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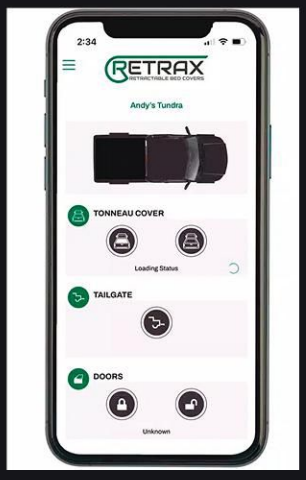
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Jef White
Editor in Chief
theshopmag.com

New Vehicle Drivers Feel Vulnerable to Cyberattacks

Today's vehicles may include enhanced electronic features and options, but many drivers feel vulnerable to attacks on the computers that run such in-car systems.

Just 19% of connected car drivers are very confident their vehicle is protected from cyberattacks, while 76% express concerns about cyberattacks causing accidents or putting their lives at risk, according to the 2025 Connected Car Cyber Safety & Security Index, released in August during the ADAS & Autonomous Vehicle Technology Summit North America by RunSafe Security, a company offering cyber-hardening technology for embedded systems.

RunSafe's 2025 Index surveyed 2,000 connected car owners across the U.S., UK and Germany, revealing drivers are increasingly aware of the cyber risks facing their vehicles—and are letting those concerns shape how and what they drive. The results show that consumer awareness of connected car cybersecurity threats has outpaced automaker action, elevating cybersecurity from a technical afterthought to a decisive factor in purchasing decisions, according to RunSafe officials.

Among the survey's findings, 79% of drivers prioritize protecting their physical safety from cyberattacks over securing personal data stored in their vehicles—showcasing consumers' understanding of automotive cybersecurity as a potential life-and-death issue, officials say. Meanwhile, 65% believe remote hacking of their car is possible, with driver anxiety fueled primarily by modern vehicles' reliance on AI and a "supply web" of software providers.

Other key findings from the report include:

- **Software supply chain transparency demands**: 83% want automakers to disclose software sources, while 77% recognize third-party components as cybersecurity risks.
- **Purchase power**: 87% say strong cybersecurity influences buying decisions, with 35% willing to pay premium prices for enhanced cyber protection on their car.
- **Avoidance behaviors**: 70% would consider buying older, less connected vehicles to reduce cyber risk.
- **AI anxiety escalation**: 85% of drivers would be more concerned about cybersecurity risks if outside companies manufactured AI features in their vehicles.
- **Premium pricing acceptance**: 35% would pay more for enhanced cybersecurity protection, turning security from a cost center into a revenue opportunity.
- **Brand loyalty concerns**: 37% would switch to a different brand if their preferred vehicle were found to be vulnerable to cyberattacks.

"Connected cars have become computers on wheels, and with that transformation comes new risks that consumers increasingly recognize," says Joe Saunders, founder and CEO of RunSafe Security. "Our research shows that cybersecurity is now an important consideration in the car buying process. Automakers who invest in transparent, proactive security measures will capture a competitive advantage, while those who lag behind risk losing market share to competitors—or worse, driving customers to opt out of connected cars altogether."

Saunders adds that "automotive cybersecurity isn't just about protecting data—it's about preventing vehicles from becoming mobile weapons. Drivers aren't paranoid in their concerns. They're recognizing that a compromised car can endanger lives, and the industry needs to respond with the same urgency we'd apply to any other life-safety system."

Learn more about the 2025 Connected Car Cyber Safety & Security Index online by visiting: runsafesecurity.com/whitepaper/connected-car-security-index-2025. ***TS***

THE SHOP

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AI's Place in Automotive Aftermarket Shops

How artificial intelligence can power your company's engine behind the scenes.

BY BARRY ALT



With over 28 years of experience, Barry Alt leads the digital marketing team at Motorhead Digital, focused on transforming the online presence of businesses in the automotive aftermarket. The company's signature Visibility, Site and Marketing Maximizer programs are designed to enhance websites, social media and digital marketing strategies, attracting quality leads and maximizing revenue for auto restoration, restyling, performance and custom build shops. The MHD team can be reached at 585-766-9785, maximizesales@motorheaddigital.com or online at motorheaddigital.com.

Editor's note: *This is the first of a two-part article on integrating artificial intelligence (AI) into automotive aftermarket shops.*

There's a lot that goes into running your automotive aftermarket shop that no one ever sees.

Behind the scenes you're shifting gears between parts orders, paperwork, project updates, customer interactions, team schedules and other back office tasks, and that's just scratching the surface.

But what if you had an extra pair of hands? That's exactly what artificial intelligence (AI) can be.

AI's not just a futuristic concept anymore—it's a very real technology that's already working in thousands of shops across the U.S. In fact, the 2025 Ratchet+Wrench Industry Survey found that 61% of independent shops are using AI-powered estimate generators, 59% are using AI in digital vehicle inspections (DVIs) and 52% rely on AI-driven scheduling tools.

From AI-powered diagnostic tools and inventory tracking to better online marketing campaigns, AI is already helping some of the best shops in the industry bring in more business. And remember, AI isn't about replacing your team; it's about giving them the support they need to focus on the work they love.

Today, we're getting under the hood of AI, sharing how it can be the engine that fuels your shop, helping you stay organized and attract more customers than ever before.

PRACTICAL AI USES

If you're already using shop scheduling software or diagnostic tools in your shop, congratulations! You're probably already working with AI, as many tool companies have already incorporated the functionality into their diagnostic software.

Artificial intelligence can serve as an extra set of hands for busy shop owners looking to streamline digital tasks. (Image Credit: Noppadol Thammatorn-stock.adobe.com)

That's the thing—AI is already all around us. The real power comes from putting it to work on the right tasks to make life in your shop as easy as possible.

With that in mind, here are some practical ways AI can make a real difference for your shop.

AI for Content Marketing

Keeping your shop visible online is a full-time job. Thankfully, artificial intelligence can help you generate engaging social media post ideas, suggest different captions and even schedule content across platforms so you're consistently connecting with your followers.

But it doesn't stop there. AI can also assist with blogs—giving you a starting point for guides, how-tos, industry updates or shop stories that share your knowledge and expertise with the world.

For online ad campaigns, AI can help target the right audience and test variations to see what works best. This means your ads will reach more of the right people over time without you spending hours manually tweaking campaigns.

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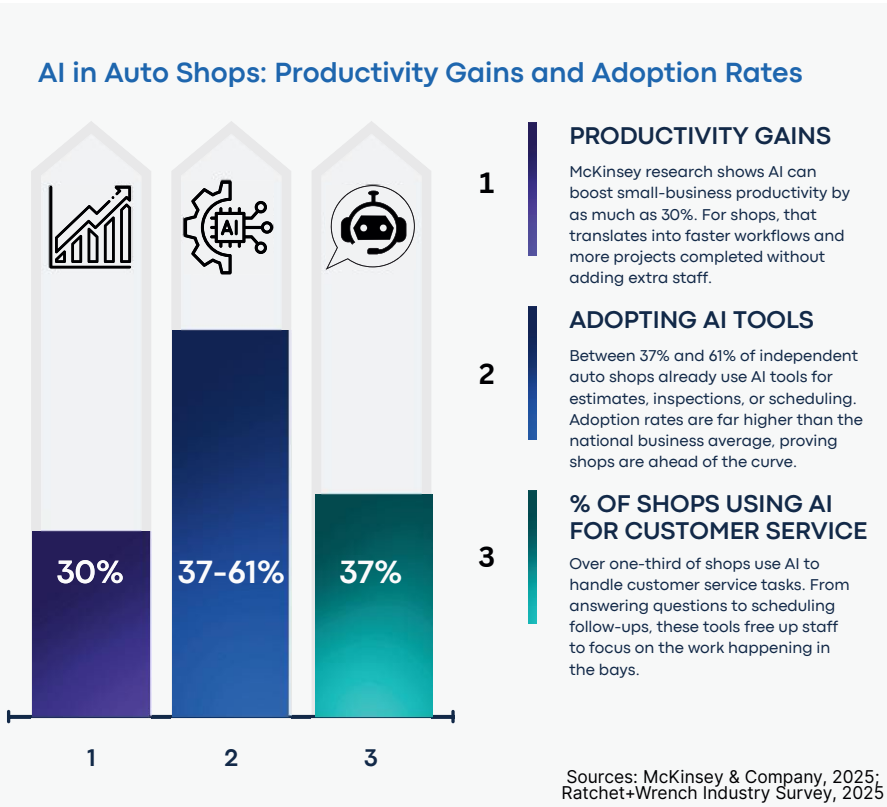
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WHSE25TS



AI isn't about replacing your team—it's about giving them the support they need to focus on the work they love. (Image courtesy Motorhead Digital)

PRO TIP: You don't always have to create new content. AI can be used to repurpose existing content, saving a lot of time. For example, one blog post could be turned into multiple social media posts.

Smarter Troubleshooting

Searching through info on the web or in repair manuals while trying to troubleshoot what's wrong with a vehicle with modern electronics is time-consuming and energy-draining. Modern AI-driven diagnostic tools can spot patterns in a car's behavior from a mile away and sometimes pinpoint the exact fix.

This can help less-experienced techs handle complex problems. That way, less time is spent scratching your head, and a lot more time is spent turning wrenches and getting projects completed and cars back on the road. For example, Bosch and Snap-on are already incorporating AI into their platforms to provide more comprehensive and efficient diagnostic services.

For those pre-computer classic cars, you can use AI's deep search feature to save hours scouring the web for the one issue that's causing you to pull your hair out. With deep search, you can ask AI to act as a master mechanic or, better yet, an ASE Certified Master Technician, explaining the issue that you're having, and let it find a possible solution for your problem.

Ask the question(s) and come back in 10-20 minutes and you'll be amazed at what AI will dig up.

PRO TIP: The more accurate information in the prompts that you give AI, the better the results will be. You can also ask follow-up questions to dig deeper into your research.

Effortless Inventory Management

AI-powered inventory systems, integrated with accounting and business management software or point-of-sale (POS) systems, can track parts usage, sales and inventory levels in real time. They learn what you use most often and predict what you'll need for upcoming jobs.

For smaller shops with limited storage space or capital, having the right amount of inventory on hand is critical. Carrying too much inventory ties up cash, while low stock levels lead to project delays. AI helps find the perfect balance by analyzing sales data, supplier lead times and project schedules.

AI-driven inventory systems can even automatically place orders without you lifting a finger. You'll never waste time with manual stock counts or delay a job because of a missing part again.

The U.S. Census Bureau's 2025 data shows nearly 1 in 10 businesses are already using AI in daily operations, and adoption in the automotive industry is running well above that, especially in parts and inventory management.

PRO TIP: Set your AI inventory system to send an alert when stock for popular items drops to a certain level. This way, you can avoid running out of critical parts.

Streamlined Scheduling

The back-and-forth of scheduling with prospects or clients can consume a significant amount of your valuable time with texts, emails and phone calls. AI tools let your prospects and customers book appointments online and confirm with a quick text.

This frees you up from multiple phone calls and endless email chains. The result? More time focusing on managing and working on customer projects instead of working the phone.

PRO TIP: To reduce no-shows and save time on follow-ups, set up automated email and text reminders to go out the day before their appointment.

Faster Part Searches

Hunting down a rare part can mean hours—sometimes even days—of digging through forums and online marketplaces. AI-powered deep search scans all those sources at once with just a few clicks.

It can pull results from eBay, Hemmings and most other online sources, such as open car-related forums and resource sites, to provide you with the information you need—in some cases, almost instantly.

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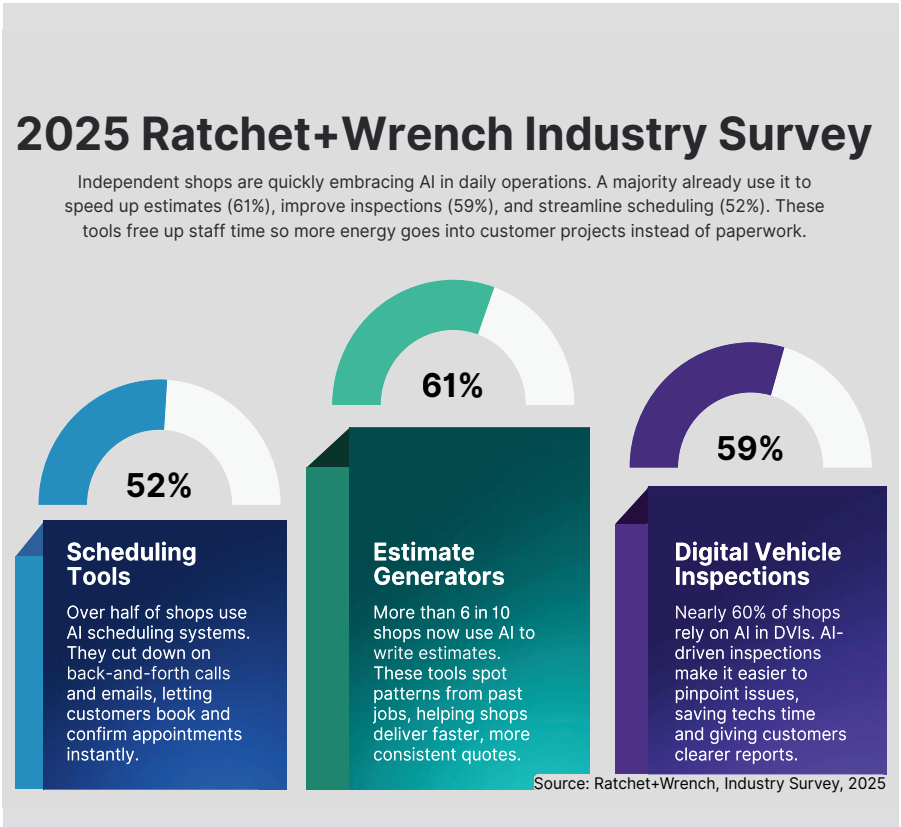
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AI speeds up the process of hunting down rare or hard-to-find parts and can also offer diagnoses of complex troubleshooting issues. (Image courtesy Motorhead Digital)

PRO TIP: Utilize AI's handy cross-referencing features to find suitable alternatives when the exact parts you need are unavailable.

FUN FACT

The average restoration project is made up of thousands of individual tasks. Consider this: from the initial teardown to the final detailing, there's a lot to accomplish.

As such, even if AI tools only save you 10% of that time, it still adds up to days of work and effort.

Research outlet McKinsey & Company reports productivity gains up to 30% for small businesses using AI. Add that to industry data showing 37%-61% adoption of AI-powered shop tools, and it's clear that these gains are already being realized in real shops.

USING AI TO BUILD SMARTER WEBSITE CONTENT

Many websites feature endless pages of poorly written text that nobody reads. Web users today want something better—smart content that's genuinely useful, easy to find and shows your expertise.

AI-driven tools like ChatGPT, Grok, Gemini, Google's search snippets and voice assistants are getting smarter every day. They don't just help answer questions like "Where can I find a Mustang restoration expert near me?"

They also decide which shops get recommended based on how your site is structured and the content you provide. By pulling insights from large amounts of information, AI tools help guide visitors to the answers they're looking for.

For Google and AI search, an essential factor in SEO today is your ability to show your Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness and Trustworthiness (E-E-A-T). Using AI to help you write and properly format great content for your site that conveys these four critical factors is more important than ever when it comes to showing up in the new "search everywhere" world that we live in.

Shop owners can also use AI-powered tools to create smart, informative content that can:

- Improve customer engagement by becoming a go-to resource for auto enthusiasts.
- Make complex processes like custom paint jobs, complicated vehicle issues or classic car restorations easier to understand.
- Get seen online more often and draw in the right people without chasing clicks.
- Show off expertise so new customers come to you first.

PRO TIP: Search engines favor websites with clear, helpful content that reads like it was written by a real person. AI and automation tools can provide your shop with a solid starting point, but be sure to tweak the content to convey your message in your own voice.

Next time, we'll look at specific AI systems that make sense for aftermarket shops and spell out some common mistakes to avoid. ***TS***



AI can help you generate engaging social media post ideas, suggest different captions and even schedule content across platforms. (Image Credit: VectorMine-stock.adobe.com)

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A Love of Shiny Things

Aftermarket lighting can steal the show on a variety of vehicle projects.

BY JEF WHITE

Much of the automotive aftermarket is based on drivers' love of shiny things. And what's shinier than aftermarket lighting?

