fair and reasonable price.

ADDITIONAL CHALLENGES LIE AHEAD

Enforcement remains a concern, as do the costs of OEM licensing for diagnostic data. Emerging technologies like Service-Oriented Vehicle Diagnostics (SOVD) introduce new complexities, raising questions about how to ensure equitable access to crucial repair information.

Additionally, future regulations—like NHTSA's 2029 ADAS mandates—will require that advanced safety systems remain fully

functional post-repair or modification. The aftermarket community must keep working with OEMs, regulators and tool providers to manage these evolving technologies. Together, they can ensure innovation, safety and open access for all.

THE MODIFICATION/ CUSTOMIZATION IMPACT

Specifically for the specialty automotive aftermarket, as vehicles grow more technologically sophisticated, modifications and customizations must advance in tandem to maintain critical safety features such as ADAS.

Aftermarket upgrades—like lift kits or wheels and tires—may alter ADAS functions, emphasizing the need for proper recalibration. Developing a standardized ADAS Readiness Test could help shops verify that safety systems remain fully operational after any customization.

For that matter, the industry needs such a test for repairers and regulators as well to ensure compliance with NHTSA ADAS mandates during vehicle manufacturing, sale, maintenance, collision repair and periodic safety inspections.

Collaborations between automakers, regulators and the aftermarket industry are vital for balancing personalization, technological advancement and road safety.

CALL TO ACTION

For nearly two decades, I have been deeply involved in Right to Repair, helping both sides of this debate understand the industry's real challenges, recognize opportunities for common ground and work toward shared goals. This Massachusetts ruling is not just a milestone—it's also a reminder of the hurdles that still lie ahead.

In many ways, it serves as a roadmap, shaping the future of fair competition, innovation and consumer choice in automotive repair.

To build on this momentum, I encourage key stakeholders to convene in person—just as we did from 2012 to 2014—to negotiate a new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The goal should be clear: independent repairers, customizers and tool providers must have the same diagnostic and repair capabilities as dealerships.

While there were disagreements and compromises in crafting the 2014 MOU, the outcome spurred remarkable collaboration among automakers, the aftermarket and tool providers. The progress we've achieved since then illustrates what can happen when everyone engages in open dialogue, aiming to ensure that independent repairers have the same level of access, at fair and reasonable prices, as dealership networks.

Beyond the MOU, I also invite OEMs and the broader repair and customization community to unite around the challenges posed by NHTSA's 2029 ADAS mandate. Together, we can establish a standardized approach to verifying that Advanced Driver-Assistance Systems remain fully functional and calibrated—even in vehicles with aftermarket modifications such as lift kits, larger wheels and tires and enhanced bumpers.

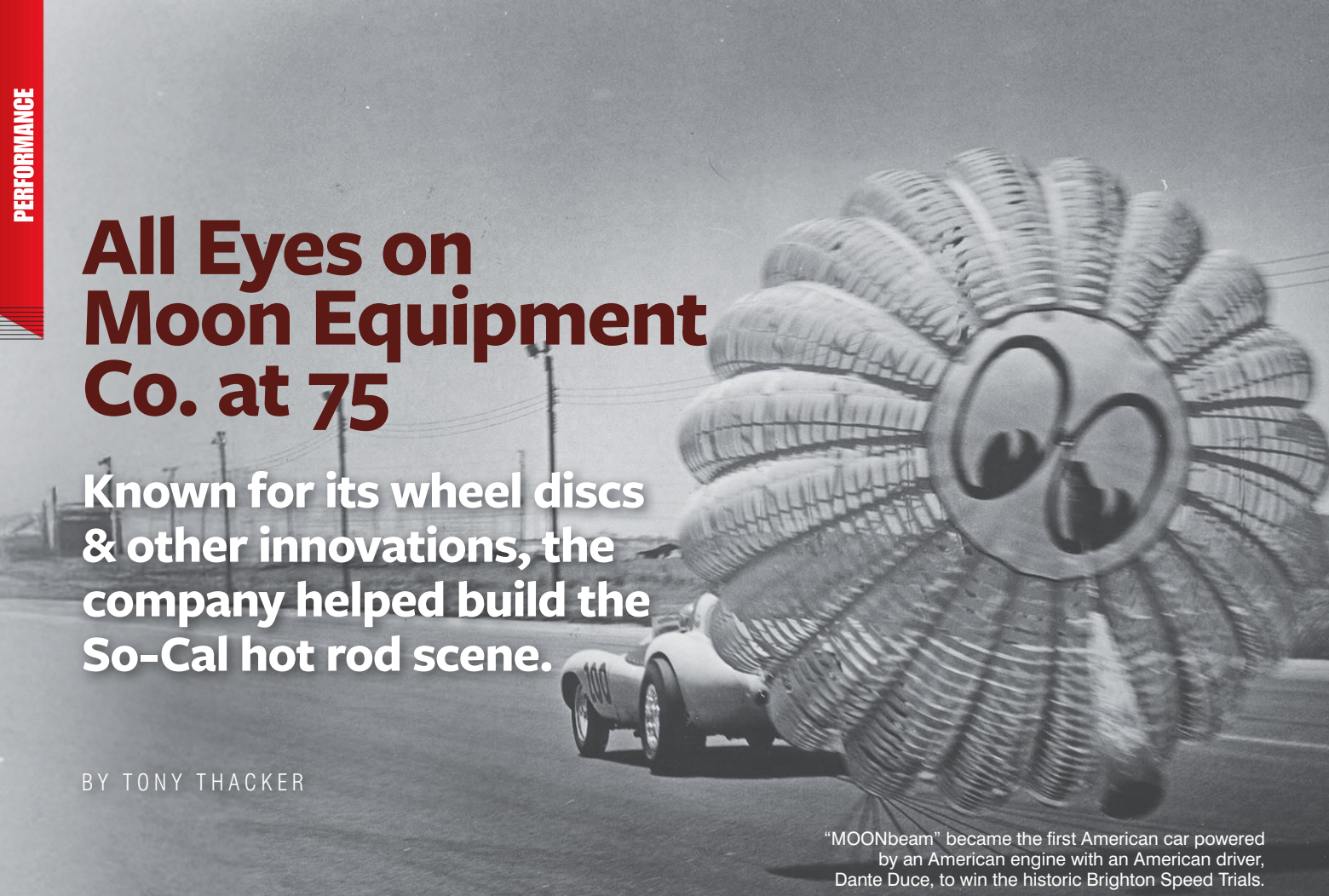
By collaborating early on, we can preserve the thriving customization culture while maintaining the highest standards of road safety. ***TS***



All Eyes on Moon Equipment Co. at 75

Known for its wheel discs & other innovations, the company helped build the So-Cal hot rod scene.

BY TONY THACKER



"MOONbeam" became the first American car powered by an American engine with an American driver, Dante Duce, to win the historic Brighton Speed Trials.



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.

In 1921, near the "Four Corners" intersection of Telegraph Road and Norwalk Boulevard in Santa Fe Springs, California—a hardscrabble town southeast of Los Angeles—George F. Getty's (J. Paul's father) Bell-17 well came in as a 2,500-barrel-a-day gusher that initiated a "black gold" rush.

Unfortunately, Bell-17 caught fire and burned for 45 days (112,500 barrels of oil). Regardless, within a year, Santa Fe Springs became one of the richest oil fields in history—known as "Hell's Half Acre" and attracting the good and the bad.

The bad included fraudster C.C. Julian who grossly oversold stock, while the good included Dallas "Pop" Moon, who had moved his family west from New Richland, Minnesota, in 1936.

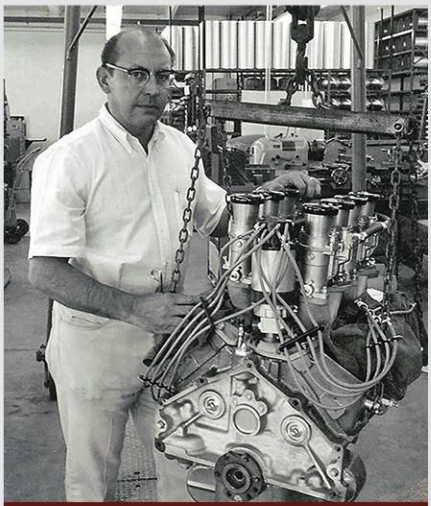
Moon, a Phillips 66 gas station operator, wasn't all good, though, as the move was precipitated by a $75 bust for, ironically, moonshining. Nevertheless, Pop purchased Tessie's Café located at 2827 Bloomfield Ave., one block south of Four Corners, to service the local roughnecks and roustabouts.

Pop quickly renamed the eatery Moon's Café, where his sons, young Dean Ardell and younger brother Dallas Jr., known as "Buzz," bussed tables and flipped eggs. Their thoughts, however, were out back in the garage—not that it was a real garage, as it had a dirt floor and no roof. Nevertheless, the boys made it their own and eventually built a go-kart track named "Moonza" after the Italian track Monza.

Dean attended Whittier Union High School, where he enjoyed shop classes and lettered in both swimming and wrestling. Across the road from the café was Shaffer Tool Works, which made drilling equipment.

It was there that Dean honed his shop skills and in 1941 machined up a compact aluminum fuel block to distribute fuel to a multi-carb setup—it was the first of his many automotive innovations. A tiny American 1931 Austin coupe became his first ride.

After finishing high school at the tail end of 1946, Dean joined the Merchant Marines and toured the Pacific. After his discharge, he purchased a 12-year-old '34 Ford 5-window coupe for $400. In 1953, it



Dean Moon raced, built parts and, in 1953, founded Moon Automotive Equipment Co.





The business helped build the sport of drag racing at home and overseas.

ran 117.87 mph at a Russetta El Mirage meet after he swapped out the Evans-headed flattie for a '51 Studebaker OHV V-8.

Dean and Buzz set to work in the shop where Dean reworked his fuel block and began selling copies to Bell Auto Parts and other local speed shops—and thus, the Moon Equipment Co. was born (although unofficially at the time).

MOONRISE

Dean got a paying job at Greenlea Engineering before going to work at Shaffer Tool. In 1949, he moved to Urich-Gibbs, the local Lincoln Mercury dealer, and in November he married Shirley Freer.

One of many tasks Moon performed at Urich-Gibbs was to work on cars for the Carrera PanAmericana Mexican road race. He also helped fellow Whittier racer Ak Miller with his race car.

In the pursuit of speed, Buzz and Dean acquired a neatly chopped '32 Ford Tudor sedan that they began to race. Without fenders, they ran at the inaugural Santa Ana Drags (July 2, 1950) where they won the Racing Sedan class.

The Tudor was lettered with the "Urich-Gibbs" name in what may well have been one of the earliest examples of corporate sponsorship. Later that year, the Tudor ran 141.17 mph in the "B" Sedan class at a Russetta El Mirage meet.

Consequently, the car got a half-page writeup in the 1951 Hot Rod Handbook, saying it was powered by a 291-ci Merc fitted with Evans heads and intake and three Stromberg 97s. Also shown was Moon's fuel block with his name cast right into it. The text said the car was also fitted with a Moon ignition.

Around this time, and being of prime age, Dean was called up for the Korean War and was scheduled to report to Hill Air Force Base, Utah, in the spring of 1951. Unfortunately, most Korean War records were lost in a fire, so we don't know his exact service dates.