From full-width, in-your-face light bars to small, tasteful pods and accent lighting, today's mostly LED-based setups help light up the night. Add in customizable colors, beam patterns and even programmed "dances" and it's easy to see why lighting upgrades make sense in a variety of vehicle projects.

With training and experience, shops can become local lighting experts, filling the needs of local enthusiasts. Suppliers are ready to help with insights on current market trends, hot new products and ways aftermarket lighting can steal the show on a variety of vehicle projects.

SEEING THE LIGHT

There's no doubt technological innovations are driving the development of modern aftermarket lights and light bars.

"Technology has advanced dramatically. From optics to LED chips, today's lights are brighter, more efficient, longer lasting and packed with more functionality than ever before," says Justin Steller, director of sales for Diode Dynamics.

The innovations come from quality suppliers committed to form and function, says Bogdan Durian, president/CEO of Delta Tech Industries.

"The lighting aftermarket in general represented by imports has become less creative and more repetitive, design-wise. We've tried for 47 years to be original and



Working with quality suppliers means access to a variety of lighting solutions to fit any project. (Photo courtesy Baja Designs)



Drivers want the appropriate amount of usable light when and where they need it. (Photos courtesy Rough Country)





innovative in our designs," he says. "We offer nearly 100 SKUs in headlight designs, from hot rods to dune buggies and Jeeps. Our light bars and headlights offer unique functions."

Lighting upgrades are popular because they deliver real benefits, says Randy Wimenta, marketing partnership and community manager for KC HiLiTES.

"The market has shifted from raw lumens to complete lighting systems that are powerful, reliable and easy to tailor. Drivers expect modular builds, beam control and styling options," he says.

When discussing aftermarket lights and light bar systems, the conversation often starts with LEDs.

"The industry has nearly completed its shift from traditional incandescent and halogen lighting to LED technology," observes Tim Watts, vice president of sales for Rough Country.

As the switch continues, the technology has reshaped the off-road industry, says Matt Sims, sales manager for Baja Designs.

"We've integrated our next-generation LEDs with several variations throughout the years," he notes. "They have become more powerful and efficient, providing a better beam pattern and light output combined with the advancement of optics."

Along with the rise of LEDs has come new lighting components and configurations.

"Product diversification has improved beyond simple light bars," says Fang (Bob) Shusheng, owner and CEO of Nilight. "The market has exploded with several options for different use cases and automotive builds, including pod lights, headlight bulbs, rock lights, tailgate light bars, etc. The rise of e-commerce websites like Amazon have also allowed for more seamless DTC sales, changing how shops source and compete."

Not only do the various systems deliver true lighting benefits—many also offer styling enhancements as well.

"Consumers in the market for a high-mount LED light bar likely want to retain a more factory style or appearance," says Justin Hartenstein, founder/CIO of ORACLE Lighting, using the company's ORACLE Integrated LED Light Bar as an example. "Our patented integrated design with its molded cowling integrates into the factory roof line of your Jeep."

LIGHTS & LIGHT BARS

■ **HOT PRODUCT:** DOT LP6
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Specifically designed as an on-road legal headlight; includes high-beam and low-beam capabilities, and amber and clear DRL options; beam patterns and overall performance meet and exceed our hypercritical expectations; attractive aesthetics.

Baja Designs
Matt Sims
Sales Manager

■ **HOT PRODUCTS:** Bronco Direct-Fit Bumper Lights
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Direct fit; easy/straightforward installation; offer a slim profile and clean, simple aesthetic; amber or white DRLs on a three-way switch allow light changes on the fly; direct-fit brackets and provided wiring harnesses all arrive in the same box.

Borne Off-Road
Chris McKendry
Marketing Manager

■ **HOT PRODUCTS:** Roof Light Bars
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Category includes two hood light bars and two grille light bars; made in the USA from laser-cut aircraft aluminum; innovative designs; 60,000 lumens; serviceable, with broken components replaced for free; no tariffs, no shipping delays; 50% lower landed cost.

Delta Tech Industries
Bogdan Durian
President/CEO

■ **HOT PRODUCTS:** Stage Series Light Bars
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Utilize modern Total Internal Reflection (TIR) optics combined with high-power LEDs for high intensity; Smart-Select technology controls the outer and inner sections independently, changing output color or beam pattern on the fly; animation options.

Diode Dynamics
Justin Steller
Director of Sales

■ **HOT PRODUCTS:** FLEX ERA LED Light Bars
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Adaptable light bars built from 10-inch modular segments, delivering the punch of a pair of FLEX ERA 4 pods; segments can be linked into a full 50-inch powerhouse with swappable clear or yellow spot/combo lenses and an integrated amber dust light.

KC HiLiTES
Randy Wimenta
Marketing Partnership & Community Manager

■ **HOT PRODUCTS:** LED Lighting Products
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Pods, flood/spotlights and light bar combos utilize high-quality CSP/CREE chips that produce powerful lumens for targeted road illumination; IP67 or IP68 ratings; housed in a sturdy aluminum alloy body that acts as a heat sink; easy to install.

Nilight
Fang (Bob) Shusheng
Owner & CEO

■ **HOT PRODUCT:** Integrated Windshield Roof LED Light Bar System for Jeep Wrangler JL & Gladiator JT
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Innovative, patented system CAD-designed to blend seamlessly with factory styling; molded cowl provides a quieter, more aerodynamic installation compared to traditional LED light bar setups; polycarbonate housing matches factory hardtops.

ORACLE Lighting
Justin Hartenstein
Founder/CIO

■ **HOT PRODUCTS:** Spectrum Series High-Performance LED Light Bars
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
A modern bezel-less design with a tinted indirect reflector that conceals the OSRAM diodes; produces the brightest and longest-projecting light we've ever offered.

Rough Country
Tim Watts
VP Sales

■ **HOT PRODUCT:**
Linear-18 Elite+
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
A low-profile LED light bar that incorporates white and yellow LEDs; can alternate between four lighting modes: white (low power), white (high power), yellow and combo (white and yellow); line contains SAE/DOT-compliant products.

Triple-R Lights
Matthew Green
Country Manager USA



The more consolidated your product line, the easier it is for customers to make buying decisions. (Photo courtesy Borne Off-Road)

With plenty of suppliers active in the lighting aftermarket, shops will want to become familiar with the lighting components they carry and the companies that make them

"More and more customers recognize and appreciate that you get what you pay for," says Matthew Green, country manager USA for Triple-R Lights. "Auxiliary lights are an important investment and, increasingly, customers don't mind paying a bit more if it's clear what more they get in terms of product design/styling, lighting performance and reliability."

BRIGHT IDEAS

When it comes to aftermarket lighting systems, there's more to consider than just brightness numbers.

"The most common misconception in lighting is 'lights with the most lumens will create the best lighting,'" says Sims. "While lumens, or output, is an important factor, it's where that output is in the driver's field of view that matters. 'Best' is subjective, so we created Lighting Zones to

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Provide consumers with features that can be used more frequently. (Photos courtesy ORACLE Lighting)

help customers understand what zone our lights are designed to illuminate along with what lens pattern is needed for a balanced lighting package."

Steller agrees that total lumens aren't always the final answer.

"While lumens are a useful spec, beam pattern, thermal management and optical efficiency are arguably more important than lumen output," he says. "A well-engineered light can have lower lumens and still outperform a higher-lumen, poorly designed light."

Another factor to consider, he adds, is how different colors offer different benefits for on- and off-road drivers.

"While 6000K white light is often marketed as the default and best option, in snowy, dusty or rainy conditions, 3000K yellow light can reduce glare and provide much better visibility."

Instead of basing choices on the number of LEDs or lumens, Wimenta recommends looking at "optics, candela and thermal management," noting his company's FLEX ERA Bar "gives customers usable distance, a clean spread and reliable performance—not just glare."

Watts explains that "a blinding white light can actually work against you more than for you. Good light when and where you need it is what people are after."

Other changes he's seen in the lighting market, Watts adds, include Bluetooth control technology, multiple RGB configurations including daytime running lights (DRL) as well as "the desire for complete mounting solutions that include bezels or mounting solutions that create a factory OE-like fit and finish."

Among the features to consider are beam patterns and housings, says Shusheng.

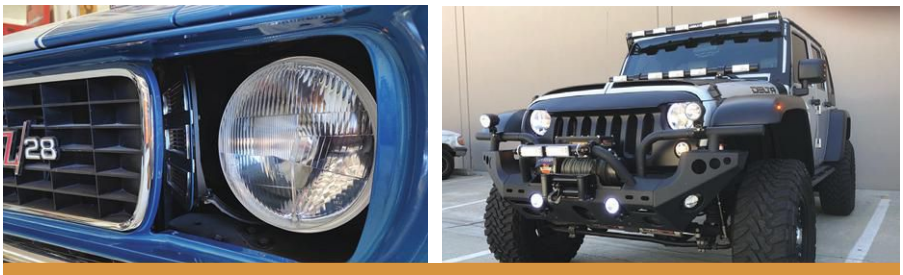
"Beam pattern is one important consideration, as the light should have the correct pattern for the user's application," he says. "Additionally, a high-lumen claim is useless if the housing cracks or the lens fills with water after one season. Shops need to emphasize the importance of IP ratings and robust construction, and should also advise users on proper installation practices to ensure the lights perform reliably."



Shops should advise users on proper installation practices to ensure their lights perform reliably. (Photo courtesy Nilight)

For many lighting customers, seeing really is believing, says Green, who recommends that shop owners and installers—instead of simply taking reported technical specifications at face value—"trust your gut feeling, check images and videos, get third-party feedback/validation and, best of all, get out at night and see for yourself how products stack up."

Professionals will quickly build experience and confidence as they sell more lighting products, says Durian.



Quality suppliers are committed to offering products that meet and exceed form and function standards. (Photos courtesy Delta Tech Industries)



Lighting customers are willing to pay more for high-quality product designs, styling, performance and reliability. (Photos courtesy triple-r-lights.com)

"We work with some shops that have served the market for over 20 years and have no misconceptions about lights or light bars," he notes. "They usually come from the ranks of off-road racing or classic car restoration and are very knowledgeable about the lighting industry, which was derived from the age of halogen lighting."

Chris McKendry, marketing manager for Borne Off-Road, cautions against confusing drivers with an overabundance of choices.

"If you give a customer too many options, they get overwhelmed and don't know what to run with," he says. "The more consolidated the product line, the easier it is for the customer to make their buying decision."

Meanwhile, new light bar and LED mounting designs can drastically reduce or even eliminate the "howling" or "whistling" associated with some aftermarket light bars, says Hartenstein.

"Historically, windshield-mounted light bars have been notorious for making loud wind noise and whistling sounds that most consumers find very annoying and, in many cases, because of this they choose to remove the lights shortly after installing them," he





Technology is driving the development of modern aftermarket lights and light bars. (Photos courtesy Diode Dynamics)



Lighting upgrades are popular because they offer real benefits. (Photos courtesy KC HiLiTES)



notes. "ORACLE's patented cowling design not only looks good, but it also provides aerodynamic benefits that reduce the noises that consumers hate."

HELP THEM SEE THE LIGHT

A show-and-tell approach can be effective when selling aftermarket lights and light bars.

"Encourage upsells by placing point-of-sale (POS) displays in-store," recommends Green from Triple-R Lights. "Customers want to touch and feel products and have good information at their fingertips in terms of product literature. But, best of all, have sales teams get firsthand experience of the lights they are selling and be able to sell to customers based on their own thoughts and impressions."

Well-trained sales teams will make lighting part of every conversation, says Steller from Diode Dynamics.

"Whether a customer comes into your shop looking for lift kits, tires, wheels or racks, lighting is a natural next step. It might be upgrading road-compliant lighting for daily use, adding scene lights onto a roof rack for camping and trail use, or installing rock lights for a 'wow' factor," he explains. "Ask questions. What lifestyle activities are they involved in? Where do they plan to travel? What time of the year will they be traveling? Do they daily drive their off-road vehicle? What's their long-term goal with the build? These questions reveal great sales opportunities. Remember, they're coming to you because you're the expert. They value your opinion and are looking for guidance."

Wimenta from KC HiLiTES advocates in-shop and real world demonstrations.

"Demo it. Do a customer outing. Nothing sells like showing a FLEX ERA Bar lighting up a dark trail," he says. "Or, if you don't have time for an outing, you can simply stream our product videos from our YouTube channel at your shop."

McKendry from Borne Off-Road is a strong advocate of the bundling approach.

"Increase your AOV (average order value) by considering all other product types that

might incorporate lights and incentivize customers with package deals—items including bumpers and roof or bed racks are solid go-tos for this type of thing," he says. "Once fitment is confirmed, compatibility is guaranteed and makes for a streamlined installation process for the shop—everything is made to work with one another."

Nilight's Shusheng explains how the process helps businesses become "application experts."

"Rather than just selling a light bar, the shop should focus on selling an experience and solution to a problem. For example, they can create displays or service packages tailored to specific activities like off-roading or overlanding with products that are best suited for those applications."

That in-depth approach means knowing and understanding the technology, says Durian from Delta Tech Industries.

"Our best and honest tip would be not to rely on Google search results," he says. "Do your homework and familiarize yourself with Delta Lights and their over 500 SKU domestic manufacturing legacy."

Watts from Rough Country reiterates the importance of dispelling the myth that brighter is always better.

"Start with a conversation," he suggests. "Understanding the customer's needs ensures you recommend a solution that not only performs but also delivers long-term satisfaction."

When it comes to the lighting systems themselves, added features mean added versatility—an attractive feature for many drivers.

"Remember, this is a product that is off 99% of the time, so providing consumers with features that can be used more frequently makes a lot of sense," says Hartenstein. "For example, the ORACLE Integrated LED Light Bar provides customers with both white LED DRL lights and amber LED marker lights incorporated into the design so that these smaller lighting arrays can be used on normal roads, saving the high-powered, 20,000-lumen light for off-road activities."

Ultimately, working with quality suppliers means access to a variety of lighting solutions to fit any project, says Sims.

"Whether your customer is looking for the first step in building a high-performance lighting package or a catchall one-and-done solution, Baja Designs has multiple solutions to fit any build or budget," he notes. ***TS***

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TOES IN THE SAND

The secret of SoCal Suspension's success is driven by one man's love of the dunes.

BY MIKE MADRIAGA



Image Credit: Alexander - stock.adobe.com



Mike Madriaga is an award-winning multi-media journalist who has created content for a variety of media outlets. From 2000-06, he owned and managed Team Prototype, a world-renowned auto fabrication shop in San Diego that built dozens of car show winners, magazine cover vehicles and SEMA projects.

While the desert in Glamis, California, remains cool, hundreds of off-road enthusiasts from San Diego County make the two-hour trek east to the Imperial Sand Dunes—an off-roader's paradise. Here, trailers are parked, UTVs and lifted trucks are unloaded, and the dunes come alive with zippy action as off-roaders on two, three or four wheels carve bowls, kick up roost, catch air and hang out with thousands of like-minded adventurers. Among them is Eric Michael Conner, owner of SoCal Suspension in El Cajon, California.

Last year and earlier this year, he brought out "Vivian," his blue-and-white 1974 F-100, a Frankenstein-esque creation blending Toyota and Ford components.

"It's a street-legal trophy truck, and it's my daily driver," Conner proudly explains.

A regular at Glamis for about eight years, Conner's experiences—piloting a leaping Ford Bronco and then "Vivian," enduring a few crashes and rebuilding each time—taught him how to tinker with and innovate off-road vehicles. These trials eventually led to him building military-grade off-road behemoths, using the desert as his test bed.

Glamis, located just northeast of Mexicali, Mexico, is widely voted by off-roaders from both sides of the border as one of the best dune areas in the U.S. As the largest off-highway vehicle recreation area, its endless beauty has even served as a backdrop for films like "Star Wars: Return of the Jedi" and "The Scorpion King."

BRINGING 'VIVIAN' TO LIFE

At Glamis, Conner and "Vivian" dominate the steep hills, climbing effortlessly to the top. On other dunes, they launch off apexes, sometimes catching an impressive 30 feet of air and landing farther than most. "Vivian's" robust suspension soaks up the landings effortlessly—a performance captured in gnarly videos shared online.

Inspired by the sassy Vivian Ward character from "Pretty Woman," the truck carries an intriguing backstory.

"'Vivian' was originally built six years ago as a first-generation Toyota Tundra," Conner shares. "It had a full chassis, cage, big motor and 30 inches of travel."

But, as a former professional skateboarder and import tuner street legend turned sand-



Zack "Ducky" Conner is following in his father's tire tracks. (Photo courtesy SoCal Suspension)

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Eric Michael Conner, owner of SoCal Suspension in El Cajon, California, mixes a love for off-road racing and a passion for suspension projects. (Photo courtesy SoCal Suspension/IG)



The sales area at SoCal Suspension displays magazine features from the shop's legacy of high-performance, street-legal suspension systems. (Photo courtesy Mike Madriaga)

dune daredevil, he wanted to leap higher and farther—a desire that led to two crashes and rebuilds.

After the third crash, Conner decided, "Let's build it into this (Ford) F-100 body and take it to the next level."

More than a year later, with the help of his friend and metal-fabricator extraordinaire, Morgan Clarke of MCD1, they cut the truck in half, cab-swapped it and transformed it into a full-blown trophy truck.

A trophy truck is the pinnacle of off-road engineering, built to conquer harsh, unpredictable deserts. "Vivian's" striking, patina-finished exterior, which fuses the removed Toyota Tundra cab with a classic Ford cab and grille, conceals a beast engineered to handle the most treacherous terrain at breakneck speeds. She has a new and heavily modified 460-ci V-8 engine, an aggressive custom exhaust and advanced cooling modifications.

Paired with a Morgan Clarke Design expertly engineered chassis and suspension—featuring a TIG-welded, 4130 chromoly frame, a triangulated rear four-link system and long-travel double-wishbone front—the truck exceeds trophy truck specifications.

THE THRILL OF THE DUNES

Perhaps in the near future, the Baja race series will be on the radar with Conner's teenage son, Zack "Ducky" Conner, behind the wheel.

"When he turns 18, we're going to start doing the SCORE series in Baja," Conner explains. "My wife doesn't want me to take him down there until he's 18."

When the Conners hit the dunes with friends, it's pure joy.

"I have the time of my life on these trails, climbing hills, jumping the truck," Conner says. "I had fun building it—but driving it, that's next-level. I realized this is what I should be doing."

Their adventures are well documented online. One Instagram video follows "Vivian" as the vehicle effortlessly tears across the sand dunes to a head-banging Metallica track. Another clip posted online was filmed at the recent 2025 King of the Hammers, showing Conner and his son racing through a mix of high-speed desert runs, while other videos show them rock crawling on a nearby course.

This being Conner's third year of racing at the annual event, he recalls, "last year, I co-drove with my son; winning first place in the 1450 class was the highlight of our year."

FROM SUSPENSIONS TO SOCIAL MEDIA

When the dust settles from the dunes and races, customers often line up outside



Wheels on display inside SoCal Suspension's large showroom. (Photo courtesy Mike Madriaga)

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Building off-road racer "Vivian," a first-generation Toyota Tundra fused with a 1974 Ford F-100 cab and grille that's ready for every type of terrain, led to the founding of SoCal Suspension. (Photo courtesy Mike Madriaga)

SoCal Suspension at 275 North Marshall Ave., where a massive showroom displays wheels, tires, lifted truck and air suspension parts, lights and accessories. The sales area, adorned with magazine features on the shop's legacy of high-performance, street-legal suspension systems, is complemented by a spacious waiting area and a studio where Conner films social media content.

The shop, located in a fenced yard at the rear of the property with 8-9 bays for repairs and builds, sometimes shelters "Vivian" from the sun while the team updates its modifications. The shop is equipped with various lifts, from a 7,000-pound unit for airbag suspension installs to 9,000-, 12,000- and even a 15,000-pound lift for larger truck projects, which include lift kit installations and other work on HDs, Ford F-350s and duallys.

A Snap-on touchless tire machine serves high-end wheels with delicate finishes, while the fabrication workshop, complete with a large bench, press, vices, tube bender and AmeriBrade grinder, is where much of the magic happens. A spring compressor machine is heavily used here, and a dedicated area is set aside for long-term projects like "Vivian" and Conner's previous project, a vintage 1990s Ford Bronco. A break room in the same area offers the team a place to recharge.

Conner manages a team of three technicians and two salesmen and remains very hands-on.

"I do everything—I'm still the owner-operator, working on cars daily. For some special fabrication jobs, I'm the only one who can do them."

Family is also involved. Zack helps out, and Conner's brother-in-law runs the shop when he isn't there, allowing Conner to focus more on social media and digital marketing.

As of late last year, Conner's high-octane videos—like the one featuring him ripping up the dunes to Metallica—had garnered more than 45,000 followers on his account, linking back to the company's Instagram (instagram.com/socalsuspension) and YouTube channels. These efforts, combined with a focus on Yelp and Google reviews (over 400 reviews with an average of 4.7 stars), have solidified the shop's reputation.

"Social media is definitely our biggest exposure tool, but Google and Yelp come in a close second," he says. "Together, they validate who we are and what we do."

He's even hired technicians through Instagram ads, further leveraging the digital tools to grow the shop's business.

DRIVEN BY A SINGLE FOCUS

Conner's passion for cars began long before social media. In the 1990s, his souped-up Honda CRX ruled underground street drag races in San Diego County, and his then-shop, Drag Pro, became famous in the racing community. He once built what was touted as the fastest 1.8L CRX in the quarter-mile.

Although Drag Pro closed in 1999, Conner's automotive dreams only grew. After managing a San Diego road racing shop and an import tuner shop, he started Mobile Motorsports, bringing his expertise directly to customers' homes, installing suspensions, roll cages and more.

His father's advice—"Stick to one thing. Pick a niche, become a professional and you'll do well"—became the cornerstone of his success when he chose to focus on suspension. Over the years, Conner's journey led him to expand from mobile services to establishing SoCal Suspension around 2006. What began as a mobile suspension installation operation evolved into a thriving business.

"I thought I wouldn't make it by specializing, but suspension is something everyone needs," he says.

Though he's expanded into wheels and tires, now accounting for 30%-40% of his business, Conner still honors his roots.

His pricing philosophy, honed during his early days in import tuner shops, remains aggressive yet fair.

"We never let a customer leave without a sale," he notes.

By monitoring competitors every six months and keeping prices $10 to $20 lower than big corporate shops, SoCal Suspension stands out with its personalized care.

One regret remains: "I should've started internet sales 20 years ago. An online revenue stream would've been a game changer when the shop is slow."

Yet, his adaptive mindset and dedication have kept the business thriving for over two decades.

Looking to the future, Conner envisions Zack eventually taking over as owner-operator while he shifts to a more relaxed role.

"My goal is for him to run the business while I help out a couple of days a week," Conner explains. "I once thought about selling, but the numbers don't support long-term retirement. I want this business to support both of us."

He emphasizes allowing his son to choose his own path, whether it's continuing in the family business or forging his own route—with eyes on always jumping farther. ***TS***


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Proof, Partnerships & Profit

How exhibiting at car shows helps restyling shops grow.

BY DINO PERFETTI

PHOTOS COURTESY DINO PERFETTI





Dino Perfetti is a 30-plus-year veteran of the automotive aftermarket and a recent past chairman of the SEMA PRO Council. He is engaged with several industry professionals with visions of increasing the opportunities to bring products to market through car dealerships. Having joined Automotive Concepts in 2008, he is the president, leading a team in customizing vehicles for over 250 dealerships throughout the Midwest. Contact him at dino@ac-mn.com.

During my career in vehicle restyling, I have learned one thing above all else—nothing beats showing people what you can do in person. Here at Automotive Concepts, local and regional shows like the Twin Cities Auto Show, Cars & Coffee meets and especially the Minnesota State Fair are the heartbeat of our shop's marketing efforts, product development and sales.

We have built our business strategy around these events because they put our work in front of people who did not even know they wanted a custom vehicle—until they sat in one. The show floor is where awareness, education and intent converge. Visitors don't just scroll past a picture—they open doors, touch materials, ask questions and start envisioning ownership. That sensory experience is something no ad campaign can replicate.

WHY SHOWS OUTPERFORM TRADITIONAL ADVERTISING

- ***Unmatched exposure.*** At the Minnesota State Fair alone, more than 2 million people pass through the gates in 12 days. That is more impressions, better conversations and deeper engagement than any digital campaign could deliver.
- ***Proof is in the metal.*** Our industry runs on credibility. A live display eliminates doubt about fitment, finish and functionality in a way brochures never can.
- ***Real-time R&D.*** Shows are the best focus groups you will ever find. What stops people in their tracks? What sparks questions? Those insights shape our next packages, inventory buys and design direction.
- ***Immediate sales.*** We've sold multiple display vehicles during major events. At the 2025 Minnesota State Fair, a new custom-designed Bronco was purchased on day one by a couple from Los Angeles visiting relatives. By Labor Day, it was already on a truck headed west.

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When it comes to show exhibits, we always bring our new car dealer partners into the mix. They love it because:

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CHRYSLER CELEBRATES CENTURY OF INNOVATION

The Chrysler Century of Innovation summer celebration has been visiting car shows and high-profile events over the summer, such as the 2025 Carlisle (Pennsylvania) Chrysler Nationals. Highlights include a lineup of historic Chrysler vehicles and concept cars including:

- ***1924 Chrysler Six.*** One of five prototypes completed before Chrysler production began in the former Chalmers plant on Jefferson Avenue in Detroit, the vehicle on display at Carlisle has been owned by the company since its creation.
- ***1934 Chrysler Airflow.*** Historians consider the Chrysler Airflow the first modern automobile—a car that ultimately revolutionized auto design around the world.
- ***1955 Chrysler 300.*** Nicknamed the "banker's hot rod," the 300 was America's first modern muscle car and featured the most powerful production passenger car engine in the world at the time.
- ***1963 Chrysler Turbine Car.*** While Chrysler worked on the Turbine program from 1954-81, this car is the most recognized of them all. Designed in Detroit and built by Ghia in Italy, all of the cars were painted Turbine Bronze and were loaned to private individuals around the country for evaluation.
- ***1995 Chrysler Atlantic Concept.*** Introduced at the 1995 North American International Auto Show in Detroit, the Atlantic was designed in the spirit of luxury French custom coach builders of the 1930s.
- ***Chrysler Halcyon Concept.*** The Chrysler Halcyon Concept exemplifies a potential future design theme of the Chrysler brand that embraces sustainability-driven exterior and interior design, full autonomy paired with personalized driving experiences and futuristic technology that expands on the brand's "Harmony in Motion" ethos of customer-focused seamless connectivity, according to officials.

The Chrysler Century of Innovation summer celebration includes a lineup of historic Chrysler vehicles and concept cars. (Photo courtesy Chrysler)



In-person displays eliminate doubts about fitment, finish and functionality in a way brochures never can.

We pre-approve packages with management and always display a few "showstopper" builds. By equipping our sales staff with pricing lists and build sheets, it's not uncommon for deals to get written right on the show floor.

When those vehicles roll back into a dealership—already sold—it is a big moment. Dealers post about it, brag to their teams and usually hand us another stock unit to customize right away. That keeps momentum alive long after the event wraps up.

The highly engaged and successful dealer partners will send some of their top performers to represent their dealership in this exciting show environment.

VENDOR PARTNERSHIPS THAT PAY OFF

One of the biggest mistakes I see shops make is treating vendors like order-fillers instead of partners. Our vendors do not just ship us parts—they show up in the booth with us.

When suspension manufacturers or pickup topper companies send reps to work an event, they validate the quality of the build, spend time answering technical questions, and expand our footprint and theirs.

Better yet, they often help offset costs with co-op marketing dollars, materials for high-profile builds or logistical support. If you are not bringing suppliers into your event strategy, you are leaving budget and credibility on the table.

DESIGNING A DISPLAY THAT CONVERTS

We approach every show like a pop-up showroom with one goal: measurable action.

- ***Curate with intent.*** Four to six builds covering different buyer personas and budgets work better than a dozen unfocused vehicles. Anchor with one or two "showstopper" builds but always include approachable and affordable packages as well.
- ***Stage a story.*** Before-and-after boards, component displays and open interiors invite exploration.
- ***Make it easy to buy.*** Use QR codes, scannable build sheets and e-sign-enabled tablets. Offer show-only incentives and fast-turn build schedules.

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- ***Train as one team.*** Every morning, huddle with staff, dealer closers and vendor reps. Everyone needs to answer objections and speak the same language on features, pricing and benefits.
- ***Keep the booth fresh.*** Rotate vehicles, wipe them down every night and run overlapping shifts. Fatigue is the enemy of good presentation.

CONTENT & FOLLOW-UP

Events are not just about sales—they are about content. We capture daily reels, walk-arounds, customer reactions and quick demos on video. That fuels weeks of social posts and retargeting ads. We tag vendors, dealers and the event itself to expand reach.

Meanwhile, the follow-up is just as important as the show itself. Leads go into our CRM and we aim to follow up within 24 hours. That is what turns a "busy" show into a profitable one.

RESULTS YOU CAN COUNT ON

Every well-executed show gives us:

- Immediate sales and booked projects
- Hundreds of qualified leads for post-show appointments
- Fresh content for digital marketing
- Product validation to refine packages
- Deeper partnerships with vendors and dealers.

THE BOTTOM LINE

If you are a shop owner wondering if an investment in exhibiting at a car show is worth it, here's my advice—pick one major event and commit to doing it right.

Build intentionally well-thought-out vehicles. Train your team. Involve your vendors. Get your dealer partners on board. And most importantly—plan to convert, not just impress.

For us, shows are not just about visibility. They are about proof, partnerships and profit. Done right, they are the single most powerful growth engine a restyling shop can have. ***TS***



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Black Winch

Superwinch, San Dimas, California, presents the Superwinch SX winch, now available in Midnight Black. Combining performance and style, the SX features a patented drum light for nighttime recoveries, a relocatable die-cast aluminum control box and a 3/8-inch-diameter synthetic rope. Both a 12-foot lighted wired remote and a wireless handheld remote are included, and the units are available in 10,000- and 12,000-pound ratings.

Wheel Spacers



Overland Vehicle Systems (OVS), Santa Fe Springs, California, presents its new Wheel Spacers, engineered to enhance vehicle stance, stability and off-road capability. Delivering an immediate performance upgrade for enthusiasts looking to improve handling and clearance for larger tires, the spacers are manufactured from forged 6061-T6 aluminum with a Type II anodized finish for enhanced corrosion resistance. They come equipped with Geomet-coated 4135 chromoly steel wheel studs for maximum reliability in rugged conditions.



High-Clearance Bumpers

Artec Industries, North Salt Lake City, Utah, presents the return of Bantam Series High Clearance Bumpers, including the Rear Bantam Bumper for Jeep JL models. With a renewed focus on production efficiency and design refinement, the re-release delivers top-tier performance and craftsmanship with improved pricing and availability. Engineered with feedback from serious wheelers and shop owners, the Bantam Series is now more modular and streamlined and ready to perform on trails across the country.

Hardshell Rooftop Tent



Roofnest, Boulder, Colorado, presents the Condor 2 XXL Air Hardshell Rooftop Tent. Capable of deploying in seconds and comfortably sleeping four adults and a couple of furry friends, the foldout tent debuts the company's refreshed branding and color scheme. Fully open, the interior measures 102 inches long and up to 80 inches wide with 4 feet of maximum headroom. The tent boasts a mattress that is 8 feet long and 6.5 feet wide and includes modular side windows that can be used with a simple rainfly canopy covering.



Multi-Spoke Wheels

ICON Vehicle Dynamics, Riverside, California, offers its 20-inch ICON Alloys Cajon multi-spoke wheels. Available in multiple finishes including Double Black, Satin Bronze with gloss black lip, and silver machined with gloss black lip, Cajon is engineered to maximize caliper clearance and optimize wheel position for unhindered suspension travel and steering function on Jeeps, trucks and SUVs. Backspace dimensions and wheel offset have been strategically developed to reduce scrub radius, improving all-around handling and ride quality.



Toyota Leveling Kits

Tuff Country EZ-Ride Suspension, West Jordan, Utah, presents its new Leveling Kits for 2007-21 Toyota Tundra and 2008-22 Toyota Sequoia models. Made in the USA and offering simple bolt-on installation, the 1-, 2.5- and 3-inch systems level the front end of the vehicle to allow for larger tires and can retain the factory shocks.



Toyota Race Series Shocks

Fox Factory, El Cajon, California, presents its battle-tested 2.5 Factory Race Series Shocks tuned for 2005-23 Toyota Tacoma and 2003-24 4Runner models. Patented Internal Bypass Technology allows increased damping capacity of the shock, giving comfort and confidence on rough terrain without the extra packaging room that comes with external bypass shocks. The internal bypass is tuned to generate nearly 100% more force in the bottom-out zone compared to a 2.5 monotube.