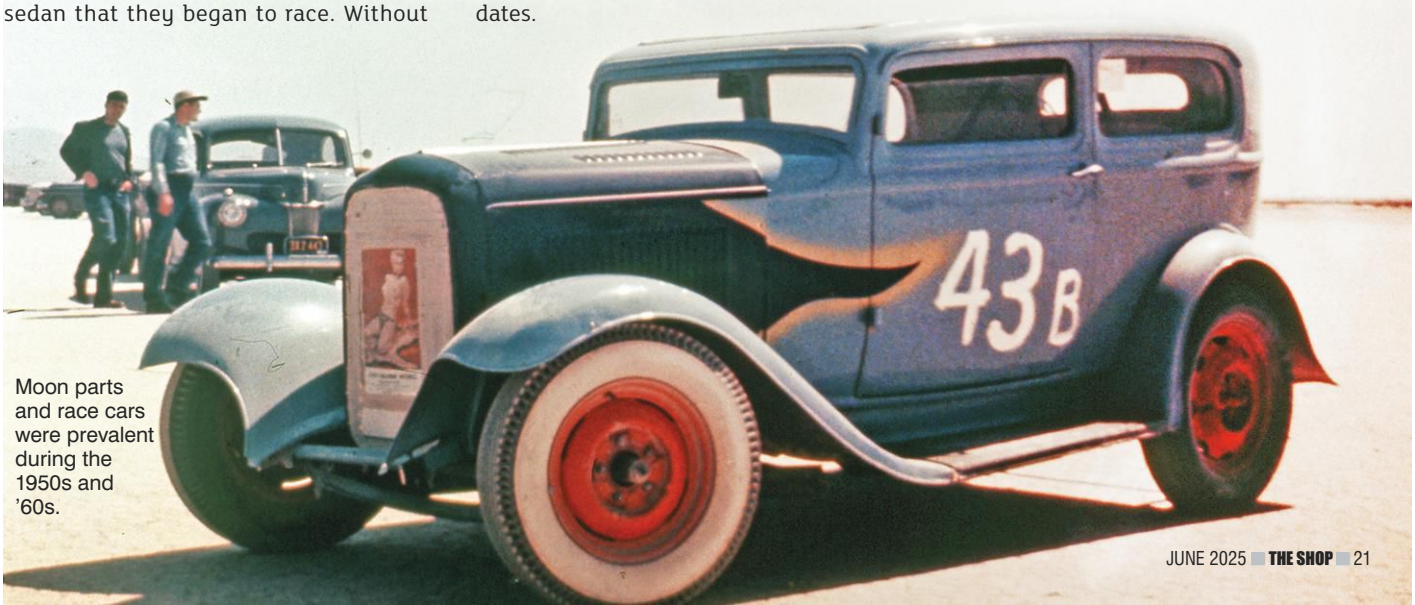
Nevertheless, the posting would be fortuitous, as he became a photographer, gaining a skill that would give him an advantage over his competitors when marketing the Moon brand back home.

Moon expanded his line of homemade products to include fuel linkage and even aluminum fuel tanks when, in October 1953, he decided to go full time and operate Moon Automotive Equipment Co. out of 10935 S. Bloomfield Ave. in Santa Fe Springs—right next to Pop's Café.

To help boost his business, Moon contributed to car magazines and in April '53 enjoyed some exposure in HOT ROD when Don Francisco wrote a lengthy feature about Moon swapping the '51 Studebaker V-8 into his '34 coupe. Clearly shown on the firewall was a Moon-branded fuel block.

GAINING TRACTION

By the mid-'50s, Moon was advertising in the Bonneville Nationals program and spon-



Moon parts and race cars were prevalent during the 1950s and '60s.



Recent events and celebrations show the impact Dean and Buzz Moon and their business had on the So-Cal hot rod scene is still appreciated.



Shige Suganuma purchased Moon Equipment Co. in the 1990s and the business, now headquartered in Japan, continues to thrive.

soring a trophy, and 1955 saw the publication of his first pocket-size catalog. With 32 pages, Moon's Fuel Systems & Accessories catalog was packed full of products. The address was the Bloomfield Avenue location.

By 1956, his advertising was depicting the company's now familiar "eyes" logo along with fuel tanks, foot pedals and famous wheel discs. While the discs will forever be known as Moon discs, it's likely he was influenced by the discs on Miller's needle-nose '27 roadster that ran at Bonneville Salt Flats in 1951.

As the business grew, Moon bought property at 10820 S. Norwalk Blvd. in Santa Fe Springs that continues to serve as the location of Mooneyes USA.

With the increasing demands of the company, he had backed off racing himself, but his products appeared on Creighton Hunter's "Hunter Oil Company Special" 1924 T that also sported "Moon Equipt" on the cowl. It was the first use of Moon's "eyes" on a race car that we can document. The eyes also popped up on Creighton's next ride, the "Slice-O-Pie" sidewinder dragster.

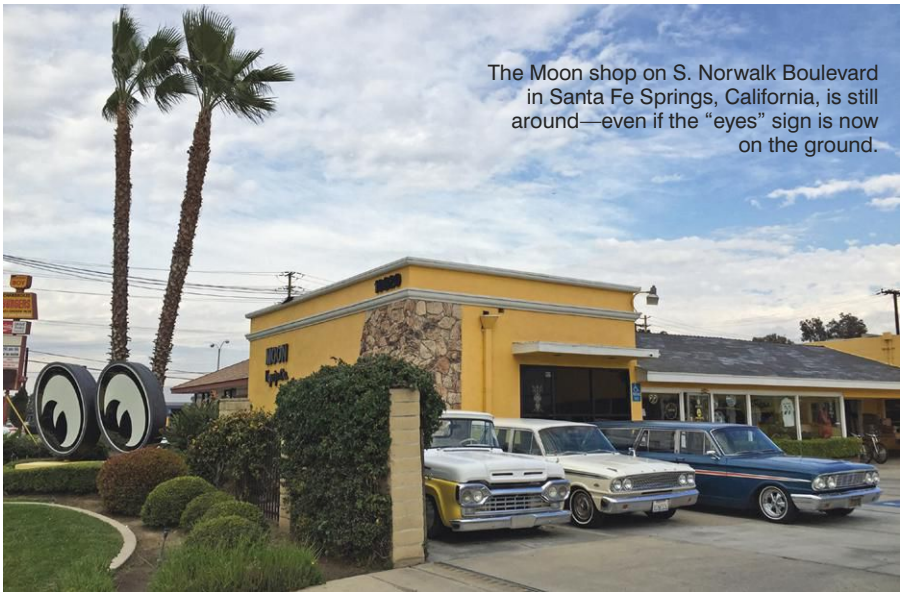
Business continued to boom as Moon got involved in many aspects of the hot rod business, and as the Swinging Sixties kicked off, he seemed to be everywhere. For example, in 1961 the Mooneyes dragster graced the cover of HOT ROD magazine, and in '62 his friend, Carroll Shelby, approached him about assembling the first Cobra in his shop.

Moon also purchased Chuck Potvin's line of speed equipment around the same time.

In 1963, Gary Cagle won Middle Eliminator running 9.52 seconds/153.06 mph at the Winternationals driving the Mooneyes dragster. Later that year, Dean was instrumental in the expansion of drag racing to Europe when he allowed Las Vegas speed shop owner Dante Duce to take the Mooneyes dragster to England for some exhibition runs against U.K. sports car builder Sydney Allard.

Moon was the man of the moment and consequently was elected the second president of the Speed Equipment Manufacturer's Association (now SEMA, the Specialty Equipment Market Association) after Ed Iskenderian.





The Moon shop on S. Norwalk Boulevard in Santa Fe Springs, California, is still around—even if the "eyes" sign is now on the ground.



The company still offers performance fuel systems.

The Moon men returned to England that same year with a new flathead Ford V-8-powered, Devin-bodied sports car. "MOONbeam" became the first American car powered by an American engine with an American driver, Duce, to win the historic Brighton Speed Trials. Duce drove to a terminal speed of 167 mph as Wally Parks looked on.

The versatile "MOONbeam" also raced at Bonneville and at Lions Drag Strip—the eyes were everywhere.

THE NEXT CHAPTER

Unfortunately, brother Buzz, who had been alongside Dean since the beginning, died in 1981 at age 51. After that, Dean's health began to decline as well, and he let the business slide—maybe he no longer had the energy to keep up with the changing industry.

He died in 1987 and the business languished for five years until two Japanese friends stepped in to salvage the ailing brand when no one else would.

More than a decade before Dean's death, 17-year-old Chico Kadoma moved to the U.S. from Japan in 1970 after his uncle immigrated and told the family back home he'd found paradise. Kadoma was a car guy into El Caminos who soaked up the So-Cal car scene.

Eight years later, 22-year-old Shige Suganuma came to the U.S. to attend Southern California Christian College and buy some Moon discs for his brother-in-law. The purchase initiated a chain of events.

Dean and Suganuma hit it off, and Moon shipped 24 Moon discs to Japan that Suganuma hadn't ordered, simply saying, "pay me later." Suganuma sold all the discs and came back for more, eventually becoming Moon's biggest dealer before Dean died.

Dean's wife, Shirley, tried to keep the doors open for a couple of years before her death in 1990. Ultimately unsuccessful, the business closed, and the building fell into decay.

However, in 1992, Suganuma was able to put together a deal with Moon's eldest daughter, Becky, to purchase what was left of the company lock, stock and eyes, along with the deteriorating building.

According to reports, the city of Santa Fe Springs did not make the takeover easy, requiring a 30-foot setback that resulted in the demo of part of the original structure featuring the iconic Mooneyes logo—the eyes now sit on the ground instead of high in the sky. It was a hard pill to swallow, but Suganuma—along with his righthand man in the U.S., Kadoma—overcame the obstacles.

Now, more than 30 years on, the Mooneyes brand is still going strong. Headquartered in Yokohama, Japan, there's a two-story retail store, shipping warehouse, workshops and the popular Moon Café.

The original Santa Fe Springs location is still operating as well, and the company has more than 40 dealers around the world.

Couple all that with two huge recent events—the Yokohama Hot Rod Custom Show and the Mooneyes Christmas Party in Los Angeles—along with Suganuma's daughter, Emi, handling brand development and social media, and you have a legacy that still shines brightly. ***TS***



BIG BUSINESS



After working various jobs in the automotive industry, Jason Bowman knew he wanted to open his own shop.

Big 10 Garage's Arizona restomods rebuild old memories with modern amenities.

ARTICLE & PHOTOS BY MARK C. BACH

Mark C. Bach is a well-preserved automotive junkie with 30W oil in his veins who remembers feeler gauges and brake springs. He has a love for all things that move, especially old-school muscle cars. Bach covers car auctions and the automotive scene and writes for a variety of outlets, including Chevy Classics, Round-Up Publications and eBay Motors, and maintains Route66pubco.com.

Despite being exposed to car culture in his youth, Jason Bowman was convinced his career path was as an aviation mechanic. However, after a stint with Southwest Airlines and moving through various jobs in the automotive industry, he realized his passion was building cars and trucks. So, he opened Big 10 Garage in Gilbert, Arizona.

Like many young people, Bowman was drawn to cars early on. His dad raced with his uncle, and Bowman spent countless hours with Matchbox toys.