Off-Grid Charger



REDARC, Lonsdale, South Australia, presents its BCDC Alpha100 R charger, the most powerful model in the BCDC range. Building on the success of the Alpha50 R, the new 100A version is engineered for serious users running high-capacity battery systems, delivering fast, efficient charging to support demanding off-grid power management setups. It combines auxiliary battery charging, start battery recovery, RedVision connectivity, high-performance charging options and an integrated Smart Battery Monitor in a single, compact, in-cabin unit.



Rooftop Platform Rack

Küat, Springfield, Missouri, presents the DEK rooftop platform rack. Designed as the ultimate cargo companion, the rack offers both a crossbar mount option to fit a wide range of vehicles and a no-drill direct-mount system for select models including 5th-gen Toyota 4Runners and 4th-gen Tacomas. The DEK features all-metal construction, a low-profile design, ample T-channels and adjustable crossbars. Lit variations were developed in partnership with **Diode Dynamics**—the optional light bar features five integrated Diode Dynamics C2 Pro Driving LED Pods.



Highway Terrain Tire

Lionhart, Irwindale, California, presents the Lionhart Imara H/T highway terrain tire. Engineered to deliver confidence, comfort and control, the tire features noise-suppressing tread patterns and multi-angle blocks for a smooth ride. Designed for safety in various conditions, highlights include water-evacuating grooves that enhance traction during wet weather. The Lionhart Imara H/T is available in 47 sizes.

Overland Racks



ZROADZ, Corona, California, presents its ZROADZ ACCESS Overland Racks, with applications available for 2016-25 Toyota Tacoma models. Reaching cargo is easy through one of three convenient ACCESS Gates, and the racks are constructed in the USA from mild steel, aluminum and stainless steel. Four high-performance ZROADZ LED lights, a custom wiring harness, hardware and instructions are included. Jeep Gladiator and Ford Ranger applications are also available.



Driving Lights

Vision X Offroad, Auburn, Washington, presents its PRO Series driving lights featuring a unique dual-circuit design that supports running the center optics only as a bright DRL to maximize visibility and style during the day and then switch the entire beam on for max output at night. The system also includes a modular X-Lens that can be used to change the color of the DRL on the fly.



Dynamic Underbody Light Kits

ORACLE Lighting, Metairie, Louisiana, presents its Dynamic Underbody Kits that bring rides to life with flowing colors and motion effects. Drivers can choose from smooth color fades, high-energy strobes or chase sequences. Durable and easy to install, the systems include high-output LEDs that ensure brilliant illumination while offering app-controlled customization.

Tonneau & Nano-Grid System



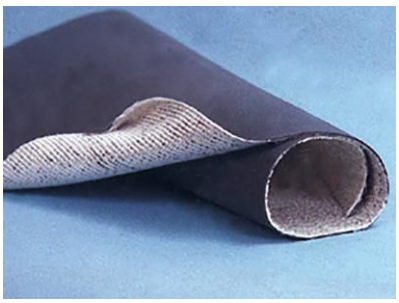
Worksport Ltd., West Seneca, New York, introduces its SOLIS & COR Modular Nano-Grid System. Designed to function independently or as an integrated energy ecosystem, the SOLIS solar tonneau cover and COR portable power system are engineered to allow more than 60 million pickups in the U.S. to generate and store power anytime, anywhere. The SOLIS tonneau cover is available for a variety of pickups and the COR system can serve a wide range of broad global consumer applications, unlocking new lifestyle and recreational verticals.



Fender Flares

EGR USA, Ontario, California, presents its robotically trimmed Fender Flares. Designed for a precision fit that eliminates gaps and alignment issues while delivering OE-quality styling that complements a truck's factory lines, the flares install easily on a variety of Ford, GMC, Chevrolet Ram and Toyota vehicles.

Corvette Heat & Sound Protection



Koolmat, Mooresville, North Carolina, presents Koolmat, a space-age composite of **Owens Corning** fiberglass/silicone material designed to stop extreme heat up to 1,000 degrees and lower sound inside the vehicle. Made to cover floors, firewalls, tunnels and kick panels, pre-cut under-carpet kits are available, including applications for 1956-present Chevrolet Corvettes. Made in the USA, the flexible material weighs 0.72 pounds per square foot and resists radiant heat, gases and oil. Koolmat also comes in 30- and 60-inch-wide bulk rolls.



NASCAR-Branded Tonneau Covers

RealTruck, Ann Arbor, Michigan, presents its NASCAR-branded UnderCover Ultra Flex Truck Bed Folding Covers. Blending race history and functionality, the covers feature rugged aluminum construction with a sleek, low-profile design and a carpeted underside featuring a vinyl NASCAR emblem. They are assembled in the U.S. and produced in limited quantities, compatible with Ford F-150, Chevy Silverado, GMC Sierra, Dodge Ram and Toyota Tundra models.



Mercedes-Benz Remote Start

Mid City Engineering, Chicago, presents a new SmartKey Starter Remote Start for select 2017-24 Mercedes Benz models. The plug-and-play system utilizes leading automotive hardware and firmware, ensuring a seamless solution that does not disrupt the integrity of the vehicle, keeping warranties intact. It works with the factory key fob out of the box while interfacing with Compustar Drone and Directed Smart Start smartphone control interfaces and RF remotes for extended range. It automatically turns on heated seats based on outside temperature.



Combination Hitch

GEN-Y Hitch, Nappanee, Indiana, presents the Advantage Combo Hitch. Created to meet the demands of serious haulers, the hitch is made in the USA and offers flexibility and performance to meet a variety of towing needs. Designed to allow towing with either a gooseneck or fifth wheel hitch, the system has up to a 25,000-pound towing capacity and switches easily with a simple pull of a pin. Engineered with SOLIDWORKS software, it is completely maintenance-free and includes a durable black powder-coat finish.

Pro Polishing Solutions



Valentine Performance Detailing, Braintree, Massachusetts, presents its expanded line of premium Car Care Products and Garage Protection Solutions. Recent U.S.-made introductions range from vehicle finish-enhancing products to garage protection solutions and a proprietary brand of spill containment absorbents. The advanced polishing products feature high-density foam polishing pads in a variety of sizes and strengths and are designed to deliver showroom-quality results. Garage Gloss is a polymer-based finish that gives floors a long-lasting shine.



Chevy/GMC HD 2500/3500 Boxed Upper Control Arms

CST Performance Suspension, Moreno Valley, California, presents High Angle Ball Joint Boxed Upper Control Arms with OE-style non greaseable bushings for 2020-25 Chevy/GMC 2500/3500 HD models. Combining the strength and functionality of a uni-ball with the longevity of a ball joint, the system is designed to hold up in extreme weather conditions. The quiet, no-maintenance bushings are built to last for the life of the vehicle with a two-stage powder-coat finish.



Van Storage Solutions

CTech Manufacturing, Weston, Wisconsin, presents its VanPro commercial work van storage solutions. Designed for use in Ford Transit, RAM ProMaster and Mercedes Sprinter models, the VanPro system includes a robust lineup of lightweight aluminum shelving units, parts cabinets, toolboxes and workbenches designed to contour with vehicle wall profiles. Standalone components and fully integrated, ready-to-install packages are available in 12 powder-coat color options.

Toolboxes



Buyers Products, Cleveland, presents its expanded Contractor Toolbox Series with new sizes and finishes. Designed to provide options for compact pickups and other space-limited applications, the toolboxes are made in America to meet the needs of professional contractors and fleet operators. Built for durability and superior organization, the Contractor Series features a two-tier design, allowing users to securely store tools inside while keeping the truck bed open for larger cargo. A weather-resistant seal and built-in rain gutter protect contents from the elements.



Truck Bed Anchors,

Torklift, Kent Washington, presents its Apex Anchors internal payload system for truck beds. The frame-mounted internal payload anchors provide a secure, stable foundation for slide-in truck campers, motorcycles, ATVs and other significant, dynamic loads with high centers of gravity. Made in the USA, the anchors bolt to the truck frame, with anchor points that stay flush with the truck bed when not in use. ***TS***



Automotive Influencers: The Supplier Connection

High-profile users are directing how consumers discover, evaluate & interact with products & brands.

BY JEF WHITE

EDITOR'S NOTE: *This is the first in a two-part series examining the impact of automotive influencers on the specialty aftermarket. Part I focuses on supplier relationships, while Part II will highlight influencer goals and trends.*

When Joey Logano pulled into victory lane last November at Phoenix Raceway to claim the NASCAR Cup Series championship, NBC's cameras didn't just show confetti raining down on the newest three-time series champion—they also focused on his bright-yellow Team Penske No. 22 Ford Mustang with "Pennzoil" splashed across the sides and hood.

Meanwhile, when RANDYS Worldwide brands organize trail rides or other customer activations at off-road events such as Easter Jeep Safari, King of the Hammers or Jeep Beach, they know they can turn to a network of 20 to 30 industry ambassadors to help push out social media posts and related messaging to attract participants and provide trail and track communications much more effectively than the companies could ever do on their own.

In today's "pics (or video) or it didn't happen" world, aftermarket brands are seeing the value of showing and not just telling customers about their products and themselves by partnering with automotive influencers. Serving as independent business ambassadors, the mainly social media-supported personalities talk up the companies and their latest offerings in posts, videos and in-person appearances.

The strategic alliances create win-win scenarios, where content creators receive products and sometimes monetary support in exchange for real-world testing and endorsements that build an auto brand's visibility and credibility with loyal followers.

"High-profile users have completely reshaped the automotive aftermarket by shifting how consumers discover, evaluate and connect with products and brands," says Brooke Perfect, social media and sponsorship manager for Yukon Gear & Axle. "Their influence has brought a more personal, experience-driven layer to the industry—where followers trust real-world performance over polished ads."

CHANGING THE GAME

In many ways, automotive influencers have been around since the beginning, sharing secrets for finding horsepower and engineering more efficient, more durable parts and systems for specialty vehicles for as



Content creator and influencer Larry Chen's well-known photography skills capture automotive passion while casting partner Pennzoil in a positive light. (Photo courtesy Pennzoil)



long as enthusiasts have been climbing behind the wheel.

Fast-forward to the advent of social media and influencers can now speak directly to consumers like never before, making the connection between those who do and those who want to do stronger than ever.

Not surprisingly, auto parts manufacturers and suppliers see advantages in using those connections to align themselves with high-profile personalities in order to speak directly to their dedicated, targeted audiences.

"Influencers and brand ambassadors have transformed how enthusiasts and professionals learn about our products, engage with our customers and make purchasing decisions. They've essentially become trusted peer reviewers, and that peer-to-peer trust has reshaped how the aftermarket connects with end users," says Alexander Boone, influencer strategy manager for Pennzoil-Quaker State.

The influencer community has also "democratized access to technical content," he believes.

"Now, anyone from a weekend warrior to a shop owner can see how our oil performs in a turbocharged drift car or how it protects engines on a cross-country rally. The result is a more informed, engaged customer base."

The opinions of trusted personalities can particularly resonate with specialty aftermarket customers, the majority of whom appreciate a "been there, done that" perspective.

"Many of the influencer partners we



Automotive content creator Jonny Grunwald has built a thriving presence on social media and a growing portfolio of projects. (Photo courtesy Pennzoil)

INFLUENCER PARTNERS

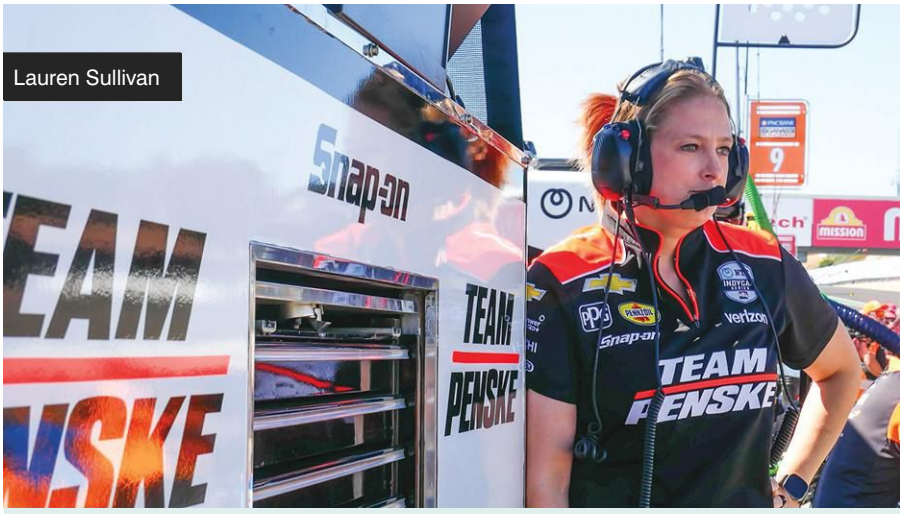
KC HiLiTES
PARTNERS:
TrailRecon, Thecraig909, Natasha Adams, Jiggin' With Jordan, Nikki Delventhal

PENNZOIL
PARTNERS:
Larry Chen, Vin Anatra, Alex Taylor, Joey Logano & Team Penske, Vaughn Gittin Jr & Team RTR, Hennessey Performance, Bring a Trailer, Radford Racing School

QUAKER STATE
PARTNERS:
Anatalia Villaranda, Coco Zurita, Miguel Martinez, Daniel Suárez & Trackhouse Racing

YUKON GEAR & AXLE
PARTNERS:
Influencers: Julie Heyer, Kelsie Heck, Kris, Bill & Diana Adair, Dominic Knight, David Brettschneider, Mark Roy and Robert Braun; athletes: Bailey Cole, Woody Rose, Alex Fleming, Andrew McLaughlin, Brexton & Kendall Glines and Dustin Sexton

WD-40
PARTNERS:
Throtl, Donut Media, Big Time, Humble Mechanic



Aligning with industry insiders such as Team Penske engineer Lauren Sullivan earns immediate credibility for aftermarket suppliers such as Pennzoil. (Photo courtesy Pennzoil)



Racing sponsorships are a natural influencer connection for aftermarket suppliers. (Photo courtesy Pennzoil)

work with use aftermarket parts to take their builds to the next level," says Aisling Williams, digital marketing manager for WD-40 Company. "In fact, our influencer partner Throtl sells aftermarket parts on their website, in addition to creating content. We expect this trend of investment in aftermarket parts to continue to grow as younger car enthusiasts become more ingrained in the automotive industry."

Many agree influencers have had a positive impact on the specialty automotive aftermarket.

"They've accelerated trends, driven demand for custom solutions and raised the bar for product quality through their constant feedback and high expectations," says Perfect. "Most importantly, they've helped build communities around brands, turning customers into loyal fans and fueling the next generation of builders, racers and enthusiasts."

As passionate advocates, they've managed to digitally capture the fun and freedom of car culture and the automotive lifestyle.

"Ambassadors provide both educational and entertaining content that is more relatable," says Randy Wimenta, marketing partnerships and community manager for KC HiLiTES. "It's content that says, 'If he/she can do that, I can do that, too.'"

FINDING THE RIGHT PARTNER

Influencer relationships make sense for aftermarket manufacturers and suppliers for a variety of reasons.

For Pennzoil and Quaker State, the collaborations are about proving their lubrication products work as advertised, as the companies look for influencer support for a wide range of outreach programs, including social media content creation, technical tutorials, event appearances and long-term storytelling.

"We know trust is earned, not bought. Collaborating with ambassadors and influencers allows Pennzoil and Quaker State to demonstrate real-world performance and build credibility through authentic voices that resonate with target audiences," says Boone. "Whether it's powering Team Penske to three straight NASCAR Cup Series championships, enabling Team RTR to torture-test their engines under extreme temperatures in Formula DRIFT, or DeBoss Garage showing cold-start behavior in Canada, we rely on them to prove Pennzoil's product performance under varied and demanding conditions. Their influence helps translate engineering and formulation benefits into experiences that consumers and pros can relate to."

For WD-40 Brand, the initial goal was to meet end users where they spend most of their time online. The company asks its influencers to produce in-depth modification and maintenance videos for YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and TikTok; appear at in-person activations, from local Cars & Coffee gatherings to the SEMA Show; and bolster support and excitement for WD-40 Brand's Techs & Trades Program.

"We knew that in order to better reach WD-40 Brand end users, we needed to integrate our products into the content they were already consuming," Williams explains. "This is where influencers came into play. We initially began working with midsized creators and have grown our influencer program to include large content creators. The main goal of our influencer strategy has always been to drive product awareness and education to encourage end users to reach for WD-40 Brand solutions at the shelf."