His first car was a 1967 VW Bug that he bought for $300, and subsequently he replaced the engines on each of his first three cars.

"I bought junk," admits Bowman, but gained valuable skills restoring and upgrading those vehicles.

During the summer after his junior year of high school, he got the chance to crew on a nitro Funny Car team.

"That was really cool. I got to travel some and just be part of a race team," he recalls.

Before high school was done, he'd worked at a Discount Tire store as well.

A FLYING START

Still, Bowman thought his future was in airplanes. His father was a mechanic for Southwest, and at age 13 during the summer school break he went with his dad to work the graveyard shift in the hangars. At that age he was not certified, but could still fetch tools and help where an extra hand was needed.

After high school, he enrolled at the local Chandler-Gilbert Community College and prepared to become licensed in aircraft airframe and power plants.

"I loved working on airplanes," says Bowman.



Big 10 Garage has six employees working four 10-hour days. They kick off Mondays with a meeting to discuss the week's schedule and activities, and try to have some fun on the weekends.

Below: Big 10 builds maintain the overall essence of the vehicle while adding the appropriate modern power and accessory upgrades.

While still in school in 2002, he was hired by Southwest. He was driving a 1971 Dodge Demon with a 340-ci power plant at the time, and unfortunately the Dodge had a tendency to throw belts at inopportune times, often causing Bowman to be late for work.

Southwest used a points system to track personnel issues. One day, his car threw yet another belt, and he was again late for his shift. His boss called him in and said he had accrued seven points and so they had to let him go.

He reluctantly switched gears, finding work at an O'Reilly Auto Parts store.

Still focused on the aeronautics industry, Bowman and his father opened an aeronautics maintenance shop in 2003. The business grew to six employees and encompassed 10,000 square feet. Later, when a lease was not renewed, with just two weeks' notice, they were forced to move into smaller quarters with only 4,000 square feet. Even with the shop business keeping him occupied, he found time to bring in a car or two and work on them while other employees worked on planes. Eventually, the aeronautics work became less interesting, and Bowman and his dad sold the business.

In 2007, Bowman opened an automotive shop with a friend and, while things started well, he learned that wrenching in somebody's backyard shop was hard, dirty work.

"I realized how much work it is to own a shop and what kind of time you had to put in. I was working 16-hour days just trying to make ends meet," he recalls.

Projects included installing lift kits for dealerships. But, in 2008, the economy soured and demand for trucks dropped. Bowman left the business and went to work for a dealership for two years.

He left there for a position at a custom car shop, but after two weeks learned the owner didn't have the money to pay his wages.

That led to a job at Pro Dyno, where he worked alongside Charles Hendrickson, who later was involved in the television series "Pinks" as a technical adviser. That allowed Bowman to meet several professional car builders.

INDIVIDUAL INITIATIVE

In 2016, Bowman went to Dallas and hung out with some of the workers from Gas Monkey Garage. Upon returning to Arizona, he went to work in his home garage, ultimately building four trucks and upsetting his homeowner's association at the same time.

In 2018, Aaron



Big 10 Garage in Gilbert, Arizona, offers truck and car restomod builds, with projects scheduled 18 months out.



Bowman hopes to soon expand into a 10,000- to 15,000-square-foot facility.

Kaufman was leaving Gas Monkey Garage and asked Bowman to join him on a new television series, "Shifting Gears with Aaron Kaufman." They built four cars in two seasons—a 1971 Scout for King of the Hammers, a semi-truck for racing, a 2000 Subaru Impreza to attend rallies and a 1931 Model A for T.R.O.G. – The Race of Gentlemen.

The TV exposure gained Bowman some fame and followers before Kaufman abruptly opted out of the series. Two days before Christmas in 2018, Bowman and his wife, Nancy, returned to Arizona so he could open his own shop.

"I knew I wasn't going to work for anybody. I just wanted to work for myself," Bowman recalls.

News of his departure from the show hit the internet, and several customers soon approached him with truck projects.

By January 2019, he had a business license and a 2,000-square-foot shop. A year-and-a-half later he added his first employee. Later, he moved to a 4,000-square-foot shop and added three more staff members.

Today, Big 10 Garage (big10garage.com) has a 6,000-square-foot location and plans to expand soon into a larger setting of 10,000 to 15,000 square feet. While 85% of the builds are trucks, an occasional car creeps into the shop for some work as well.

Since Bowman has a strong social media presence, his business also offers a wide variety of clothing and merchandise, supervised by Nancy, who has previous retail business experience.

The shop handles everything mechanically but does not do paint or bodywork. Big 10 also uses another firm to do interior stitching while the crew performs the actual assembly work.

When COVID-19 struck in 2020, Bowman wasn't sure what to expect. There was an abrupt shutdown for a few weeks, but then his customers pressed forward with even more enthusiasm about completing their builds.

From there it's been mostly smooth sailing. Big 10 Garage receives many customers from word of mouth and social media. Bowman has hired a social media staff member to handle the feeds.

A presence at large truck shows also helps





Bowman's skill and talent were on display as part of four builds over two seasons of "Shifting Gears with Aaron Kaufman."

keep his brand alive and thriving. He estimates that two-thirds of his customers can be traced to his attending enthusiast events.

Of course, it helps when his builds walk off with trophies, such as a customer's 1972 GMC truck that won first place in its class at this year's Grand National Roadster Show.

MAINTAINING THE ESSENCE

His approach with customers is to "steer them to what they want." Bowman describes his builds as maintaining the overall essence of the pickup while adding the appropriate modern power and accessory upgrades.

"They are such cool-looking pickup trucks. Why change them?" he asks.

Bowman presently has six employees working four 10-hour days. They kick off Mondays with a meeting to discuss the week's schedule and activities, and he tries to schedule some fun activities for his staff on weekends (like attending truck shows), as he considers them part of his family.

Lamenting the office duties that often keep him off the shop floor, Bowman says he would still rather spend his time making things on the mill and lathe.

Workflow is steady, with builds scheduled about 18 months out.

"It's really neat to be able to do what we do, but it also scares me because what we do is not a necessity," he reveals.

As for advice for shop owners, Bowman offers, "Just do good work. Do the best that you can. Take the extra time to make it nice." ***TS***

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Design Engineering Inc. (DEI), Avon Lake, Ohio, presents ATAC Red Oxide Primer, designed to seal, prime and encapsulate rust on metal surfaces, providing superior protection. The primer helps create a perfectly prepped surface for the company's ATAC Thermal Acoustic Coating, Boom Mat damping material or other finishing products. It does not require a topcoat and delivers waterproofing as well as rust protection.

High-Performance Automotive Chemicals

Holley Performance Brands, Bowling Green, Kentucky, presents its expanded portfolio of High-Performance Automotive Chemicals featuring three new products—**NOS** Octane Booster, Holley Carburetor Cleaner and **Baer** Spray Brake Cleaner. The offerings are designed for automotive enthusiasts and racers seeking improved power output, superior cleaning and enhanced system efficiency.





Flexline Hose Kits

Wilwood, Camarillo, California, offers Universal Flexline Hose Kits for Solid Axles. Solutions include a Weld-On Tabs Flexline Kit that includes weld-on tabs to hold the chassis adapters within reach of the 12-inch flexline-to-caliper connection and includes a choice of NPT fittings, and a 3-inch Axle Clamp Flexline Kit that includes 3-inch axle clamp-on brackets with line mounts to hold the 12-inch flexline-to-caliper connection to a 3/16-inch chassis hardline, with choice of NPT fittings.

Mustang Toploader Hydraulic Clutch Kits

American Powertrain, Cookeville, Tennessee, offers 4-speed Toploader Transmission Hydraulic Clutch Kits designed for first-gen Ford Mustang applications with or without power brakes. Ideal for smooth cruising, the new kits have everything needed for installation with a Ford Toploader 4-speed transmission. Paired with a MalWood under-dash hydraulic pedal, the hydraulic clutch is pre-bled for easy bleeding and tested at 1,800 psi.





Chevy Truck Radio

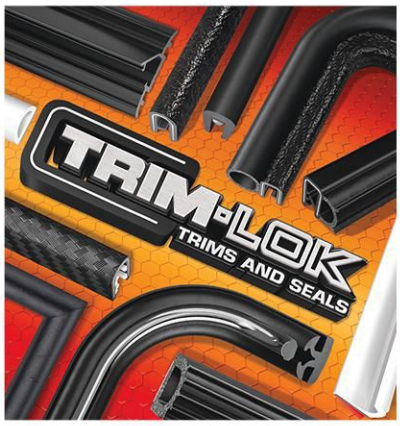
Custom Autosound Mfg., Fullerton, California, presents its 1967-72 Chevy Truck Slide Bar Radio featuring a classic analog face that disappears to show a modern, digital display offering classic style and modern features. It functions similar to how the bar did on original radios to change from AM to FM, but instead it controls which face displays. The radio features a bar that actuates the classic screen to make it display or disappear. The digital tuner delivers 300 watts of power, a USB port, a CD changer controller and built-in Bluetooth.



So-Cal Series Seats

TMI Products, Corona, California, introduces its So-Cal Series entry-level seats. The affordable bucket seats are designed to fit a wide selection of vehicles and are available with headrests. Handcrafted in-house with a focus on quality, they are sold in pairs and come fully assembled and ready to install with TMI slider tracks. The black vinyl seats include a proprietary molded foam blend that meets low VOC UL Greenguard Gold standards with an FMVSS 302 Fire-Retardant rating.

Trim, Seal & Gasket Catalog



Trim-Lok, Buena Park, California, presents Catalog 800, introducing the company's latest trim, seal and gasket products. Featuring an enhanced, user-friendly layout, the catalog highlights high-quality parts and innovative solutions and includes an expanded Design Guide that has been significantly enhanced with a newly updated Materials Guide, a comprehensive Adhesives Guide and detailed information on Trim-Lok's value-added operations, including services such as cut-to-length, color matching, slip coating and more.



Outback Exhaust

AWE, Horsham, Pennsylvania, offers its 0FG Catback Exhaust for Subaru Outback 2.4T applications. Completely bolt-on for an easy installation, the system features patented drone-canceling 180 Technology and dual reinforced BashGuards in the rear for increased clearance and rigidity. It delivers maximum gains of 5 hp and 3 pound-feet of torque at the wheels and saves 5.5 pounds compared to the stock exhaust.



SBF Modular Serpentine Accessory Drive Supercharger Kit

ProCharger, Lenexa, Kansas, presents an Accessory Drive Kit featuring a sleek design and unique supercharger bracket. Specifically designed for Ford small-block engines, the kit includes 8- or 10-rib pulleys shown to support 1,300-plus-hp. The base kit includes the water pump pulley, crank pulley, alternator bracket and pulley, and serpentine belt and tensioner. Upgrades include a power steering bracket and pulley, A/C bracket and pulley cover, supercharger head unit P-1SC through F-2, intercooler/bypass valve/tubing and more.