For KC HiLiTES, it's about authenticity and the stories the company wants to share as it forges collaborations with influencers to help deliver how-to videos, social media marketing, in-person appearances and product testing.

"We took a page from our founder, Pete Brown—our branded KC lights speak for themselves, so let customers personalize their builds and experiences," says Wimenta. "Ambassadors sharing their stories and showcasing their lifestyle is the most powerful soft-selling tactic. Our products are

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Ambassador content, such as posts from TrailRecon, tells enthusiasts, "If he/she can do that, I can do that, too." (Photo courtesy KC HiLiTES

always secondary, as we want to genuinely share their stories with the world. We don't ever want their content to look like an infomercial."

For Yukon Gear & Axle, the aim of influencer partnerships is "to build authentic connections with our target audience through trusted voices in the community," says Perfect, noting the company uses the collaborations to create authentic social media marketing and how-to content, educate and engage its audience while showcasing real-world product applications, and drive in-person appearances at events, races and industry gatherings. Many of the company's partners are hands-on with R&D as well.

"These individuals live and breathe the lifestyle our products are built for, and their real-world use carries credibility that traditional marketing can't replicate. By aligning with respected names in the industry, we're able to extend our reach, strengthen brand loyalty and gather meaningful product feedback—all while staying rooted in the culture that drives our innovation," she says.

BENEFITS FOR BOTH SIDES

For automotive influencer partnerships to be successful, there needs to be a payoff for both sides.

"The foundation of any strong collaboration is authenticity and alignment. We look for individuals who already believe in what we offer and can speak to their audience in their voice," Boone notes. "At Pennzoil and Quaker State, we bring industry-leading products and technical support. From their side, influencers and brand ambassadors bring creativity, community and storytelling. It becomes a true collaboration when both parties are transparent about expectations, timelines and goals."

The alliances can also be used to reinforce what businesses and influencers stand for.

"WD-40 Brand has strong company values, and we expect our influencer partners to hold true to those values as well," says Williams. "We clearly communicate our values, objectives and expected outcomes to our influencer partners to ensure they have the tools they need to get the 'Job Done Right.' This also goes both ways. Our influencer partners are candid in telling us what types of content will resonate best with their audience to prevent the activation from feeling too sales-focused. When both sides collaborate effectively, the content feels organic rather than overly sponsored."

Perfect says "mutual respect and clear alignment on goals" are the bedrocks of an effective alliance.

"Both the company and the influencer need to understand each other's values, audience and what success looks like. It's not just about promotion—it's about collaboration," she says. "When an influencer truly believes in the product and the brand supports their creativity and authenticity, the content resonates. Open communication, creative freedom and a long-term mindset are what turn a basic sponsorship into a meaningful partnership that delivers real value on both sides."

To that end, Wimenta says KC has two simple rules for its ambassadors.

"Let them authentically tell their story, and they shouldn't oversell the product."

UNIQUE RELATIONSHIPS

It seems most everyone has an opinion on the high-profile nature of automotive influencers and their impact on the aftermarket. But, as individual relationships grow organically, it's apparent there's more than one way for companies to realize tangible benefits.

"A common misconception is that influencers and ambassadors are only relevant for flashy lifestyle brands—not serious automotive products," Boone notes. "Some people assume it's just about reach or follower count. But for Pennzoil and Quaker State, our most successful collaborations are grounded in performance, trust and



Many content creators use aftermarket parts to take their builds to the next level. (Photo courtesy WD-40 Company)



WD-40 Brand partner Humble Mechanic is a graduate of Universal Technical Institute and often participates in informational sessions and Q&As with trade school students. (Photo courtesy WD-40 Company)



The main goal of many influencer strategies is to drive product awareness and education. (Photo courtesy WD-40 Company)

technical credibility. It's about relevance, finding someone who actually uses our products and can speak to their community with authority and experience—whether they're a content creator with millions of followers or a respected builder."

For KC, the collaborations are an effective way to connect with a huge market.

"The network of ambassadors is vast, and over time the KC brand has become synonymous with the off-road community," says Wimenta.

Still, the most effective partners aren't always the ones with the biggest platforms, but the ones who actually use the products, speak the community's language and earn trust through hands-on knowledge, says Perfect.

"A well-respected builder with a tight-knit audience can have a far bigger impact than a generic influencer with a million followers and no connection to the lifestyle," she explains.

As such, when it comes to these types of business partnerships, questions of authenticity sometimes arise.

"Many people consider influencers as talking heads for brands, when they really serve as brand advocates. This is especially true for our brand and the influencer partnerships we have in the trades industry," says Williams. "We don't partner with influencers that have never used our products. We partner with content creators that already know and love our brand. We're lucky to have strong brand recognition in the automotive community, and we actively work to maintain brand awareness to ensure that WD-40 Brand will be a household name for many years to come."





High-profile users have reshaped the automotive aftermarket by shifting how consumers discover, evaluate and connect with products and brands. (Photo courtesy Yukon Gear & Axle)



Influencers help build communities around brands, turning customers into loyal fans and fueling the next generation of builders, racers and enthusiasts. (Photo courtesy Yukon Gear & Axle)



True supplier/influencer relationships are about collaboration and not just promotion. (Photo courtesy Yukon Gear & Axle)

MORE TO OFFER

As suppliers continue to cultivate influencer partnerships, new ways to add value emerge. A major benefit is the introduction of brands to like-minded enthusiasts.

"It's not just about reach or product promotion—(influencers) have created a sense of connection and loyalty among their followers, many of whom become long-term customers," says Yukon's Perfect. "We've seen more user-generated content, deeper engagement at events and even customers tagging us just to show off their builds. That kind of organic brand advocacy has been a powerful driver of awareness and trust—without feeling forced or overly commercial."

It seems that fans of specific markets quickly find each other and begin forming strong bonds.

"We've realized how small and tight-knit the automotive influencer community is, which has played to our benefit as we've worked with a variety of influencers over the years," Williams says. "From off-road racing to high-end race cars, automotive content creators love getting together to share knowledge and help each other grow. This has been beneficial from the brand side because we've been able to leverage our influencer partners' relationships to host in-person events, pursue ambitious car builds and more."

It's also a way to connect not just with consumers, but with industry professionals and advocates as well, she notes.

"We have relationships with many trade schools across the country to help build the next generation of mechanics, welders, electricians and more. Longtime WD-40 Brand influencer partner Humble Mechanic is a graduate of Universal Technical Institute, so he often participates in informational sessions and Q&As with trade school students at campuses across the country. We love being able to not only educate future trade professionals about the power of WD-40 Brand solutions but also show them how we are partnered with some of their favorite content creators to bring that 'cool' factor."

Influencer partnerships can also create gateways to new media offerings, expanding a brand's reach and visibility.

"One surprising benefit has been the diversity of content formats and story-


Robert Braun


Ioana Silvana

Manufacturers seek collaborations with partners who use the products, speak the community's language and earn trust through hands-on knowledge. (Photos courtesy Yukon Gear & Axle)

telling styles," Boone from Pennzoil-Quaker State reveals. "From cinematic video shorts to technical how-tos and real-time event coverage, our influencers and ambassadors have expanded how we present our brands."

Still, patience is a virtue. Even with instant exposure, the impacts of working with influencers aren't always felt right away.

"It's a misconception to think that you just have to send them the product and it will immediately drive sales," says KC's Wimenta. "Working with ambassadors is a long-term relationship strategy that you have to continue to maintain as part of a bigger ambassador program."

SHOP SUPPORT

Suppliers agree that automotive influencers have relevance for specialty aftermarket shops on several levels. Most directly, if there are content creators in the area that share a company's values and enthusiasm, it might be worthwhile to set up a meeting to determine if a collaboration makes sense.

"Shops working with ambassadors is a winning strategy," Wimenta believes, "especially if you allow them to integrate you as part of their story and potentially include them in live events at your shop."

In fact, many social media personalities got their start at aftermarket businesses or vehicle service centers.

"We have a few influencer partners that began their automotive careers working at shops and dealerships across the country," Williams says. "This gives them the 'boots on the ground' perspective of what will actually resonate with automotive mechanics that are getting their hands dirty day in and day out, while also understanding the nuances of influencer marketing."

Even if aftermarket shops don't connect with influencers directly, there are often opportunities to build on the relationships forged by the brands they carry.

"While influencers are effective at driving consumer awareness, their impact goes beyond digital engagement. They can also directly support our installers by promoting their services and helping drive customers into bays," Boone says. "Influencers often serve as trusted advocates who spotlight the quality and convenience of professional installations."

For example, NASCAR champ Logano has actively promoted Jiffy Lube on social media and made in-person appearances at locations across the country with his NASCAR Cup car.

"These activations create real excitement and local buzz, motivating fans to visit their nearby service center," Boone states.

Finally, aftermarket shops might consider if they qualify as brand influencers themselves.

"These are the folks turning wrenches every day—installing our products, recommending them to customers and putting them to the test in real-world conditions. Their credibility within the off-road and performance communities carries serious weight, especially when it comes to drivetrain components, where quality and reliability are nonnegotiable," says Perfect. "While consumer-facing influencers help build buzz, our shop-level partners drive trust and conversions at the ground level. Their technical feedback also plays a key role in helping us improve and evolve our products to meet the demands of hardcore users. Many of our key influencers are shop owners." ***TS***



Dual Belt Sander

Scotchman Industries, Philip, South Dakota, presents the DBS-3 Dual Belt Sander. Built in the USA to deliver durability, performance and versatility, the DBS-3 combines heavy-duty construction with thoughtful design, including a fully adjustable stand and dual 3-by-48-inch belts that can be set up in multiple configurations—either both for sanding or one for sanding and the other for buffing. Common uses include deburring, surface preparation and finishing tasks across a wide range of materials.





Low-Profile Magnetic Drill for Metal Fab

Blair Equipment Company, Swartz Creek, Michigan, presents the BFD-KX+ Right Angle Magnetic Drill. Engineered to offer professionals power, precision and accessibility in tight workspaces, the drill features a right-angle, low-profile design, high-torque motor and magnetic base. Small batch built in the USA, it uses Karbon X+ annular cutters capable of handling a range of hole sizes and materials, including steel and other metals. A simple, intuitive control panel allows for easy operation.

Air Compressor

Atlas Automotive Equipment, Greenfield, Indiana, presents its Air Force AF13 Air Compressor. The gas-powered, 30-gallon, heavy-duty compressor is engineered for mobile service professionals seeking performance and durability. Powered by a **Honda** GX390 13-hp, electric-start gas engine, the AF13G features a pneumatic throttle control, vibro-isolator pads for reduced vibration, a built-in charging system and head unloaders to perform in the toughest environments.





MIG Welder

Miller Electric Mfg. LLC, Appleton, Wisconsin, presents the Millermatic 211 PRO MIG welder. Including a USB-enabled software feature designed to grow with welders over time, the 211 PRO is continually upgradable. Highlights include an extended arc time with a 15-foot MIG gun, and a newly adjustable Auto-Set feature that automatically fine-tunes the machine's settings for optimal control and quick setup.

Parking Lifts With New Ramps

Autostacker, Agoura Hills, California, presents its new **Autostacker by BendPak**, now with 48-inch extended approach ramps that make it easy to drive sports cars, exotics, lowriders and other low-slung vehicles onto Autostacker space-saving parking lifts without fear of scraping or bottoming-out. The fully collapsible lift doubles parking capacity in residential and commercial applications with a patented design that eliminates bulky side posts and beams to fit in a typical parking space. Up to 14 lifts can be connected to a single high-speed master power unit.



Extra-Wide Four-Post Lift

BendPak, Agoura Hills, California, presents the BendPak HD-9EWT four-post lift. Designed to easily raise wide-body pickups, cars, off-road vehicles and SUVs higher than standard four-post lifts for additional working space underneath, the lift has a wider footprint to accommodate projects with larger aftermarket tires, wide fenders, extended side mirrors or broader overall dimensions. Multilevel locking positions ensure comfortable working heights, while an electric-hydraulic power system allows techs to quickly stop, start and reverse the lift as needed.





ADAS Testing System

Mustang Advanced Engineering (MAE), Twinsburg, Ohio, presents a new Testing Solution developed specifically for Advanced Driver-Assistance Systems (ADAS). The system enables precise, efficient and affordable testing of critical ADAS functions. It accommodates all-wheel drive vehicles and integrates a compact radar target simulator to test and validate five core ADAS functions—Rear Cross Traffic Alert (RCTA), Automatic Emergency Braking (AEB), Adaptive Cruise Control (ACC), Lane Departure Warning (LDW) and Visual Inspection Mode.

Compact Portable Air Cooler

Cool Boss, Theodore, Alabama, presents its Cool Boss CB-19SL portable evaporative air cooler. Designed as a quick, easy and cost-effective way to cool residential and commercial spaces spanning up to 1,076 square feet, the system utilizes evaporative cooling, blowing chilled air at a volume of 6,840 cubic feet per minute to quickly cool enclosed or open areas via smart airflow and natural water cooling. The compact CB-19SL stands just over 44 inches tall and weighs 40 pounds when empty. The housing is rotomolded as a single component for leakproof operation.



Insulated EV Battery Tools

Cementex, Burlington, New Jersey, presents its Battery Openers and Battery Seal Breaker, designed to provide safer, more efficient solutions for working on hybrid/electric vehicle batteries. Featuring double insulation technology, the specialized tools ensure safety and precision for professionals working with high-voltage battery systems. The battery lid poppers offer a controlled and secure method for opening battery lids and are available in multiple blade sizes. The seal breakers are specifically designed for use on EV batteries.



Oil Drains

K-Tool International, Lakeland, Florida, presents its line of air-pressurized Oil Drains. The metal units include an 18- and a 30-gallon air-pressurized oil drain, both designed for use as mobile waste containers and drain tanks during oil changes. The 18-gallon drain features an 8-inch discharge hose with a shutoff valve, fluid level gauge and air pressure valve. It also offers an adjustable working height ranging from 45 to 70 inches. The 30-gallon drain is equipped with a heavy-duty collection funnel and a 15-3/4-inch-diameter filter screen. ***TS***



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PART ARTISTIC VISION, PART SUPERIOR CRAFTSMANSHIP, SPECIALTY BUILDS ARE ALL ABOUT INNOVATION & IMAGINATION.

Project vehicle creators blend art with craft to showcase new possibilities and fire the imagination. The builds are about approaching familiar processes in new ways and making logical leaps forward.

The exciting thing for the specialty automotive aftermarket is that these advancements can be applied beyond custom vehicle creations. Many industry professionals spend their days blending new ideas into classic vehicles, with remarkable results.

"Innovation has always played a major role in the automotive and powersports worlds," says Mark Beatty, brand director for Red Line Oil. "The advancements just in the last five years or so are unlike anything we have seen before. In our case, customers want thinner oils, increased longevity, better performance—the list goes on."

You never know what you'll find under the hood or behind the dash of the project vehicles, special editions and concepts that pop up at consumer and trade shows, race weekends and automotive rallies. But each one is a step forward in the automotive journey.

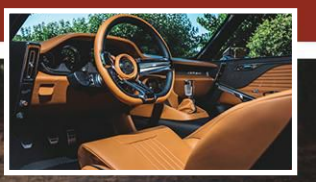
"People say it's hard to have one foot in the past and one foot in the future. For us, it is a necessity," Beatty says. "We'll never forget where we came from and the products that carried us to this point. Our very first product was our 2-Stroke Race Oil and to this day it is a major part of our business. Since that point we have engineered gear oils, transmission fluids, engine oils, suspension fluids, coolants and more as our industry has grown and needs have changed."

THE SHOP's biannual Project Vehicle Sketchbook looks to document the trendsetting builds that help redefine the market and generate new profit centers, building upon the partnerships that are the industry's bedrock.

"For years we have worked hand in hand with builders and race teams to design, test and develop new products. We never stop learning," says Beatty. "That is not only our tradition, but how we do things."

It's the beauty of working with a blank canvas—combining modern advancements and classic values to get to the heart of customizing culture.

1971 ASTON MARTIN DBS



Ringbrothers, the world-renowned custom car builder and parts manufacturer, unveiled its **1971 Aston Martin DBS "OCTAVIA"** at the 2025 The Quail, A Motorsports Gathering. As the shop's first Aston Martin build, the project starts with carbon fiber bodywork that echoes the original silhouette penned by **William Townsend**, while its curves and contours are decidedly more chiseled and pronounced.

The car's track was widened 8 inches at the front and 10 inches at the rear, creating a distinctive, muscular curvature.

Under the clamshell bonnet is a **Ford Performance**-sourced 5.0L engine with a specially engineered 2.65L **Harrop Performance** supercharger. The V-8 produces 805 hp in street tune and is backed by a 6-speed manual gearbox.

Highlights include one-off, three-piece, centerlock wheels designed in collaboration with **Ragle Design** and **HRE Performance Wheels** as an homage to the original DBS, plus custom 14-inch **Brembo** brake rotors, **FOX** RS SV fixed-valve coil-overs, a **Roadster Shop** FAST TRACK chassis, **BASF Glasurit** Double-0 Silver paint with accents finished in Nuclear Olive Green, 3D printed trim and brightwork in stainless steel using additive manufacturing, and **Gentex Corporation** auto-dimming visors.

Additional details include valve covers machined to accept the original Aston Martin emblems, with the tongue-in-cheek addition of an extra "i" to read "Aston Martini." The dipstick handle was machined into the likeness of a martini glass to complement the theme.

1969 CHEVROLET CAMARO



John and **Kim Wargo** of **The Custom Shop** in Flanagan, Illinois, send word on a **1969 Chevrolet Camaro** project nicknamed "**Dstroyr**." Built using a **Roadster Shop** chassis and **Fast Track** 427-ci LSX engine that reaches 700 hp, it features a **Bowler Performance** 4L80E transmission, three-piece custom wheels and custom body mods including tucked bumpers, ground effects spoiler and billet hideaway grille.

Participants include **Auto City Classic** (flush glass), **Toyo** (tires), **Apex Leather** (orange leather on **TMI Products** seats), **Sony** (custom audio), **Dakota Digital** (gauges), **IDIDIT** (steering column), **Scosche** (wiring), **ODYSSEY Battery**, **Ctek**, **Goodmark Industries** (sheet metal installed using **Carworx products**), **ProSpray** (paint), **Griot's Garage** (polish), **XKGLOW** (LED lighting), **Nu-Relics** (power windows), **Ultimate Headers**, **Pypes Performance Exhaust**, **Granatelli Motor Sports**, **Car-Rep Automotive Products**, **Cerakote**, **Prismatic Powders**, **Eddie Motorsports**, **Hawkeye Industries**, **Painless Performance** (wiring), **Fairchild Industries** (weatherstrips) and **Gold Eagle**.

CHEVROLET C10 PICKUP



Velocity adds a classic Chevrolet pickup offering to its lineup with a **1967-72 C10** model equipped with a new LT1 V-8 engine mated to a 10-speed automatic transmission, **Roadster Shop** chassis and other modern upgrades.

Designed to be a turnkey driver, it combines classic looks with a custom suspension and modern luxuries such as **Vintage Air** climate control and a **Focal** sound system.

Highlights include a **Holley** serpentine system, custom-built exhaust with **MagnaFlow** mufflers, independent front suspension, **Ford** 9-inch rear axle with a 3.73 gear ratio, **Baer** six-piston brakes with 14-inch rotors, 245/50R18 **Michelin** Pilot Sport tires, 18-inch **Forgeline** wheels, **FOX Factory** coil-overs, **BASF Glasurit** paint options, **Dakota Digital** gauge cluster, vintage-inspired beltline trim, **J.W. Speaker** LED headlights, **Apple** CarPlay-enabled **Alpine** double-DIN head unit, leather-wrapped **Sparc Industries** steering wheel attached to an **IDIDIT** tilt column, a **Raptor**-lined bed, and custom-machined billet exterior components for the door handles, side mirrors and tailgate handle.

1954 CHEVROLET



"**Georgia**" is a mildly customized **1954 Chevy** built by **The Custom Shop** in Flanagan, Illinois. Project highlights include a **Roadster Shop** chassis, **Prismatic Powders** powder-coating and a 427-ci LSX engine directing power through a **Pypes Performance Exhaust** system.

The car's Root Beer and Vanilla Pearl paint comes from **TCP Global**, while distressed brown **Apex Leather** can be found on seats from **TMI Products**. Custom audio plays through a **Sony** system, with behind-the-scenes power courtesy **Scosche**, **Painless Performance** (wiring) and **ODYSSEY Battery**.

A **Tanks Inc.** fuel tank feeds the **Holley** EFI system, featuring **CVF Racing** pulleys and a **Vintage Air** system. Custom wheels with billet hubcaps and **Atturo Tires** keep it rolling down the road.

Participants include **ABS Power Brake**, **Auto City Classic**, **Bartec USA** (TPMS), **Car-Rep**, **Carworx**, **Cerakote**, **Ctek**, **Dakota Digital** (gauges), **Design Engineering Inc. (DEI)**, **Eddie Motorsports**, **Fairchild Industries**, **Griot's Garage**, **Granatelli Motor Sports**, **Gold Eagle**, **Hawkeye Industries**, **IDIDIT** (column), **K&N Filters**, **Lokar Performance** (shifter), **Luma III**, **North Star Plating**, **Nu-Relics** (power windows), **PST** (driveshaft), **RainGear Wiper Systems**, **Seatbelt Planet**, **TCP Global** and **XKGLOW**.

1973-79 DENTSIDE F-SERIES TRUCKS

Velocity has announced new additions to its lineup of modernized classic F-Series trucks. Known for their concaved body lines, the all-new **1973-79 "Dentside" Ford Pickups** are fully reimagined with redesigned interiors and powertrains to operate as turnkey drivers.

Key features across all models (F-100, F-150, F-250) include a Coyote V-8 engine mated to a 10-speed automatic transmission, all mounted to a **Roadster Shop** chassis, along with modern luxuries like a **Vintage Air** climate control system and a Bluetooth stereo. Velocity also offers a variety of paint and trim options.

Participants on one or more models and/or series include **Dana** (44 front and 60 rear axles), **MagnaFlow** (mufflers), **Wilwood** and **Baer** (brake options), **AMP Research** (retractable running boards), **Dakota Digital** (gauge cluster), **Focal** (sound system), **IDIDIT** (tilt column), **FOX** (coil-overs), **Forgeline** (wheels), **Michelin** (tires), **BASF Glasurit** (paint options), **Raptor Coatings** (bedliner), **Sparc Industries** (steering wheel) and **Alpine** (double-DIN head unit).





1987 BUICK GRAND NATIONAL





Ringbrothers recently unveiled another one of its creations, a custom-built **1987 Buick Grand National** known as "**INVADR**." The twin-turbocharged Buick produces 1,246 hp and 1,000 pound-feet of torque to the rear wheels and was engineered from the ground up.

After 5,000 build hours, the Grand National retains its signature angular design but has added touches that subtly highlight the extensive customizations. Originally plastic, both the front and rear bumpers were fabricated from stainless steel and feature machined aluminum bumper guards.

The angle of the front fenders was adjusted slightly and now seamlessly integrates with the new bumpers, while the rocker panels have been extended. Covering the body is a custom **BASF Glasurit** Waterborne paint mix called Dark Vader Gray.

Participants include **Duttweiler Performance** (3.8L V-6), **Precision Turbo & Engine** (turbochargers), **Bowler Transmissions** (**TREMEC** T-56 Magnum 6-speed), **Roadster Shop** (chassis, four-link rear suspension), **Penske** (three-way adjustable shocks), **Brembo** (brakes with six-piston calipers), **HRE Performance Wheels** (528 series wheels), **Michelin** (Pilot Sport Cup 2 tires), **Upholstery Unlimited** (hand-fabricated seats, dashboard, center console), **Dakota Digital** (custom instrumentation), **Gentex** and **Dynamat**.

VENOM F5 HYPERCAR





Hennessey Special Vehicles, the Texas-based manufacturer of America's Hypercar, has revealed the **Venom F5 Revolution LF**—a 1-of-1 customer commission created by the company's new bespoke customer commission division, "Maverick."

Featuring an all-new carbon fiber tub, the project pairs Hennessey's latest Evolution package with an open-top F5 in track-spec Revolution configuration.

Appearance enhancements on the Venom F5 include tinting the carbon fiber Coco Brown to accent the River Sand Metallic paint, and a wealth of aerodynamic revisions including a new front splitter, reshaped dive planes, resculpted fender louvers, a new rear deck with integrated lip spoiler and a significantly taller rear wing.

As fast as it looks, the LF pairs Hennessey's new 6.6L twin-turbo V-8 Fury engine that reaches 2,031 bhp with a 6-speed gated manual transmission. Meanwhile, inside are machined aluminum pedals completed with laser-etched Hennessey logos and moved to a new floor-mounted configuration, a new center console showcasing the H-pattern gated shifter milled from solid aluminum, side-by-side air vents with a key holster immediately below, and unique switch, toggle and rotary controllers.



2024 RAM 1500 LARAMIE



The **Küat Racks** team sends info on a **2024 Ram 1500 Laramie** build named **"CHAOS"** created by **RDM Builds**. Powered by the 5.7L eTorque 4x4 drivetrain, the truck is a daily driver that's also used for search and rescue operations and as a show vehicle. See it on display outside of Central Hall at the **2025 SEMA Show**, spot V116.

The pickup showcases upper and lower control arms from RDM Builds plus Küat accessories including the IBEX full bed rack with MOLLE panels, handles, bottle opener, third brake light and ski rack.

A **Dropracks** roof rack is attached to the Küat rack, as is one of three **Carbon Offroad** winches.

Participants include **EGR USA** (Rolltrac electric retractable bed cover), **AlphaRex** (NOVA headlights), **Hammerhead Armor** (front and rear bumpers), **Katzkin** (leather seats in red and black with American flag perforation and black saddle embossed with western scroll), **Belltech** (8-inch adjustable suspension powder-coated in red candy), **Air Design USA** (off-road body kit), **R1 Concepts** (slotted and drilled rotors), **Motion Marine Customs** (running board covers), **XKGlow** (XKAlpha rock lights), **Hercules Tires** (37x13.50x22 tires) and **Diode Dynamics** (SS2 and SS5 lighting).

1970 CHEVROLET C20







Restomod builder **ICON 4x4** debuts the **"Derelict" 1970 Chevrolet C20**. The one-of-a-kind pickup fuses vintage charm with cutting-edge modernity. Built atop a brand-new **Chevrolet Silverado 4x4**, the Derelict C20 appears to be an authentic throwback with period-correct styling. However, when peering inside the vintage shell, clients are treated to a world of modern refinement including a custom dash, split bucket seats upholstered in **Connolly** leather and wool plaid, and a wide range of modern aftermarket accessories and performance upgrades that make it suitable for today's driving conditions.

2024 TOYOTA TACOMA SPORT

Victor Casillas, sales and marketing manager for **T-Rex Truck Product**s, reports the company built its **2024 Toyota Tacoma Sport** project vehicle to showcase two of its hottest brands—**ZROADZ Offroad** and **T-Rex Grilles**.

The build features a full lineup of ZROADZ products including ditch light brackets with LED lights, a roof rack, TRAILX.R1 Series rock slider steps and an ACCESS overland rack with three ACCESS gates. Added style comes from a TRD Pro-inspired T-Rex Laser Torch aluminum LED grille in gloss black, paired with a 20-inch LED Bar.

All products were designed and built in-house at the T-Rex facility in Corona, California.



1986 PORSCHE TARGA







Galpin Motors debuted its first U.S.-built **bb-Auto** commission, a faith-inspired **1986 Porsche Targa** known as **bb-001 "Streets of Gold,"** during **Monterey Car Week**. Commissioned by **Alexander Everest**, founder of **Christ and Cars** and a health care executive, the build reflects biblical imagery and features signature bb-Auto front and rear styling—every trim piece, emblem and accent was refinished to harmonize with the gold theme.

The dash cluster features mother of pearl-backed gauges framed by 24-karat gold bezels, while bespoke leather **Sparco** seats are complemented by custom leather and Alcantara trim covering the pillars, windshield header and rear quarters.

The shift knob is carved from acacia wood (believed to be the same type of wood used to build Noah's ark), and a custom-built **Morel** Elate Carbon sound system is powered by **Mosconi** amplifiers and paired with **Focal** subwoofers.

Under the rear decklid, the precisely engineered 4.0L **Ed Pink Racing** engine produces a naturally aspirated 400 hp. Dual oil coolers ensure consistent performance, while Porsche Active Suspension Management delivers a refined-yet-responsive ride. Stopping power is provided by **Brembo** brakes, and grip comes from **Michelin** Cup 2 tires mounted on custom 18-inch HRE Performance Wheels featuring bespoke bb-Auto center caps.

Participants include master technicians and restoration specialists at **Porsche Santa Clarita** and the custom fabrication and design team at **Galpin Auto Sports**.

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SUBARU CROSSTREK



Ron Burnett, director of marketing communications for **KICKER**, sends info on the audio component company's recent **Subaru Crosstrek** project build. The in-house installation team of **Tim Smith** (manager), **Josh Fletcher** and **Chase Alexander** blended an overlanding stance with rally-inspired pieces and then raised the bar on interior appearance and comfort.

The interior highlights a premium audio system featuring new LX-Series power amplifiers and three 8-inch KICKER SoloX L7X subwoofers in the cargo area. Participants include **XS Power**, **Wheel Pros**, **Nitto Tires**, **HushMat**, **Rough Country**, **K&N Filters**, **NC Carpet Binding** and **Crawford Performance**.

1969 FORD F-100

Ford Vehicle Personalization showcased several custom project vehicles at the 2024 SEMA Show in the **Ford Performance Parts** display, including the **Solomon Lunger Custom 1969 F-100 "Clyde"** build.

Designed to showcase "the pinnacle of classic form and function, making it a showstopper wherever the road takes it," the classic Ford F-100 pickup features the latest advanced technology, starting with a high-performance 5.2L V-8 Ford Performance Raptor R Crate Engine paired with a 3.8L **Whipple** supercharger with a total projected power output of more than 900 hp and more than 700 pound-feet of torque.

The truck sits on a **Porterbuilt** Stage 2 coil-over chassis from **Fat Fender Garage** with exposed carbon fiber body panels, forged custom wheels and a luxury leather interior.



2018 FERRARI 488 GTB



Based just outside of Miami, **Unlimited Wraps** specializes in premium protection, detailing and wrapping services for automobiles, watercrafts and architectural projects. The shop was recently tapped for a full color change wrap on a **2018 Ferrari 488 GTB** that transformed an ordinary OEM silver paint finish into a flaming hot stunner.

The installation team turned up the heat with Satin Carmine Red on the body and door jambs, while gloss black was installed on the roof. Both colors are part of the Supreme Wrapping Film color-change film line from **Avery Dennison**.

JEEP WRANGLER JL PICKUP

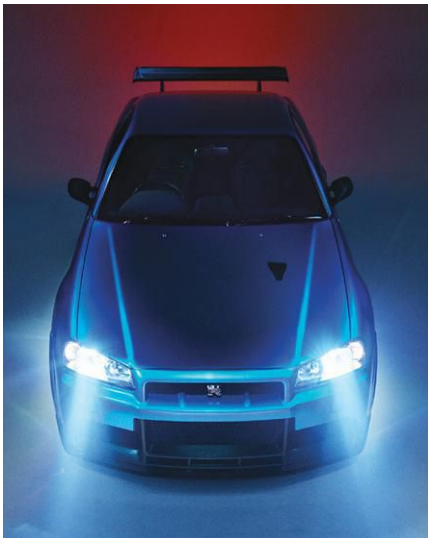


SoFlo Customs is offering just 27 models of its modified **Jeep Wrangler**-based pickup. The **JTT** is a custom single-cab JL truck that packs powerful performance and stands out with its retro design, paying homage to the **Jeep Scrambler** of yesteryear.

The base of the donor four-door Wrangler remains intact, providing a desired wide footprint, while the two rear seats and trunk house an almost 5-foot bed with a 2-by-2-foot hidden storage compartment and an all-aluminum chase rack. Modern technology includes a full-service infotainment center with **Apple** CarPlay, back-up camera, Bluetooth, adaptive cruise control and an aux switch pod for complete exterior light control.

Options include exterior paint (high-gloss and off-road armor), interior color/pattern and rim/tire combination. SoFlo Customs can build the JTT using a turbocharged diesel that churns out almost 500 pound-feet of torque, or one of two Hemi V-8s—the 485-hp 392 and the 717-hp supercharged **Hellcat**.

NISSAN R34 GT-R SKYLINE





Built By Legends presents a striking blue **Nissan R34 GT-R Skyline** built for everyday driving in the United States. Implementing modern performance and power while staying true to the legendary Japanese sports car's original design and driving experience, the urban street fighter is prized for its nimble handling, balanced power and lightweight engineering.