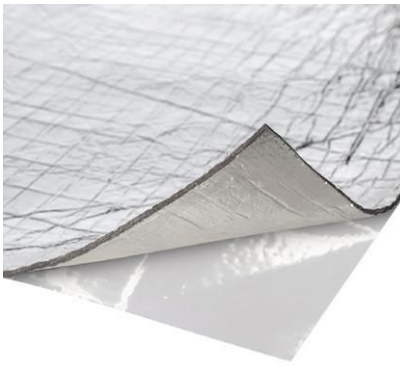
Dodge Deep Sump Transmission Pan

BD Diesel, Abbotsford, British Columbia, presents a Deep Sump Transmission Pan for 2013-24 Dodge/Ram vehicles equipped with AISIN transmissions. The pan adds 3.5 quarts for better cooling and extended transmission life and is made from aluminum with heat-dissipating fins to keep temperatures down. Enhanced rigidity prevents case twisting for improved durability and installation takes approximately 1.5 hours.

Mustang Supercharger Kit



Vortech Superchargers, Oxnard, California, presents its Complete Supercharger Kit for 2021-23 Ford Mustang GT models. The comprehensive kit boosts the stock 5.0L GT to 692 hp and 584 pound-feet of torque with 7.5 to 8.5 psi on 91-octane fuel. Complete, fully calibrated supercharging systems are available for 6-speed manual and 10-speed automatic versions. Features include a new, patented oil control system, state-of-the-art centrifugal compressor stage and 76% adiabatic efficiency for less heat.



Adhesive-Backed Insulation

Thermo-Tec, Greenwich, Ohio, presents its new line of Adhesive-Backed Thermo Guard products, available in various sizes and configurations. The company's Thermo Guard FR high-tech foil heat barrier blocks more than 90% of radiant heat and protects against temperatures up to 1,500 degrees. Made in the USA, it is easy to apply, trimmable and suitable for the interiors of cars, trucks, RVs, buses, aircraft and more. ***TS***

Committed to Helping Kids

SEMA Cares & its partner organizations mobilize industry support to help children in need.

BY STEFANIE GALEANO-ZALUTKO



Stefanie Galeano-Zalutko heads up Zalutko Business Services and has been freelance writing across multiple industries for more than 10 years. Visit the company's Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn pages for more information, or contact her directly at szalutko@zalutkobusiness.com to learn more about client services.

Years back, Richard Petty invited fellow automotive industry professionals to visit Victory Junction, a newly conceived youth camp dedicated to empowering children who suffer from serious illnesses.

The racing legend explained Victory Junction's commitment to deeply enriching the lives of disadvantaged children through life-changing camp experiences, at no cost to their families. Spread across 84 acres in the hills of Randleman, North Carolina, Victory Junction was designed as a safe, inclusive environment for all kids to be kids—a chance for those facing an uphill battle to cast aside the weight of personal circumstances and fill their days with laughter, exploration, fun and friendship.

Joel Ayres, a 50-year aftermarket industry veteran and active volunteer, was intrigued by the concept and tapped the Specialty Equipment Market Association's (SEMA) former Light Truck Accessory Alliance (LTAA) council to get involved.

Three industry representatives took Petty up on his offer and volunteered at the camp for a weekend.

"At Victory Junction, the kids are organized into groups based on their condition, so they have a chance to connect with other children who are going through a similar situation, and every volunteer is assigned an individual camper," Ayres says, noting the compassion strewn into each organizational detail.

"These kids have serious illnesses—doctors, nurses and equipment are right there. Yet my first visit to Victory Junction was like one big playground. To see kids severely affected but still smiling, still living life—it was inspiring."

Ayres recalls one special wheelchair-bound camper performing wheelies on the dance floor.

"At the talent show, she sang and did a comedy act poking fun at 'stand-up' comedy from a wheelchair. She was so funny, and there wasn't a dry eye in the house. I just thought, 'Man, with a positive attitude like that…'" he reflects.

While the world was busy telling these kids "You're different, you can't," Victory Junction clapped back by closing the gap. Ayres was impressed with every aspect of the camp, from its structure and goals to its activities and impact.

"It was such a humbling experience—one that makes you rethink and reprioritize," he says.

Ayres returned home on a mission, "all fired up" and determined to build a bridge between Victory Junction and the aftermarket.

With the SEMA board of directors and key aftermarket professionals in his corner, SEMA Cares was born, with Ayres as its first chairperson. Ayres credits former SEMA President Chris Kersting, Scooter Brothers, Rick Rollins and Peter MacGillivray as early



(Photo credit: cartoon-IT - stock.adobe.com)

industry supporters, along with Luanne Brown, a former SEMA board member and SBN chairperson, who volunteered to take over after Ayres stepped down a few years later.

"All of us wanted to help children that were going through tough times; some who were even betrayed by adults," he says. "We were blessed in our business lives and just wanted to find the right way for our industry to get involved and give back."

A SHARED MISSION

Formally established in 2007, SEMA Cares (sema.org/sema-cares) is a nonprofit entity that serves as a liaison between the automotive aftermarket and children in need.

Led by an eight-person committee and dozens of active volunteers, SEMA Cares acts as a medium for association members to collaborate and give back, making a real difference in the lives of disadvantaged children.

"Care for us and accept us—we are all human beings. We are normal. We have hands. We have feet. We can walk, we can talk, we have needs just like everyone else.



SEMA Cares raises funds for partner organizations including Childhelp with a Pinewood Drags event and other efforts. (Photo courtesy Childhelp)

Don't be afraid of us, we are all the same!" exclaims Nkosi Johnson, a South African child born with HIV/AIDS who greatly influenced public perceptions of the disease and its effects before his death at age 12.

His life and words not only inspired Ayres in the early days of SEMA Cares, but also remain at the core of each partner organization:

- ***Victory Junction:***
  Founded in honor of Adam Petty, the program assists children with serious medical conditions and serious illnesses by providing life-changing camping experiences that are exciting, fun and empowering—all at no cost to children and their families.
- ***Childhelp:***
  Serving abused, neglected and at-risk children, programs focus on advocacy, intervention, treatment, prevention, family resilience and community outreach.
- ***Austin Hatcher Foundation for Pediatric Cancer:***
  A lifeline during a pediatric cancer diagnosis, the foundation provides services to children and their families through industrial arts therapy, diversionary therapy, psycho-oncology and lifestyle education.

While many organizations are worthy of partnership, such exclusive relationships



The Austin Hatcher Foundation for Pediatric Cancer is one of three SEMA Cares partner organizations. (Photo courtesy Austin Hatcher Foundation)



AHF offers children and families a lifeline during a pediatric cancer diagnosis, supporting their journeys through industrial arts therapy, diversionary therapy, psycho-oncology and healthy lifestyle education. (Photo courtesy Austin Hatcher Foundation)

allow SEMA Cares to exercise an even greater impact. Victory Junction, Childhelp and the Austin Hatcher Foundation for Pediatric Cancer are finely woven into the fabric of SEMA Cares—knitted with common values, a shared mission and direct ties to the automotive industry.

While the organizations may assist differently in hardships, each one represents the community at large and the value system of SEMA Cares.

"Every person I've ever met at these foundations just wants to help a family at their most base level," says Lori Ramsey, current chairwoman of SEMA Cares.

The organizations, in conjunction with SEMA Cares, are laser focused on making a tangible difference in the lives of disadvantaged children—one story and one family at a time.

"Some of these children have faced serious illness or never felt hugged, loved or safe," Ramsey adds, acknowledging heartbreak and healing is the cardiac rhythm of each child under the umbrella of SEMA Cares. "Together, we really want these kids to feel as normal as they possibly can, to know they aren't alone despite all of the childhood ailments and/or trauma."

Consistent funding distributed through the SEMA Cares network ensures children and loved ones who are a part of the partner organizations receive critical care and services that extend beyond a diagnosis or personal situation.

The children who benefit pay it forward through healing, making the most of every opportunity and inspiring those around them.

Ramsey recalls visiting Victory Junction last summer with her granddaughter. The night before a scheduled 5K race, the nonprofit hosted a dinner where some of the campers were in attendance. The beautiful irony is while staff and volunteers are empathetic to creating a sense of normalcy for the at-risk youth, many publicly discuss their personal struggles with a lion's heart of courage.

"There was this little girl—she had to be about 8-10 years old—what an articulate speaker. She was so passionate about Victory Junction because, due to health issues, she wouldn't be able to attend any other summer camp. It was so moving, and I couldn't stop crying," Ramsey says, noting the experience inspired her granddaughter to eventually become a Victory Junction camp counselor as well.

RAISING THE BAR

All agree a child's life should be filled with wonder and praise, not worry and strife. At SEMA Cares, passionate volunteers are dedicated to uniting the voices and resources of the automotive aftermarket to ensure a better tomorrow for vulnerable youth.

While the nonprofit organization cannot erase the heavy burden some children unfortunately carry, its industry advocates are committed to lightening the load in any way possible.

With a small army of volunteers and contributors firmly behind the cause, representatives of SEMA Cares raise national awareness, host numerous events, coordinate special auctions and collect donations year-round.

"Everyone involved has a personal mission to raise the bar," Ramsey says, noting how small gestures of kindness can lead to



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Greg Henderson, owner of Unofficial Use Only in Lennon, Michigan, took the "Unofficial Road to SEMA" on a 50cc moped last year to fundraise on behalf of SEMA Cares. (Photo courtesy Unofficial Use Only)

remarkable change. "There's lots of little examples at work every single day."

One such instance is volunteer Rich Barsamian who, alongside his bandmates in Led Foot, played at the annual SEMA banquet and donated all proceeds to SEMA Cares.

Another example of heart and ingenuity is custom vehicle builder Greg Henderson, owner of Unofficial Use Only in Lennon, Michigan. Revered for clever creations and craftsmanship, Henderson's masterpieces are often front and center on the SEMA Show floor.

Last year, however, he opted to take the road less traveled to the SEMA Show, rather than debuting a new project. What initially started as a lighthearted joke about "the hard road to SEMA" took root in the form of a 2,400-mile, two-week trek on a compact 50cc moped to fundraise on behalf of SEMA Cares.

"I've built a lot of vehicles for SEMA over the years, but this time, riding a scooter across the country, ended up being one of the most rewarding experiences of my career," Henderson was quoted as saying.

On a larger scale, popular influencers lend their clout and credibility, alongside industry titans with boots on the ground at gala and community events.



The SEMA Cares Pinewood Drags hosted at the annual SEMA Hall of Fame Installation Banquet in July has evolved into a signature annual fundraising event. (Photo courtesy SEMA)

Various industry councils and membership groups actively involve SEMA Cares in their charity initiatives, including auto care professionals who raised nearly $20,000 at their own banquet.

Recently, the SEMA Businesswomen's Network (SBN) also stepped up to organize an exclusive, female-led 2021 Ford Bronco Wildtrak vehicle build. Not only did the project fetch national attention and $59,600 for SEMA Cares funding at auction, it also served as a testament to the talent and growing involvement of women in the automotive industry.

"The decision to use this build to give back to the community through SEMA Cares was an easy one, and the positive effect it had on the women who participated and the connections they made will last a lifetime," says Nicole Bradle, SBN council director.

Ramsey continues to be impressed by the industry-wide involvement.

"I was (pleasantly) surprised by the number of people who approached me about SEMA Cares at the 2024 SEMA Show. That made me feel great—like we're doing something right to get the word out," she adds.