The R34 GT-R is outfitted with a 650-hp MINE'S MB7 engine built on a 24U N1 engine block mated to a 6-speed **Getrag** transmission.

Built By Legends implements a comprehensive 400-point spot welding program to strengthen and stiffen the chassis. The company also completely refreshes each suspension component, replacing all bushings and bearings.

A race-ready front and rear braking system from **AP Racing** is found behind the period-correct custom **Rays** 21A 10.5Jx18 wheels wearing high-performance **Bridgestone** Potenza 71RS tires in 265/35R18 fitment. The exterior Bayside Blue color is complemented by a luxurious black-and-navy two-tone **Ultrasuede** interior.





1965 FORD MUSTANG







Matt Memmer, director of engineering and program management for transmission builder **TREMEC**, headed up a secret barn-find build of a **1965 Ford Mustang** as a surprise for his father, **Roger**, who originally received the car from his father, **Gerald**.

Bonafide Customs in Napoleon, Ohio, stripped the Mustang to an empty shell and then created a vision with **Mike Kidd**, TREMEC aftermarket business unit manager. The powertrain is a **Ford Performance Parts** 7.3L Godzilla Power Pack crate engine matched to a TREMEC TKX 5-speed transmission. Bonafide invested more than 1,000 man-hours into the custom metalwork, paint and bodywork, as well as fitting the chassis components, assembling the interior and addressing all the details.

The Mustang was unveiled earlier this year at **Detroit Autorama**, alongside a Gen-2 **1999 Ford F-150 Lightning** built by **Livernois Performance** in Dearborn Heights, Michigan, as proof-of-concept for the TREMEC TR-9070 7-speed dual-clutch transmission (DCT) that's new to the aftermarket.

1994 TOYOTA SUPRA (MK4)

Revo Reeves of **Stitchcraft Interiors** provides an update on a **1994 Toyota Supra (Mk4)** build headed to the Hot Rod Alley section of the **2025 SEMA Show**. Designed and built in-house, the project will serve as a launchpad for the company's new Mk4 Supra interior product line.

"This project represents more than just a build—it's a tribute to our legacy," says Reeves. "Stitchcraft Interiors was responsible for the interiors of the iconic hero cars in **'The Fast and the Furious,'** including the original Mk4 Supra. Now, we're bringing that heritage full circle."

The Supra MK4 features a fully built 2JZ-GTE engine, full interior redesign, **Extreme Dimensions** widebody kit, custom paint, **Fast Brakes** big brake kit, **REVO Forged** wheels, roll bar, **TOMEI** exhaust, carbon fiber accents, air suspension, **Hifonics** audio system, custom console, under-glow lighting, laser-etched panels and one-off details throughout.

Participants include **BFGoodrich** (tires), **Seibon Carbon**, **Titan Motorsports**, **IMPACT Interior Products**, **Driftmotion**, **Whiteline Performance** and more.



1970 CHEVROLET CHEVELLE





Blazin Rodz, a new team of young builders pushing the boundaries of innovation in the custom car world, presented its **1970 Chevrolet Chevelle** dubbed **"Doughboy"** at the **2024 SEMA Show**. Fusing the power of a drag car with the sleek aesthetic of a GT Cup car and the luxury of an exotic supercar, the build is powered by a twin-turbo Chevrolet-based big-block delivering more than 2,800 hp and constructed utilizing multiple 3D-based design and printing techniques.

A series capturing the construction of "Doughboy" is available on **YouTube** and **Roku TV**.

Participants include **ACE Racing Engines** (540-ci **Brodix** big-block with forced induction from twin **Precision Turbo & Engine** 8385 Next-Gen turbos), **Aeromotive** (dual brushless fuel pumps), **Art Morrison Enterprises** (chassis), **JRi Shocks** (hydraulic coil-overs), **Wilwood** (SX6R six-piston brake calipers finished in 24-karat gold), **Kompression Wheels** (custom 20x13 front and 20x15 rear billet three-piece wheels), **Michelin** (Sport Cup 2 tires), **Porsche** (factory Night Blue Metallic paint), **MoTeC** (engine management, display unit), **Audi** (R8 steering wheel), **Avant-Garde Design** (interior), **Deutsch Autosports** (connectors) and **Lifeline USA** (fire suppression system).



ARMORED TOYOTA LAND CRUISER 250



INKAS Armored is enhancing the long-awaited **Toyota Land Cruiser 250**—already built to endure extreme conditions and vigorous terrain—with ballistic and blast protection for those who demand the highest levels of security, including high-risk individuals, law enforcement, corporate clients and governments.

Upfitted to withstand threats without compromising performance or comfort, the armored Land Cruiser 250 offers ballistic protection surrounding the vehicle—creating a capsule to withstand high-powered rifle fire and explosions to the walls, floor or roof—as well as multilayer ballistic glass in the windows and windshield that maintain a clear view outside, upgraded suspension and reinforced chassis to mitigate the additional weight while maintaining superior off-road capabilities, a run-flat system for continued mobility with a punctured or even absent tire, and an armored overlap system that fully encloses and extends the armor around the doors, ensuring vulnerable areas are bulletproof.

PORSCHE 911 (964)

Theon Design has revealed its first **Porsche 911 (964)** build commissioned by a U.S. customer. The 4.0L F1-grade carbon-bodied coupe is finished in Midnight Blue metallic paint and designed to blend cutting-edge British motorsport engineering DNA and technology with handcrafted luxury and OEM-grade design methodology.

Based on a 964 donor, the car was stripped back to a bare shell and seam welded for torsional rigidity and greater strength. The revamped platform was then fitted with an all-new F1-grade carbon and Kevlar body styled by designer **Hawley** in CAD.

The flat-six power is sent to the rear wheels via a genuine, original 993 RS 6-speed gearbox. A **Wavetrac** Torsen limited-slip differential combines with the gearbox to deliver traction and control. Braking performance is transformed with a full 993 RS brake package.

Highlights include 17-inch **Fuchs** wheels, **Michelin** Pilot Sport 2 tires, five-stage **TracTive Suspension** Active Controlled Electronics (ACE) damping system, the company's Sports Touring front seat option with enhanced bolsters, aesthetic carbon fiber for the interior sill covers, **Pioneer** P99RS head unit and a **Hertz** and **Audison** speaker setup.







1970 DODGE CHARGER

A new team of young builders from **Blazin Rodz** presented the carbon fiber **1970 Dodge Charger "Sangria"** project in the **Hemmings** booth at the **2024 SEMA Show**. Showcasing the first Direct Connection 1500 Hemi crate engine from DSR Performance, the entire build was documented as part of Season 1 of the show, **"Blazin Rodz: The Series"** that aired on YouTube and Roku TV.

"Sangria's" body is finished with Wild Cherry Kandy from **House of Kolor**, highlighting the perfectly aligned, autoclave-produced carbon fiber weaves. The body is mated to a **Roadster Shop** Fast Track chassis.

The 426-ci GEN 3 Hemi includes a Stage 2 3.0L Gen 5 **Whipple** supercharger mounted on top, with power routed through an 8-speed **Pure Drivetrain Solutions** Stage 2 ZF 8HP transmission. The Charger utilizes **Brembo** carbon-ceramic brakes to bring the 1,500 hp to a rapid halt, riding on **Kompression** custom wheels and **Pirelli** tires.

The interior was finished by the experts at **Avant Garde Design**, who utilized **Sparco** bucket seats and **Vintage Air** performance air conditioning to keep "Sangria's" future owner as comfortable as a modern luxury car. A complete sound system powered by a **Pioneer** head unit feeding a **TRU Technology** amplifier and **Morel** HiFi speakers completes the experience.







SUPERCHARGED CHEVY SUVS







Hennessey, the Texas-based hypercar manufacturer and high-performance vehicle creator, has announced new 625-hp versions of **2025 Chevrolet Tahoe** and **Suburban** SUVs. The H600 performance package features a host of mechanical and aesthetic enhancements, ranging from a new **Magnuson** supercharger, **Firestone** Firehawk Pursuit tires, sport-touring exhaust and **Brembo** brakes to a menacing lowered ride height and distinctive Hennessey wheels.

Upgrades to the 6.2L V-8 Tahoe and Suburban see the Texan team increase the power to 625 bhp and 633 pound-feet of torque at 4,200 rpm. Distinctive visual enhancements include 24-inch gloss black lightweight sport wheels, a lowered stance and Hennessey badging inside and out.

GT2 COMPETITOR

Ginetta has unveiled its new **GT2 Competitor**, created to bring the confidence, performance and safety of the company's bespoke race cars to the world's most iconic circuits. Capable of competing under SRO GT2 regulations, the Ginetta GT2 is a purposefully designed and built racing machine. Powered by a Ginetta-manufactured, supercharged 6.3L V-8, it's capable of up to 800 bhp and benefits from upgrades including a billet aluminum block and billet dry sump, both machined in-house.

Full carbon fiber bodywork assists in keeping the vehicle's target weight down, while top-tier components include an **XTrac** transaxle LMP gearbox with custom ratios, **SACHS** triple-plate clutch, **Ohlins** TTX40 double wishbone suspension, **Alcon** GT endurance brake discs and calipers, a full **MoTeC** electronic suite and **Pirelli** racing slicks.



LAMBORGHINI WRAP PROJECTS





Avery Dennison Graphics Solutions sends information on a pair of recent Lamborghini wrap projects. The first is a **2024 Lamborghini Huracan Tecnica** wrapped by Wrap Ohio owner/installer **Alex Simmons**.

Starting with the OEM blue paint finish, Simmons created an eye-popping street statement with vibrant rocker panels and pinstripes using Avery Dennison Supreme Wrapping Film colors Obsidian Black Gloss for the top and lower rocker panels, and Gloss Carmine Red and Gloss White for the custom pinstripes. It was then finished with Avery Dennison Supreme Defense Gloss paint protection film.

The second project is a **2017 Lamborghini Aventador** performed by **Carbon Wraps** installers **Steve** and **Jen Carney**. Based in Orlando and opened in 2009, the shop specializes in luxury sedans, exotic automobiles and race and drift cars.

Both certified Avery Dennison wrap installers (CWI), the couple worked together to revamp the Aventador with a full color wrap using Avery Dennison Supreme Wrapping Film Gloss Light Blue on the panels and engine strut braces, and Avery Dennison Supreme Wrapping Film Satin Black on the roof, mirrors and side skirts.

1978 FORD F-250 HIGHBOY DERELICT BADLANDS TRUCK



Fat Fender Garage debuted a reimagined **1978 Ford F-250 Highboy Derelict Badlands** truck at the **2024 SEMA Show**. The Candy Apple red pickup, commissioned by collectors **Avery Sly** and **Harrison Woodruff**, retains its original exterior patina while paying tribute to its origins as a rugged Southwest ranch vehicle.

Tastefully blending classic designs with modern innovation, the custom Fat Fender Garage F-250 Highboy embodies the spirit and heritage of painted deserts with a rich, bright interior that captures the rustic colors of Arizona. It includes a Southwest-inspired cabin with a period-authentic dashboard discreetly upgraded with modern mechanical upgrades.

Highlights of the imposing pickup include **Method wheels**, **Toyo** A/T III tires, Ultra Blue square-weave carpet and saddle brown distressed Italian leather from **Apex Leather**'s Infinity Series, **Pendleton** Grand Canyon fabric inserts, **SoundShield** membrane, Gen-5 **Vintage Air** A/C, custom burl walnut wood inserts, billet aluminum window cranks and CNC-cut door and kick panels, rebuilt **Lincoln** 460 7.5L V-8 engines with upgrades from **Danny's Vintage Fords** in Phoenix, custom exhaust system, **Boyd** fuel cell, **Edelbrock** EFI, front and rear **Dana** 60 axles from a 2022 Super Duty truck, **FOX** performance shocks, **Battle Born Brakes**, **Red Head** steering gears and an **American Auto Wire** system.

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MORGAN PLUS FOUR



The **Morgan Plus Four** arrived in the U.S. this summer. Hand-built at the company's historic Pickersleigh Road factory in Malvern, U.K., each Plus Four combines traditional coachbuilding techniques with the latest engineering innovations.

Underneath its aluminum body panels and ash frame sits the CX-Generation bonded-aluminum platform, double wishbone suspension, and a 2.0L **BMW**-sourced engine paired with an 8-speed automatic transmission. Highlights include **Sennheiser** in-car audio technology that delivers a rich, precise listening experience.

"The arrival of Plus Four in the United States is the result of years of patient development and close collaboration with our partners. Its debut at Monterey Car Week was a proud moment for everyone at Morgan, and the perfect stage to reintroduce a model that embodies our blend of craftsmanship, engineering integrity and driving joy. We are excited to share it with new customers and long-standing enthusiasts across the country," says **Matthew Hole**, managing director, **Morgan Motor Company**.

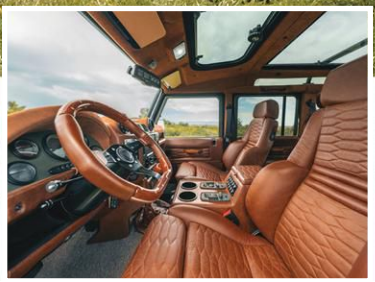
LAND ROVER STATION WAGON

"Project Wilder" is a handcrafted California **Land Rover Station Wagon** by **ECD Automotive Design** with subtle styling cues from original series Land Rovers and later Land Rover Defenders. The 700-plus-hp thrill ride is the company's most powerful off-road build to date.

Highlights of the Eastnor Green SUV with Nara Bronze accents include a **GM** supercharged V-8 engine, **Magnum** T56 6-speed transmission, **Brembo** high-performance brakes, **Borla** Sport Dual Plus exhaust, **Project Kahn** 20-inch Mondial Retro wheels painted in Nara Bronze, **BFGoodrich** all-terrain tires, **RECARO** seats, a Kallista wooden wheel from **Nardi Steering Wheel** and **Focal** audio components.







ROUSH PERFORMANCE 2025 F-150

Roush Performance presents its latest off-road truck, based on the **2025 Ford F-150**. Fusing performance upgrades with iconic styling, the pickup offers improved capability and premium build quality while maintaining OEM safety standards.

Roush has outfitted the truck's exterior with several off-road and performance-focused upgrades. Airflow improvements come from the high-flow front Roush grille and the hood's functional heat extractors. Wide, paint-matched fender flares provide additional clearance and an imposing stance. An integrated amber LED light bar in the front bumper, pillar lights and rear flood lights by **Diode Dynamics** can be optioned.

Roush Performance's coil-over suspension system provides a 2-inch level to the truck and features custom-tuned spring and shock rates. The 2025 Roush F-150 grips the ground with 33-inch **General Tire** Grabber A/TX All-Terrain tires wrapped around satin black 20-inch Roush Off-Road Wheels. Roush's signature Active Exhaust System, paired with laser-etched stainless steel dual exhaust tips on the STX and XLT models, is also part of the package.







The 2025 Roush F-150 can be built on Ford STX, XLT or Lariat trim levels, according to officials. Exterior color options are scaled by trim and all builds start with a black appearance package as a foundation to complement the rugged off-road styling of the high-performance truck.

SHELBY SUPER SNAKE-R

Shelby American, a wholly owned subsidiary of **Carroll Shelby International Inc.**, introduces the **Shelby Super Snake-R**, a limited edition sports car based on the **Ford Mustang Dark Horse**. Features include a sophisticated coil-over independent suspension, widened stance, larger **Michelin** tires, aerodynamic carbon fiber parts, cooling upgrades, a bold optional graphics package and other enhancements.



Supercharging the 5.0L V-8 produces 850-plus hp, powering an available **TREMEC** TR-3160 manual 6-speed or 10-speed automatic transmission. Performance is strengthened with fully adjustable coil-overs, metal spherical bearings and a harness strut bar that ties together the rear shock towers. The company liberally used carbon fiber and lightweight magnesium alloy in its construction.

ARMORED CADILLAC ESCALADE VIP LIMOUSINE



Miami Armored integrated a fully optimized **Starlink** system inside its executive armored **Cadillac Escalade "Chairman"** limousine. The advanced internet system is designed to deliver ultrafast connectivity in virtually any environment.

The limo offers elite ballistic protection without compromising on comfort or style. The vehicle features advanced armoring materials that provide multilayered ballistic resistance, safeguarding passengers against high-caliber threats. Reinforced bulletproof glass, armored doors and blast-resistant undercarriage protection ensure maximum security in high-risk environments.