PINEWOOD DRAGS

Over the years, one fundraising event in particular continues to ignite hope, healing and happiness among children in need. The SEMA Cares Pinewood Drags—a concept conceived by SEMA CEO Mike Spagnola and hosted at the annual SEMA Hall of Fame Installation Banquet in July—has evolved into a signature annual event, "combining just the right elements of charitable giving, community participation, automotive passion and youthful spirit," according to organizational representatives. Donors can choose among three options:

- ***The Build-It-For-Me Kit:*** Upon purchasing, a child from one of the SEMA Cares sponsored charities will decorate the vehicle.
- ***The Stock Class:*** Bring out your inner child with a build relying on kit parts only. Decorations are the only modification allowed. Cars and trucks race side-by-side in this all-class competition.
- ***The Unlimited Class:*** Calling true builders who are in it to win it! Featuring all-out customization that is scaled down to size, participants enjoy the anything-goes race to the finish line.

Ramsey says the Industry Cup Challenge takes charitable giving to the next level. After the sponsoring companies are divided into five divisions (warehouse distributors, manufacturers, media groups, rep agencies and service providers), competitors make a mad dash to the finish line with child-built pinewood cars. The winner from each division competes in an industry-wide race for first place overall—and bragging rights.

Similar to the time-honored Stanley Cup tradition, the champion has the privilege of displaying the trophy for a year, after which the previous year's winner must defend its title or pay it forward to the next winner.

In the end, Ramsey notes, "everyone is a winner," as the children make lasting memories building toy cars, the industry engages with the community in an overwhelmingly positive way and partner charities receive critical funding to carry out their missions to help children in need.

"I'm truly thankful for every dollar we bring in. No donation is too small," Ramsey says, explaining all funds are distributed evenly among the three partner organizations.

After raising $67,000 last year, SEMA Cares has set an ambitious goal of $100,000 in 2025. While the organization will lean on its tried-and-true fundraising events like the annual Pinewood Drags, the committee also plans to diversify initiatives and expand grassroots efforts to bring even more people and opportunities into the fold.

"Right now, the biggest challenge is economics. Things are tight and a lot of companies are cutting back," says Ramsey, while noting "it isn't just about the money. These are real lives—real children in real situations."

PEOPLE FIRST

Before his passing, Nkosi Johnson was quoted as saying, "Do all you can with what you have, in the time you have, in the place you are."

At SEMA Cares, every touchpoint matters. Genuine acts of compassion and giving across the industry reinforce the nonprofit's motto of "every child deserves to pursue happiness." For a lifelong philanthropist and volunteer like Ramsey, SEMA Cares holds a special place in her heart.

"It is one of the most rewarding volunteer initiatives I have ever participated in. SEMA Cares, and the organizations we work with, have gifted me a new perspective on life, helping others and fundraising," she says. "Working with these charities and the people involved has made an impression on me that I will take throughout my life. Many have become personal friends in a shared mission."

Ramsey and Ayres agree that success always comes down to the people involved.

"Our volunteers are second to none," Ayres says, noting how fortunate SEMA Cares is to have the rock-solid support of the largest aftermarket foundation in the world.

He remembers calling in favors at the onset of SEMA Cares, requests that quickly morphed into industry professionals seeking out involvement on their own. Before long, Spagnola and his family were actively involved, as well as Barsamian, Melanie Hellwig-White and many others.

"Years ago, I decided to step down as chairperson so that SEMA Cares could evolve from my brainchild into something sustainable. Look at it now," Ayres says proudly, commending Ramsey and the committee for their continued hard work.

Today, next-generation supporters like Colby McLaughlin, Sara Morosan and Kathryn Reinhardt are helping to carry the torch, ensuring the legacy lives on. The committee, which is purely volunteer, drives the mission forward by staying relevant with fresh ideas, emphasizing annual priorities and living the values they defend through SEMA Cares.

Every volunteer, from Dawson Druesedow, Matt Reasoner and Tony Colombini to Michelle McGaughy and Jenna Jeffries, brings a different perspective and skillset to the table, Ramsey says. Such diversity among the committee members, and with the support of SEMA liaison Joe Escobar, allows SEMA Cares to be versatile and nimble in its service.

"When you meet the children and families personally affected, when you see with your own eyes how much it means to them, it just makes your heart swell. That feeling is contagious," says Ramsey. "Love spreads, support spreads and it inspires the next generation to do the same. That's what lights the fire inside me." ***TS***



SPIRIT OF GIVING

The specialty automotive aftermarket takes care of its own & others.

Whether it's supporting educational programs for the next generation of professionals, participating in charity builds or working with nonprofits, the specialty aftermarket isn't shy when it comes to giving back.

Donating time, money and/or resources is nothing new in an industry known for having a big heart. Efforts large and small are made every day.

Here's a sampling of recent examples.

CENTURY CHEMICAL SUPPORTS RV WOMEN'S ALLIANCE DONATION DRIVE

As a woman-owned business and an active supporter of the RV Women's Alliance, Century Chemical Corp. partnered with RVWA last winter on a donation drive for the I Support the Girls (ISTG) nonprofit, with the goal of collecting 80,000 essential items for women in need.

ISTG is a global organization dedicated to collecting and distributing critical resources such as bras, menstrual hygiene products and toiletries to homeless and low-income women and girls, ensuring their dignity and health are prioritized.

Century Chemical also hosted a celebratory brunch in March, inviting participants to bring their donations and take part in the festivities.

"As a company deeply invested in supporting women, Century Chemical is honored to work alongside the RVWA and ISTG in this meaningful effort," says Denyse Pontius, CEO of Century Chemical. "We believe the RVWA's focus on inclusivity and empowerment is creating incredible opportunities for women across the country and making an enormous impact on the RV industry and beyond."

RVWA
RV WOMEN'S ALLIANCE

TACOMA OVERLAND BUILD BENEFITS A RACE AGAINST BLINDNESS



Rago Fabrication partnered with Doetsch Off-Road on a 2024 Toyota Tacoma Trailhunter overland build for A Race Against Blindness. (Photo courtesy Rago Fabrication)

Rago Fabrication partnered with Doetsch Off-Road on a 2024 Toyota Tacoma Trailhunter overland build for A Race Against Blindness, a nonprofit organization that raises money to fund research and treatments to fight childhood blindness.

After their son Luke was diagnosed with Bardet-Biedl Syndrome (BBS), Kristina and Steve Johnston started the charity to help find a cure for BBS, Retinitis Pigmentosa (RP) and other low-vision disorders. To raise money, they host fundraising events on their website where donors can purchase entries for a chance to win concert tickets, vacation packages, vehicle builds and more.

The Rago Fabrication build features a 2024 Tacoma Trailhunter and 2025 Voyager Xpedition Trailer assembled and wrapped by Doetsch Off-Road. Rago contributed its center-mount winch front bumper, rear bumper, roof rack, RIGID round light roof rack mount, roof rack decking panels, ditch light brackets, bed rack crossmembers, bed cab MOLLE panels, bed side MOLLE panels and bed channel stiffeners.

Highlights include a Warn Industries EVO 10-S winch mounted to the front bumper, a Westcott Designs 1.5-inch lift kit and rock sliders, Method Race Wheels with 35-inch Nitto Ridge Grappler Tires, RIGID Industries lights and a Freespirit Recreation tent.

"It is always an honor when we get the opportunity to work with Kristina, Steve and Luke," says Daniel Bohler, Rago brand manager. "Witnessing the off-road community come together to not only assist in creating exceptional off-road builds but also to participate in each fundraiser has been an inspiration to us all. It is extraordinary to see what we can accomplish as a community. As always, it was a pleasure to partner with Doetsch Off-Road and help bring their vision to fruition."

WOMEN-LED REAL DEAL REVOLUTION WORKSHOPPES TEACH WELDING, PINSTRIPING & MORE

Over the last year, hundreds of women, children and hardcore male motorcycle riders learned how to weld, pinstripe and rebuild their carburetors thanks to Real Deal Revolution, a powerful collective of skilled tradeswomen fueled by passion and driven by a shared legacy, who empower others to break boundaries and achieve extraordinary feats.

Cofounded by Jessi Combs, the "fastest woman on Earth" and first female grand marshal of the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally, and renowned automotive painter and bike builder Theresa Contreras, Real Deal Revolution has launched several new programs including a Moto scholarship with Doffo Winery, was awarded a VF Foundation grant and was recognized by Event Marketer in its "Top Experiential Exhibit Trends."

With support from Dickies, Harley-Davidson, Lincoln Electric and Industrial Metal Supply Co., and assistance from the Jessi Combs Foundation, Real Deal Revolution brings its traveling "workshoppes" to high-profile automotive and motorcycle events, including the SEMA Show.

Last year's workshoppes and instructors included:

- Carb Rebuilds by Riley Schlick, who started Riley's Rebuilds as a teenager, and Bobbi Prueter, an award-winning bike builder
- Pinstriping by Shayna Guy, custom painter on Netflix's "Resurrected Rides," and Contreras, cohost of Auto Revolution's "High Octane Hustle" podcast
- Resin by Tamara Robertson, engineering expert for Discovery Channel's "Mythbusters Jr."
- Welding by Hannah Stout-Ortega, Zoe Carmichael, Lindsey Hover and Sana Abbas, as well as other scholarship recipients of the Jessi Combs Foundation

"(Having celebrated) our 10th year, we're even more driven heading into our next decade of empowering others through hands-on skilled trades," says Contreras. "Working with partners like Dickies and being awarded the VF Foundation grant has played a pivotal role in not only us looking good while doing what we love, but by supporting us in our mission to help supercharge our future. With support like theirs, we look forward to making Real Deal workshoppes even more accessible to everyone."





Real Deal Revolution is a powerful collective of skilled tradeswomen who teach welding, carb rebuilding and pinstriping through "workshoppes" at prominent industry events. (Photos courtesy Real Deal Revolution)

VALVOLINE DONATES TO AACF DURING MECHANICS MONTH

Every March, Valvoline Global Operations celebrates Mechanics Month, honoring hardworking professionals who keep vehicles—and the world—moving forward. This year, as part of its commitment to supporting the backbone of the automotive aftermarket industry, Valvoline Global donated $5,000 to the Automotive Aftermarket Charitable Foundation (AACF) to provide assistance to mechanics and aftermarket teammates facing unexpected hardships.

"For more than 20 years, Valvoline Global has stood alongside the AACF in its mission to support the men and women who dedicate their lives to keeping our cars, trucks and fleets running safely," says David Young, vice president/business development, Valvoline Global Operations. "Mechanics are the unsung heroes of global mobility, ensuring that businesses, families and entire industries keep moving forward. Through this donation, we are reinforcing our commitment to giving back to those who give so much to us."

The AACF serves as a lifeline for aftermarket professionals, providing financial assistance, resources and guidance in times of need, including sudden medical expenses, natural disasters or other personal hardships.

"We are incredibly grateful for Valvoline Global's continued generosity and commitment to supporting the people who make the automotive aftermarket industry thrive," says John Kairys, executive director of AACF. "For over two decades, Valvoline has been a dedicated partner, helping us provide critical assistance to industry teammates and their families when they need it most. This ongoing support is invaluable to ensuring we can continue our mission of being a safety net for those who keep the world moving."

LIPPERT PARTNERS WITH SHEPHERD'S HOUSE TO SUPPORT HOMELESS VETERANS



Lippert leadership from northern Indiana and Ohio came together to support Shepherd's House, a nonprofit organization providing long-term residential support to homeless veterans. (Photo courtesy Lippert Components Inc.)

Towing and aftermarket products supplier Lippert Components Inc. completed its latest Built to Serve event over the winter in Fort Wayne, Indiana. Lippert leadership from northern Indiana and Ohio came together to support Shepherd's House, a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing long-term residential support for homeless veterans struggling with alcohol and chemical dependencies, as well as mental health challenges.

As part of Lippert's ongoing Built to Serve initiative, which encourages team members to give back to the communities where they live and work, leaders from across the company volunteered their time and resources to assist Shepherd's House in enhancing its facility and supporting its mission of veteran recovery.

The day's activities included organizing donations, assisting with maintenance projects and providing support to staff who work to help men and women regain their independence.

"At Lippert, we are deeply committed to supporting those who have served our country," says Michilah Grimes, social impact strategist at Lippert. "Our Built to Serve events are an important part of our company culture and we are proud to collaborate with organizations like Shepherd's House, whose work is vital in providing a path to recovery for veterans in need."

Shepherd's House offers a structured, long-term residential program for veterans recovering from alcoholism, chemical dependency or mental health issues. The program emphasizes dignity, self-sufficiency and the development of a solid foundation of sobriety.

Veterans participating in the program work closely with professional staff to create personalized recovery plans, focusing on education, therapy and building effective support systems.

"We are incredibly grateful for Lippert's support," says Tracey Barr, director of veteran outreach for Shepherd's House. "Their generosity not only impacts the physical environment here but also reminds our veterans that they are valued members of the community. This partnership helps us move closer to our vision of empowering veterans to become self-sufficient, employed and hopeful for their future."

CRC INDUSTRIES, WESTERN WELDING ACADEMY POWER 2025 BLUE COLLAR TOUR

Vehicle maintenance products company CRC Industries and Western Welding Academy are partnering on the fifth annual Blue Collar Tour, showcasing the opportunities and rewards of a career in the trades.

With more than 30 planned stops at high schools and vocational training centers across the U.S., the 2025 Blue Collar Tour offers students hands-on welding demonstrations, career insights and the opportunity to connect directly with WWA instructors, alumni and industry experts.

"Our country was built by hardworking men and women in the trades, and it's time we invest in the future of these industries," says Colton Pfeil, vice president of marketing at Western Welding Academy. "The Blue Collar Tour isn't just about promoting welding—it's about giving students the tools to create their own successful future."

The Blue Collar Tour began in 2020 during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Tyler Sasse, founder of Western Welding Academy, saw how the crisis eliminated opportunities for young people and left America facing an even greater shortage of skilled labor.

The tour has grown each year since, introducing the trades to high school students nationwide and highlighting welding as a path to a rewarding, well-paid career.

Presented as a live concert-style event, tour highlights and activities include hands-on welding demonstrations, inspirational talks, a working tour bus and mobile welding setup, and sponsored tool and swag giveaways.

"CRC is dedicated to keeping the industry moving forward, and that includes addressing the skilled trade workforce gap," says Steven Drake, president of CRC Industries, Americas. "CRC's sponsorship of the Blue Collar Tour and partnership with Western Welding Academy is a natural extension of our commitment by providing support to train the next generation. Together, we get it done."



CRC Industries and Western Welding Academy are partnering on the fifth annual Blue Collar Tour, showcasing the opportunities and rewards of a career in the trades to high school students nationwide. (Photo courtesy CRC Industries Inc.)

DRIVETIME, GIRL GANG GARAGE DONATE REFURBISHED VAN TO MAGGIE'S PLACE





DriveTime partnered with Girl Gang Garage to donate a fully refurbished van to Maggie's Place to help women in need. (Photos courtesy Maggie's Place)

Preowned car company DriveTime partnered with Girl Gang Garage to donate a fully refurbished van to Maggie's Place. The donation marks the culmination of the Women for Change initiative, a collaboration between the three organizations to empower and uplift women in need.

"At DriveTime, we believe in creating opportunities that improve lives," says Robyn Jordan, head of people at DriveTime. "Partnering with Girl Gang Garage and Maggie's Place allowed us to make a tangible difference in the lives of women and families. This van is more than a vehicle—it symbolizes empowerment, independence and hope."

Last summer, 10 women joined automotive personality Bogi Lateiner at Girl Gang Garage to contribute more than 250 hours of their time to benefit women in need with a vehicle build. Assisting was U Pull U Pay, which donated the van, and Advance Auto Parts, which provided essential parts for the refurbishment.

The restored vehicle was deemed safe and reliable, ready to serve the mothers and children of Maggie's Place, an Arizona organization that provides safe housing and a nurturing community for homeless pregnant women.

"Maggie's Place is honored to be the recipient of this van, refurbished by women, for women," says Laura Magruder, CEO. "I want to thank everyone involved including DriveTime, Women for Change and Bogi's Garage, as well as the many women who volunteered numerous hours to complete this project. We appreciate the community support we receive for our moms and their babies."

ENERSYS RENEWS SPONSORSHIP DEAL WITH TEAM BRIT



EnerSys is helping power Team BRIT, the world's only competitive team of disabled racing drivers. (Photo courtesy EnerSys)

EnerSys is helping power the world's only competitive team of disabled racing drivers for the fourth consecutive year after extending its ODYSSEY battery sponsorship with Team BRIT for 2025.

As part of the company's longstanding support for Team BRIT and its mission to create a completely level playing field for disabled racers, EnerSys will provide batteries and technical expertise to the organization throughout the season.

Team BRIT's race cars—two McLaren 570S GT4s and a BMW M240i—feature advanced hand control technology to allow drivers to compete on equal terms against able-bodied rivals.

"We're looking forward to another exciting season ahead with Team BRIT," says Dave McMullen, senior director of global marketing, transportation & specialty at EnerSys. "Over the years, it's been fantastic to see Team BRIT take podium after podium, and we're incredibly proud to be a part of the journey as they continue to champion inclusion in the world of motorsport and beyond."

The renewed sponsorship agreement will help enable Team BRIT to further its work to create a ladder of development opportunities for disabled drivers, from grassroots, entry-level racing to the most competitive endurance challenges in the United Kingdom.

"It's phenomenal to have the continued support of EnerSys and the ODYSSEY battery brand," says Al Locke, engineering director at Team BRIT. "Endurance racing demands a battery that is reliable and tough. We've been using ODYSSEY batteries for many years and they never let us down—they deliver extreme power, they're lightweight and they're sturdy enough to cope with any knocks on the racetrack. We need the best kit to help us continue with our goals to drive real change, so we're thrilled to have ODYSSEY batteries on board as we continue to break down barriers in motorsport." **TS**

Restyling
AFTERMARKET ACCESSORIES

Phone Calls p. 50 | Products p. 54



Look for a tailored solution when possible in favor of a "one-size-fits-all" approach. (Photo courtesy RockJock 4x4 by John Currie)

ON THE RISE

Taking lift & leveling kit sales to the next level.

BY JEF WHITE

Editor's note: This is the first half of a two-part article highlighting the lift and leveling kits market. Part II, featuring additional manufacturers and suppliers, will appear in the September 2025 issue of THE SHOP magazine.

When customers want to take their off-road and overlanding trucks and SUVs to the next level, one modification rises above the rest—lift and leveling kits.

A must-have add-on for vehicles with oversized wheel-and-tire combos, the kits hit the sweet spot for aftermarket shops by being just complex enough that many enthusiasts turn to professionals for purchasing and installation assistance, while not being so complicated that they eat up too many hours in the work bay.

Offering a noticeable appearance upgrade, the kits can also deliver steering, ride quality and drivability benefits for hardworking vehicles. For a deeper look at a market that's riding high, suppliers offer insights on outside influences, sales tips and hot new products.

DO WHAT YOU LOVE

As many shop owners know, today's off-road, overland and everyday truck and SUV enthusiasts are more educated than ever about lift and leveling kits, their features and benefits. But that doesn't mean that professional knowledge, experience and recommendations aren't as vital as ever when it comes time to buy.

"While there's so much consumer awareness about the products, customers are still turning to jobbers and retailers that have experience installing kits and modifying vehicles as the local experts," says Mark Krumme, head of marketing, North America, for Eibach Inc. "Manufacturers are making a concerted effort to give our shops all of the educational tools and lifelines they need to help educate customers on how these products perform. It's about creating more trust from the end user to invest in better quality products and doing it the right way."

As technology advances, today's lifts and leveling kits need to match the versatility of modern vehicles.

"Trucks are increasingly becoming daily drivers, adventure vehicles and workhorses all rolled into one. People aren't just looking for a truck that looks good—they want something that can comfortably handle heavy loads, tow confidently and perform reliably both on and off-road," says Alex



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ON THE RISE

LIFTS & LEVELING KITS

■ **HOT PRODUCT:** GM 2500HD/3500HD 3-Inch Leveling Kit
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Tuned front and rear 2.0 IFP shocks; torsion bar keys provide desired front ride height; SM Series Upper Control Arms add caster, correct ball joint angle and feature high-angle Alpha Ball Joint; yields up to 3 inches of front lift; corrects GM steering flaw.

Cognito Motorsports
Justin Lambert
Founder, Head of Company

■ **HOT PRODUCT:** INEOS Grenadier 4x4 Suspension Upgrade
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
As the OE spring and sway bar manufacturer for the Grenadier, Eibach has the insight on the vehicle to offer a complete kit that works together to improve ride quality and steering; includes steering stabilizer, six spring configurations, four reservoir shock options and adjustable sway bar.

Eibach Inc.
Mark Krumme
Head of Marketing, North America

■ **HOT PRODUCT:** Coil-Over Shock Systems
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Adjustable ride height; advanced suspension performance and ride quality; high-quality manufacturing and components; tunable and rebuildable.

ICON Vehicle Dynamics
Dylan Evans
Design Engineer

■ **HOT PRODUCTS:** JL/JT Jeep Kits
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Articulating Johnny Joint rod ends at every point; forged track bar; drivetrain-specific (V-6, 2.0T, EcoDiesel, 392, 4xe, Mojave) options, as they require different springs for different drivetrains as well as different bump stops and rear track bar brackets.

RockJock 4x4 by John Currie
Brian Shephard
Marketing Director

■ **HOT PRODUCT:** M1 Monotube Loaded Struts
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Complete, easy-to-install solution that requires no disassembly of the factory strut to streamline installation; strut valving and coil spring rates engineered for ride quality; struts feature adjustable height with five preset spring seat positions for tuning.

Rough Country
Tim Watts
VP Sales

■ **HOT PRODUCT:** SPC Adjustable Upper Control Arms
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Popular for 2005-23 Toyota Tacomas; patented design; full adjustability for camber and caster; allows proper wheel positioning in the wheel well; arms feature sealed xAxis flex joint bushings with bonded rubber sleeves for NVH suppression.

Specialty Products Company
Scott Adcock
Creative Services Manager

■ **HOT PRODUCT:** JBS-101-01 Journey Better Leveling Kit
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Specifically built for 2015-newer 4WD (non-Raptor) Ford F-150 models; partnered with Koni on custom-tuned, twin-tube front shocks with a steel-body design; removable aluminum leveling spacer adjusts front ride height; Sumo-Springs in the rear.

SuperSprings International
Alex Hodschayan
Director of Marketing

■ **HOT PRODUCT:** Boxed-Style Upper Control Arms
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Aggressive box-style upper control arm; easy to install; reduces stress on the ball joint; allows for proper geometry.

Tuff Country EZ-Ride Suspension
Kelly Davis
CEO



Pricing and value play critical roles in purchasing decisions.
(Photo courtesy Rough Country)



Use a tiered approach to walk customers through various kit and component levels to find what's right for them.
(Photo courtesy Rough Country)

Hodschayan, director of marketing for SuperSprings International. "This shift is driving the demand for more versatile, high-quality lift and leveling kits."

Of course, not everyone can afford a new vehicle, meaning there are plenty of preowned options available for upgrades as well.

"The high entry-level cost of new vehicles has been driving a resurgence in the older vehicle platforms, as the cost of new vehicles gets farther and farther away from something a blue collar guy can justify purchasing," says Brian Shephard, marketing director for RockJock 4x4 by John Currie.

The older projects can oftentimes be easier to execute as well, notes Scott Adcock, creative services manager for Specialty Products Company.

"OE complexity with modern applications

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ON THE RISE

FOX FACTORY UNVEILS UPFITTED SILVERADO

Fox Factory has rolled out its 2025 Fox Factory truck. The bespoke upfit on the 2025 Chevrolet Silverado 1500 LTZ chassis builds on last year's success with additional refinement, new configurable options and a lower starting price of $194,995, according to company officials.

Starting with a 700-hp supercharged 6.2L V-8, the Fox Factory Silverado features a Baja Kits long-travel suspension system delivering 14.5 inches front and 15.5 inches rear usable travel and FOX 3.2 FRS internal bypass live valve coil-overs.

Other highlights include 37-inch BFGoodrich A/T tires on 17-inch Method Bead Grip wheels, carbon fiber body panels, prerunner bumpers and LED lighting.



Fox Factory has rolled out its 2025 Fox Factory Silverado 1500 LTZ. (Photo courtesy Fox Factory)

has made installation of kits not quite as user install-friendly as in the past with many older vehicles. These well engineered kits can provide a more complete installation, but typically at a higher price point," he says.

The good news for shops is that, once in the market, the price of the kits will often take a back seat to how they look and perform.

"Consumers are increasingly demanding higher-quality products," notes Dylan Evans, design engineer for ICON Vehicle Dynamics.

Still, economic factors will always impact the market.

"As it stands today, the economy and fuel prices are the biggest factors affecting the aftermarket suspension business," says Kelly Davis, CEO of Tuff Country EZ-Ride Suspension.

Justin Lambert, founder of Cognito Motorsports, advises professionals to always keep an eye on:

- Consumer interest rates
- Cost of living
- Inflation

In a competitive market where customers are presented with many options for vehicle personalization, pricing and value play critical roles in purchasing decisions, says Tim Watts, vice president of sales for Rough Country.

"Installing a 6-inch lift kit often goes hand in hand with additional upgrades like larger tires, new wheels and other performance or aesthetic enhancements," he explains. "Because these purchases are typically discretionary, consumers are sensitive to overall costs."

UNDER CONTROL

While drivers may first be attracted to lift and leveling kits because they make trucks and SUVs look better, top shops know the right system can improve the driving experience as well.

"One common issue is shops focusing solely on the visual appeal of added height and larger tires without emphasizing ride quality and overall performance," says Hodschayan. "Customers eventually notice when ride comfort or handling suffers after the install. Additionally, installation mistakes—like improperly tightening suspension components or incorrect positioning—can lead to avoidable warranty claims and unhappy customers."

Confidence that the kit will perform as advertised is vital to shops and drivers.

"Selling incomplete, low-quality systems can cause



Lift and leveling kits are a vital part of many aftermarket truck and SUV upfitting projects. (Photo courtesy Eibach Inc.)





Installations become quicker and easier as shops gain experience. (Photos courtesy Tuff Country EZ-Ride Suspension)

subsequent damage," says Evans.

Systems designed specifically for the vehicle can eliminate guesswork.

"With regards to the newer Jeep platforms, look to work with a company that offers drivetrain-specific kits," says Shephard. "There is no 'one-size-fits-all' anymore."

When it comes to kit selection, some cases may involve talking a customer down—not up—from what they initially envisioned.

"The best thing shops can do is identify a customer's needs versus wants—basically, influencing the customer in the right direction," says Krumme. "They may come in wanting a superexpensive setup that they



ON THE RISE



Discuss planned vehicle use in advance to set projects on the proper course from the beginning. (Photo courtesy Cognito Motorsports)





For many off-roaders, price takes a back seat to performance and features when it comes to lift and leveling kits. (Photos courtesy ICON Vehicle Dynamics)

won't ever utilize. That $6,000 off-road racing shock setup they're asking about may be too stiff or too soft, too tall or too low for the street. If you take the time to consult with them about the use case scenario and what their needs are, and then give your opinion, they will become a loyal and return customer."

Lambert advises professional installers to take their time and follow installation instructions so as not to miss requirements that can affect product performance and longevity.

"Projects should address inherent needed steering upgrades such as the patented Cognito pitman and idler arm support kit that is a remedy for the GM steering flaw that is still present on late-model GM 2500HD/3500HD trucks," he says. "Also, the correct ride height must maintain a proper amount of droop travel to preserve the integrity of the ride quality and product longevity. Often, ride height is set too tall in an attempt to clear tires that are too tall or wheels that are too wide."

Installations will become quicker and easier as the shop gains experience.

"The perception is that installing lift kits is hard and labor-intensive, but in most instances that just isn't the case," says Davis. "They can be intimidating, but 90% are simple bolt-on systems."

As far as specific installation tips, when it comes to replacing a factory strut on an older vehicle, Watts says it's crucial to determine if a leveling spacer is already installed.

"Secondhand vehicle owners might be unaware of such modifications, especially if the strut and coil assembly have settled due to high mileage or extensive use. Therefore, conducting a visual inspection is advisable," he recommends. "Many aftermarket factory strut replacements have a slightly firmer rate than the original stock components. When combined with an existing leveling spacer, this can result in excessive lift, potentially leading to handling issues or undue stress on suspension components. To mitigate this, it's preferable to install a complete loaded strut leveling kit designed to work cohesively, ensuring optimal performance and safety."

Shops should also be in the habit of checking alignment angles for potential issues before beginning projects, says Adcock.

"Think about the lift and what it's going to do to alignment angles, and particularly the droop travel needed for optimal performance. Not accounting for proper droop

JEEP'S CALIFORNIA-ONLY BIG BEAR EDITION



The 2025 Jeep Gladiator Big Bear Edition is available only in California. (Photo courtesy Jeep)

Jeep brand is celebrating the Golden State by introducing the new 2025 Jeep Gladiator Big Bear Edition, available exclusively for customers in California.

"Our 2025 Jeep Gladiator Big Bear Edition brings Californians their own unique take on the Gladiator, with a pickup truck that delivers popular content as standard and at a great value, plus signature Jeep capability and class-exclusive open-air freedom," says Bob Broderdorf, chief executive officer, Jeep brand. "It's the perfect companion for exploring California's standout geography, whether you're heading to its sandy shores, rugged peaks or expansive deserts."

The 2025 Jeep Gladiator Big Bear Edition is named as an homage to both Southern California's like-named, four-season mountain lake recreation area and the California grizzly bear. Building from the Jeep Gladiator Sport S, the special edition combines new exterior enhancements and bespoke Big Bear hood and rear tailgate badging with off-road capability via the Jeep Command-Trac 4x4 part-time and 2-speed transfer case with a 2.72:1 low-range gear ratio.

Standard equipment on the 2025 Jeep Gladiator Big Bear Edition includes 17-inch black-painted aluminum wheels with 32-inch mud-terrain tires; steel rock rails; body-color hardtop; open-air freedom options such as removable roof panels, completely removable roof, removable doors and a fold-down windshield; black McKinley-trimmed leather seats; heated front seats and heated steering wheel; keyless entry system; power heated mirrors; first- and second-row side-curtain airbags; adaptive cruise control; 12.3-inch Uconnect 5 touchscreen; remote start and universal garage door opener.

The Uconnect 5 system features AppMarket, an onscreen hub for connected features, adventure apps like Geocaching and The Dyrt, and games like Sudoku.

The 2025 Jeep Gladiator Big Bear Edition is limited to 5,000 units in California and offers a range of exterior color options drivers can choose from including the new-for-2025 color '41, plus black, bright white, Granite Crystal, Hydro Blue, Firecracker Red and Anvil.

travel not only limits travel but can also put unnecessary strain on the ball joint, potentially causing a failure point," he says. "Another missed consequence of an improperly lifted vehicle is that it tends to want to 'wander' after the lift due to a loss in caster. Many of today's IFS 4WD suspensions mount the upper control arm at a front-to-back angle. When the suspension is lifted, the upper ball joint not only drops down, but it also moves forward, which causes the loss of caster. An adjustable upper control arm allows the vehicle to be brought back into a specification that provides better driving characteristics."

PROFESSIONAL ADVICE

While many customers are in a rush to get their vehicle upfitted and hit the road or trail, taking the time to discuss their purchase and their plan in advance is always rewarded.

"The best tip I can give is education," says Hodschayan from SuperSprings. "Help

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ON THE RISE



Understanding individual components and how they work together allows shops to create project-specific solutions. (Photos courtesy Specialty Products Co.)

your customers understand exactly how a high-quality kit improves ride comfort, handling and overall vehicle performance. Use demonstrations, testimonials or before-and-after examples to clearly showcase the advantages of choosing a premium solution like our JBS-101-01 kit. Once customers see and feel the difference, they're usually sold."

Of course, that means your team members must do their homework as well, says Evans from ICON Vehicle Dynamics.

"Educate the sales staff to educate the customer," he recommends, "and learn how to correctly modify a vehicle."

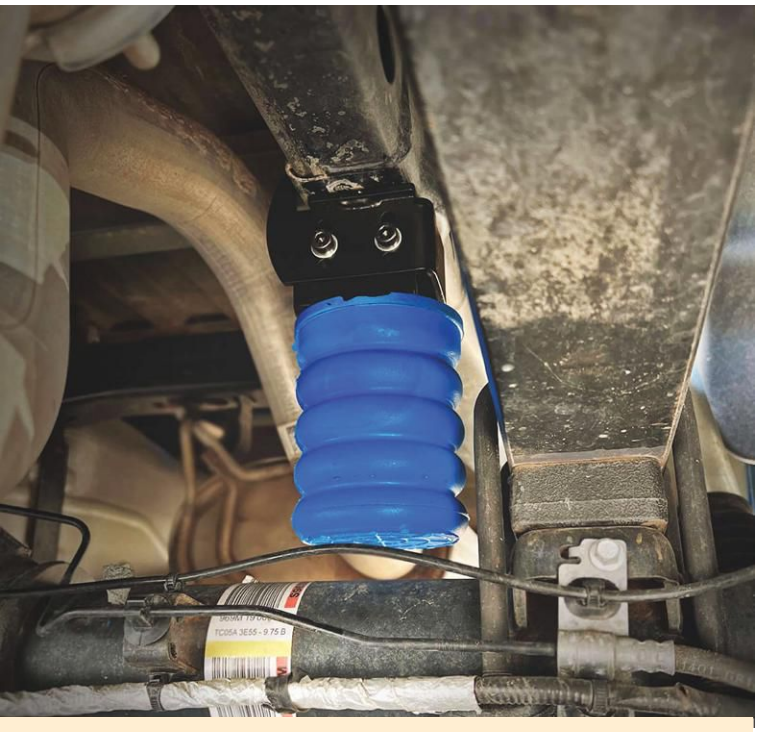
A little experience can go a long way, says Shephard from RockJock 4x4 by John Currie.

"Educate yourself on how sensitive these new Jeep platforms are to geometry and proper setup and alignment of the lift components to be installed so that you are able to convey the unpleasant drivability changes that lower-end kits can cause," he advises. "These factors really are the sales tool that assists in selling the top shelf-brand kits."

Watts recommends the proven Good-Better-Best sales approach for new customers—outlining his company's entry-level spacer kit, Loaded N3 Strut and Loaded M1 Strut as examples—and then adds a Premium choice as well, referencing the Rough Country Vertex coil-over system.

"This approach helps customers easily





Trucks are increasingly becoming daily drivers, adventure vehicles and workhorses all rolled into one.
(Photos courtesy SuperSprings International)

compare features and benefits, often leading to higher-value purchases," he says. "By walking customers through these tiers, shops can help them choose the right kit for their needs—whether it's budget, performance or premium upgrades—while increasing overall sales and customer satisfaction."

That can also mean inclusion of all the products required to do the job right, says Adcock from Specialty Products Company.

"Shops should always consider the adjustable upper control arm as part of a properly installed lift kit," he says. "Explaining the benefits to the end consumer can not only increase overall sales, but also prevent an unhappy and regretful purchase. It's better to bake in the cost of the arms as part of the kit upfront than to have to deal with fixing an unwanted problem later."

Shops looking to build overall awareness of themselves and their suspension offerings can start by promoting before-and-after videos and demonstrations on social media, says Eibach's Krumme.

"People want to see before-and-after examples. They create traction in the marketplace and start to build credibility. Do a mini build series on everything that comes through the shop," he says. "Customers want a reference before they buy anything these days. This is an opportunity to become an unbiased, trusted advisor. You can and should be promoting what's happening in your shop."

As mentioned, discussing planned vehicle use in advance can help steer projects in the right direction from the beginning.

"Start by asking the customer how the truck needs to serve them. Then assist the customer in selecting the appropriate modifications to ensure the final product is not going to present any regrets or problems," says Lambert from Cognito. "Provide value and an excellent customer experience rather than just a transaction, and become a specialist in what you do, not just a salesperson."

Unsure of which customers might be interested in a lift or leveling kit? Davis from Tuff Country suggests starting with anyone looking to upgrade from the factory wheels and tires.

"Always recommend/upsell a leveling kit when a customer is buying new tires," he says. ***TS***



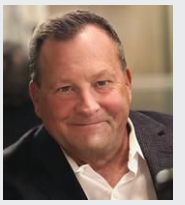


Image credit: tashatuvango - stock.adobe.com

The Power of Phone Calls

Creating a connection that texting & emailing can't match.

BY JHAN R. DOLPHIN



Jhan Robert Dolphin is vice president of Prefix Corporation, responsible for some of the wildest concept vehicles and prototypes in the industry. He regularly speaks to and trains business groups on the topics of sales, customer service and promotional marketing. He can be reached at jhan.dolphin@prefix.com.

Communication has evolved in today's digital age, with texting and emailing becoming the preferred methods for most business interactions.

While these tools offer convenience and efficiency, they often fall short when it comes to building strong relationships, resolving complex issues and conveying emotions clearly. Sometimes, a five-minute phone call can save hours of waiting for responses to emails or texts.

Despite the prevalence of digital communication, the phone call remains an essential tool in the business world. So, why don't more people just pick up the phone?

COMFORT & CONTROL

Many people, particularly younger generations, prefer texting and emailing because they offer comfort and control. Text-based communication allows individuals to edit and carefully craft messages, making it feel less risky than a live phone call.

This preference is partly due to anxiety around mistakes, awkwardness or the unfiltered nature of real-time conversations. With less frequent face-to-face interactions, younger generations—especially Gen Z and millennials—may feel uncomfortable with phone calls and face-to-face communication, sometimes even experiencing anxiety when choosing a phone conversation over texts or emails.

Still, here are a few things to consider before you send your next text or email:

1 *Fostering Stronger Personal Connections*

Phone calls create a level of personal connection that texting and emailing simply can't match. The tone, urgency and emotions you convey over the phone are



Phone calls continue to play a vital role in building personal connections. (Photo courtesy Prefix Corporation)

clearer and more easily understood. This is especially important for building trust, such as in sales, where clients often appreciate the personal touch of a phone call over a generic email.

A well-timed call shows you're invested in the relationship and care about their needs, which could mean the difference between closing a deal or losing a potential customer.

2 *Real-Time Conversation for Better Clarity*

While emails and texts allow you to craft your message carefully, they can lead to misunderstandings without immediate feedback. Misinterpretations can cause confusion or harm relationships.

Phone calls, on the other hand, provide real-time, two-way communication, where both parties can clarify points, ask questions and adjust their responses instantly. This dynamic exchange makes conversations more productive and accurate, reducing the risk of errors.

Phone calls also allow for spontaneous discussions. Whether brainstorming solutions to a problem or negotiating terms, the immediacy of a call facilitates a fluid and adaptable conversation, unlike the back-and-forth of emails or texts.

3 *Conveying Urgency & Emotions More Effectively*

Written communication is efficient but often lacks emotional depth. A phone call conveys tone, pace and voice inflection, helping ensure your message is understood as intended.

If you're delivering important news—like a project delay or a significant change—a phone call ensures clarity and allows you to gauge the recipient's reaction immediately. In contrast, text or email can be easily misinterpreted, leading to unnecessary friction.

For example, when negotiating a sensitive business deal, being able to read the other person's tone and respond accordingly can lead to a more successful outcome, while written communication might be misread.

4 *Building Trust & Rapport*

Business is ultimately about relationships. Phone calls offer a unique opportunity to build trust and rapport in ways that emails and texts can't.

Hearing your voice makes you appear more human, approachable and transparent. It shows commitment to your relationships and can set you apart from competitors who rely heavily on digital communication.

For instance, reaching out to clients or partners via phone shows that you value their time and input. It makes you more approachable and open to conversation, which can lead to long-lasting, mutually beneficial relationships.

5 *Efficient Communication in Complex Situations*

In complex scenarios—whether troubleshooting an issue, discussing legal matters or negotiating terms—phone calls are invaluable. The back-and-forth nature of texting or emailing can be cumbersome and inefficient.

A single phone call allows you to address questions, clarify doubts and make decisions quickly, without the need for endless exchanges.

While texting and emailing are convenient, they aren't always the best tools for communication in the business world. Phone calls continue to play a vital role in building personal connections, offering real-time clarity, conveying emotions, building trust and improving efficiency.

In an era where digital communication dominates, taking the time to pick up the phone can set you apart as a thoughtful, efficient and relationship-focused professional. **TS**

Hard Tri-Fold Tonneau Cover



Westin Automotive, San Dimas, California, presents its Westin Hard Tri-Fold Tonneau Cover. Built for strength and security with a flush-mount design, the premium cover is crafted from high-quality, heavy-duty aluminum panels to protect against harsh weather conditions. The tri-fold design provides easy access to the truck bed, and installation is quick and hassle-free with no drilling required. The cover securely attaches with a custom-fit clamp system that ensures a tight seal.

Sprinter Van Strut Systems



Van Compass, Rathdrum, Idaho, offers Suspension Strut Systems for Sprinter van applications. Adjustable 2WD Rally Struts and new Monotube Struts for AWD/4x4 and 2WD Sprinter applications are available, along with 2WD Sprinter complete systems that include front struts. The setups improve comfort and control, delivering solutions for various price points and use cases.

Automotive Window Films



Avery Dennison, Mentor, Ohio, presents its new Encore Automotive Window Films portfolio, featuring a range of products designed to set a new standard in performance and style for window film professionals and automotive enthusiasts. Featuring a versatile three-tier lineup—Encore, Encore Supreme and Encore Supreme IR—the films are designed to cater to every preference, with a Good-Better-Best approach. Each film is engineered with dye-free advanced nanotechnology to resist fading or turning purple.

Vehicle Power Management System



REDARC, Lonsdale, South Australia, presents its BCDC Alpha R mini vehicle power management system. Now available in a 50A model, the BCDC Alpha R is a DC-DC charger designed to keep an auxiliary battery charged using power from both the vehicle's alternator and solar panels. The setup offers seamless integration with the company's RedVision and TVMS products for a comprehensive power management system with on-air updates. It is compatible with hybrid and electric vehicles. ***TS***





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Art Deco Returns to the Road

Art deco is returning to the streets of the United Kingdom through the Lancefield continuation car from The Alvis Car Co.

Some 88 years after the first special order left Alvis' Coventry factory for the 1938 London Motor Show, the modern model—fully certified for road use—features a celebrated art deco design with modern engineering techniques. At approximately 16 feet long, the 2025 Lancefield draws on Alvis' archive of more than 25,000 drawings, 23,000 car records and 300,000 original parts.

As a true continuation, it uses components curated from the new old stock retained since the end of car production in 1968. Power steering, electronic engine management and servo-operated brakes have been integrated without compromising the car's original character, as well as a catalytic converter, indicator repeater lights and a collapsible steering column.

Rooted in a design celebrated for its art deco elegance, the Lancefield was specifically created for the 1938 London Motor Show. Dispatched from Alvis on Aug. 19, 1937, the original would've cost $1,750—more than double the price of the average house at the time.

Designed by Lancefield Coachworks Ltd., the car reportedly was a hit at the show with its graceful proportions, concave flutings and disappearing hood. The Lancefield was selected "one of the world's most beautiful cars" in 1982, flown to Germany and displayed in the Autoshow der Superlative-Veedol Starparade in Berlin. The car later visited North America, more of Germany and Jamaica before returning to the UK in June 1994.

For 2025, a Warwickshire-based team using a blend of contemporary tools and traditional techniques has faithfully recreated the bodywork, created using traditional coachbuilding techniques. Aluminum was carefully formed over a bespoke ash frame in a 3,800-hour process. The car is painted in-house in two-tone cream, completing the appearance.

At its heart, the straight-six, 267-ci engine is assembled to the same specifications as the Alvis original, but now benefits from fuel injection and electronic engine management for easy hot starting, smoother throttle response and improved torque, with a 0-60-mph mark of under 10 seconds.

The engine and body are mated to a fully galvanized steel chassis that carries a consecutive chassis number, with a vehicle weight of 3,300 pounds.

"The Lancefield continuation car is a clear demonstration of Alvis' rich legacy and our dedication to quality," says Alan Stote, owner of The Alvis Car Co. "The 1938 original is a car very close to my heart, and it's wonderful to continue the legacy of this special machine with a brand-new build."

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Art deco returns to the streets of the United Kingdom in eye-catching fashion through the Lancefield continuation car from The Alvis Car Co. (Photos courtesy The Alvis Car Co.)

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