Lined with leather accents, the interior seats deliver extensive comfort that is fully reclinable. The bold cabin also comes equipped with a large TV screen embedded with premium audio and touchscreen interfaces to control interior adjustments.

The limo comes equipped with run-flat systems in the tires, multilayered ballistic glass for the windows and windshield, and additional available customization options such as strobe lights, night vision optics and other tactical features.

GUNTHER WERKS 911 GWX

Vehicle remastering specialist **Gunther Werks** will make just three **GWX** models, based on the **Porsche 911** platform. The invite-only program builds on the company's current platforms, adding new performance levels and technological advancements.

A second generation GWX 4.0L flat-six produces 440 hp and 320 pound-feet of torque, utilizing advanced sliding throttle body plates. A new drive by wire throttle system was developed to support the technology.

Optimized aerodynamics include GWX carbon fiber vented front fenders, rear quarter panels, flared side skirts, front hood, Race Edition front bumper, vented rear bumper with diffuser and frame-mounted rear wing with decklid ram air scoop. Developed in-house, the specialized Candy Purple hue is exclusive to the GWX and accented by silver pinstriping and an exposed herringbone carbon fiber weave down the center of the hood, roof and tail.









DEFENDER 110 EV





ECD Automotive Design, a builder of bespoke luxury Land Rover Defenders and classic British icons, unveils **"Project Powder Keg."** Based on the iconic **Land Rover Defender 110** platform, it's an all-electric creation that reimagines the spirit of overlanding for the modern age—combining vintage off-road prowess with cutting-edge EV performance.

Cloaked in a muted eggshell Bonatti Gray and accented in Shadow Black, the build includes a six-point external roll cage, metal A-bar bumper fitted with a **Warn Industries** winch, multiple LED spotlights front and rear, handcrafted upholstery in a rich Sumac tone, an **Exmoor Trim** Evander steering wheel, electric-set gauges, **Recaro** Orthoped seats, billet aluminum accents, a modern infotainment system and premium finishes throughout.

The ECD Electric Direct EV drivetrain delivers more than 300 hp and 368 pound-feet of torque, with an 84 kWh battery pack and a range of up to 200 miles. Drivers can toggle between Sport, Eco and Normal driving modes.

EV CLASSIC FORD BRONCO

Vintage vehicle rebuilder **ICON 4x4**, in chorus with the pioneering team at **Moment Motor Company**, presents its first-ever **ICON EV Bronco**. Featuring OEM-level integration and engineering, the build is designed to provide all of the character and feel of a classic Ford Bronco blended with a powerful electric drivetrain and numerous design changes.

Sporting more than 500 hp and greater than 440 pound-feet of torque, the Bronco's drive is delivered to the ground via a full-time all-wheel drive system capable of 0-60 mph in 4.5 seconds. Three different driving modes (Eco, Normal and Sport) add an element of customization depending on driver preference and style.

Highlights include **Brembo** brakes; fully electro-hydraulic power steering; adjustable **Reiger Suspension**; **Currie** axles with rear LSD; **ARB USA** locking front differentials; 400V architecture; onboard 6.6kW Level 2 charger; vehicle control unit (VCU) with completely integrated battery management, power management and vehicle management; **Apple** CarPlay and **Android** Auto compatibility; "Blue Star" interior; multiple top and door configurations; **AMP Research** power steps; and electric heat and air conditioning.







ELECTRIFIED PORSCHE 911 (964)



EV converter **Everrati** presents **"The Lighthouse Commission,"** a one-of-a-kind, zero-emissions **Porsche 911 (964)**. Co-created with the vehicle's owner, the build began life as a 1990 lefthand-drive 911 964 Widebody Coupe.

Featuring an entirely reengineered battery unit, the 911 EV delivers 500 hp and a 0-60-mph time of under 3.7 seconds with the company's proprietary Performance Package, which also allows for around 200 miles of range, while a regenerative braking system further improves battery life.

"Lighthouse Commission" benefits from the implementation of new carbon fiber components, an adaptive suspension system, upgraded LED headlights, a modern Porsche PCCM entertainment unit, **Fuchs**-style wheels, custom dials, and a distinctive Nardo Grey color and interior finishes.

1967 ASTON MARTIN DB6

British EV technology company **Electrogenic** has revealed its latest bespoke project: a **1967 Aston Martin DB6** transformed to electric drive for comedian **Jimmy Carr**. The stylish British classic was converted through a process in which nothing was cut, drilled or welded on the original car, making it entirely reversible.

The elongated DB6 conversion incorporates 60kWh of premium OEM batteries, fitted beneath the hood and above the rear axle where the fuel tank originally sat. The neatly packaged battery packs power a motor delivering 200 bhp (150kW) of performance, driving through a bespoke 2.9:1 fixed ratio reduction gearbox.

Highlights include fully adjustable regenerative braking, available 280 bhp (210kW) upgraded motor and corresponding sports suspension kit, Eco and Sport driving modes, one-pedal driving and more than 150 miles of real-world range in mixed driving conditions.



LUCID GRAVITY X CONCEPT

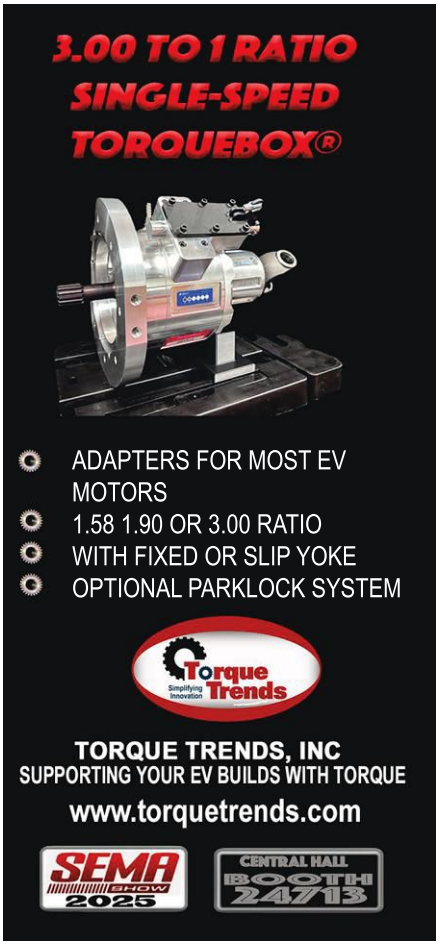




EV maker **Lucid Group Inc**. presents the **Lucid Gravity X (Gravity Cross)** concept, designed to combine advanced on- and off-road readiness. Using a **Lucid Gravity Grand Touring** model as its foundation, the overlanding SUV features redesigned front and rear fascias, a widened track, skid plates, a lifted ride height and custom wheels with all-terrain tires.

Inspired by iconic California road trip locations and the state's diverse environments, the project includes bold orange accents contrasting the specially developed Astral Drift rugged satin paint finish and Lucid's darkened Stealth Appearance. The front and rear fascias are finished in brushed metal, and topography maps of Big Sur and Death Valley are etched onto the recesses on the hood.

Unique sill plates and rocker trim featuring the coordinates of Pebble Beach mark the concept's debut at this summer's 74th edition of the **Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance**. ***TS***



PERFORMANCE

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2 for 1



Image credit: ThorstenSchmitt - stock.adobe.com

Classic styling, modern amenities drive today's Pro-Touring market.

BY JOHN CAROLLO



Porsche Santa Clarita debuted a Manthey Racing-equipped 2007 Porsche 997 GT3 MR that blends the analog driving experience of the Porsche 997 with modern racing technology in true Pro-Touring fashion. (Photo courtesy Galpin Motors)

The Pro-Touring formula is easy to initiate, but somewhat more difficult to perfect: Take a beloved classic vehicle and add modern amenities for a project greater than the sum of its parts.

Allowing builders added freedom while presenting unique challenges, the Pro-Touring market demands a mix of technical skill and artistic creativity. Maybe that's why top restomod shops have customer waiting lists stretching out months or even years.

Suppliers have a unique perspective on what it takes to succeed in the Pro-Touring market. Here they offer insights on common misconceptions shops may face, hot new products to keep in mind and ways to connect with excited drivers hoping to combine the best of two worlds.

A PLACE FOR PRO-TOURING

If your customers are interested in performance—at the track or on the street—then there's a place for them in the Pro-Touring market.

"One of the biggest misconceptions is that Pro-Touring parts are only for extreme, high-budget builds," says Rich Barsamian, vice president, sales and marketing at Advanced Clutch Technology. "In reality, many enthusiasts are looking for upgrades that deliver both street drivability and track-ready performance. Shops sometimes underestimate how much today's Pro-Touring products have evolved—they're not just 'race-only' components, but rather engineered solutions that balance durability, comfort and performance for real-world use."

Their appeal reaches vehicles of all shapes and sizes, says Mike Santa Cruz, sales director for aFe POWER.

"Pro-Touring has come a long way in its 45-plus years. It's not just for first-gen Camaros and early C10 pickup trucks; it has evolved from classic American muscle cars to later-model cars and trucks, European sports cars and Japanese sport compact cars," he says. "Mid- to late-'90s Corvettes and Mustangs have become very popular in the Pro-Touring segment because they are affordable and competitive. Installing


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PRO-TOURING PRODUCTS

■ **HOT PRODUCTS:**
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■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Popular for GM LS/LT platforms and Ford Mustangs; high torque capacity while retaining street-able pedal effort; modular, rebuildable design; forged aluminum pressure plate cover; organic or cerametallic six-puck disc options.

Advanced Clutch Technology
Rich Barsamian
Vice President, Sales & Marketing

■ **HOT PRODUCT:**
aFe Control PFADT Featherlight Adjustable Coil-Over Suspension System
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Elevates responsiveness and cornering grip for Corvettes; BOA (ball on axis) upper mount is a completely sealed design allowing full suspension articulation; durable, quiet mounting solution without travel loss; 24-way damping adjustment.

aFe POWER
Mike Santa Cruz
Sales Director

■ **HOT PRODUCT:**
CrateMuffler for Chevrolet LS 6.2L V-8 Engines
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Recently released 3-inch-diameter muffler eliminates or drastically reduces drone/resonance on cataloged applications; looks like and has the installation flexibility of a universal muffler but sounds like an application-specific muffler.

Borla Performance Industries
Tim Sayers
Muffler Development Manager

■ **HOT PRODUCTS:**
Direct Bolt-In Columns & Rack and Pinion Cradle Kits
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Available for 1967-69 and 1970-81 Chevy Camaros; mounting tabs on the column tube accept the OE dash mount; the columns are the correct length and use available universal joints and shafts to connect to a steering box or rack and pinion; made in the USA.

Flaming River Industries
Brett Domin
Sales Manager

■ **HOT PRODUCT:**
WaterWetter SuperCoolant
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Reduces the surface tension of the fluid in the cooling system, whether it is 50/50, straight water or some other ratio to improve the coolant/water's ability to extract more heat; reduces hot spots and operating temps; improves heat transfer to the radiator.

Red Line Oil
Kyle Neal
Director, Specialty Chemicals/ Lubricants

■ **HOT PRODUCT:**
MOMENTUM Chassis for 1968-72 GM A-Bodies
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Clean slate design approach allows for selection of suspension pickup points for improved geometry; upgrade to rack-and-pinion improves steering feedback and control; maintains OE track width; support for 1964-67 models coming soon.

Ridetech
Blane Burnett
Marketing Manager

■ **HOT PRODUCTS:** 97000 Series Adjustable Upper Control Arms
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Allow for large camber and caster changes while also incorporating 1/2-inch-longer ball joint studs to help modify the inadequate OE suspension geometry; forged ball joint housings have substantial "swoop" for increased clearance.

Specialty Products Company
Tom Przedpelski
Technical Specialist/Alignment Trainer

■ **HOT PRODUCTS:**
Forged Aluminum ProSpindles
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Include a captured unit bearing; direct replacement/fitment to the company's pin-type ProSpindle; easily used with ABS systems through the VR-style ABS port and included wiring loom; can be used with oversized 18-inch wheels and sticky tires.

Wilwood Disc Brakes
Michael Hamrick
Events & Promotions Manager



Many enthusiasts are looking for upgrades that deliver both street drivability and track-ready performance. (Photo courtesy Advanced Clutch Technology)

Pro-Touring products is limited only to your capabilities."

That's not to say that there isn't a price to pay for quality builds done right, however.

"Many customers underestimate the true cost of Pro-Touring projects," says Blane Burnett, marketing manager for Ridetech. "Unlike newer cars, muscle cars don't have standard 'book times,' so shops charge hourly. The hours required often depend on the car's condition, along with what tasks need to be completed, which can lead to bills that are higher than expected. Shops must set pricing expectations early to avoid sticker shock."

High-quality components that perform beyond expectations in unique applications is what Pro-Touring is all about, notes Tom Przedpelski, technical specialist/alignment trainer for Specialty Products Co.

"Many people believe adjustable control arms are only for competition or race-only vehicles," he explains. "Our SPC Race/Builder's Series arms offer greater adjustment range and can be easily modified to fit custom applications through a large selection of individual components such as adjusting sleeves, cross-shafts, pivot ends and ball joint plates. With these components, one could build an arm that would mount to a GM subframe but feature a

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Pro-Touring enthusiasts are loyal and support shops that support their hobby. (Photos courtesy aFe POWER)



Chrysler or Ford upper ball joint."

With so many possible directions, steady communication is one key to a successful Pro-Touring build, notes Michael Hamrick, events and promotions manager at Wilwood Disc Brakes.

"When the shop works with their customer on a new build, or even on an existing build that they are looking to upgrade, make sure you ask all the necessary questions and have your customer/car owner give you details on what they are looking for," he advises. "What does the owner/customer drive daily? If they own a 2024 Mustang GT and expect the same performance from a 1966 Mustang Fastback you are adding suspension, brakes, wheels and tires to, unfortunately, they may not be happy with the results. Make sure you are giving the customer the most realistic idea of what to expect up front and not on the day they come to pick up their Pro-Touring build."

Restomod-type builds are often done in stages, meaning shops must be confident the new components they are adding can coexist with existing parts.

"Make sure different products are compatible with each other," says Brett Domin, sales manager for Flaming River Industries.

That includes staples such as motor oils, advises Kyle Neal, director, specialty chemicals/lubricants for Red Line Oil.

"In Pro-Touring, all the applications are different—the engines, transmissions, differentials, transfer cases, fuel systems, etc.," he says. "Treat each vehicle as its own application. It does not matter if they are both the same year, make, model and engine. One could be a flat tappet with fuel injection and the other a roller motor with a blower. This goes for the oils that go into these vehicles as well. The clearances in an engine could be different than factory spec, which would change the oil viscosity recommendation. Selecting the wrong one may not always lead to damaging components, but it is preventing the full performance potential the owner is seeking from their setup."

It also helps to spend time with drivers who have strong opinions on exactly what they need to make sure your reality ultimately matches their vision, says Tim Sayers, muffler development manager at Borla Performance Industries.

"Just because they have or are building a Pro-Touring vehicle doesn't always mean that they have a full understanding of how the various systems on a vehicle work and how they interact with the other systems. Make sure to spend some time with the customer to determine their level of knowledge and understanding."



Shops must be confident the new components they are adding will work well with existing parts. (Photos courtesy Flaming River Industries)

CUSTOMER CONNECTIONS

An attractive aspect of serving the Pro-Touring market is that shops can maximize client partnerships.

"An unexpected benefit is the longer-term customer relationships it creates," says Barsamian. "Pro-Touring buyers are typically enthusiasts who return for ongoing upgrades—clutch kits, driveline parts, brakes, suspension and more. Shops that carry and install products like ACT's clutches often see higher repeat business, plus they build a reputation as a go-to destination for high-performance street/track builds. That credibility leads to more referrals and community visibility."

These drivers also tend to focus more on performance than price point, says Santa Cruz.

"Pro-Touring enthusiasts have more disposable income and are competitive. They are also a very tight-knit community and will share very little of their 'speed secrets,' but they are loyal and will support shops that support their hobby," he says.

Sayers says to never underestimate the impact of handing over the keys of a well-built project to a proud owner.

"In addition to the work and profit created by selling and installing Pro-Touring products, the customers who own Pro-Touring vehicles can oftentimes influence the people they associate with," he explains. "Your relationship with a Pro-Touring vehicle owner may lead to new business with people who associate with your original customer."

Quality components that outperform expectations leave some drivers wanting more, notes Przedpelski.

"People may be so happy with the improvements our arms give to their Pro-Touring car that they want to install them on all their vintage vehicles running modern radial tires as well," he says.



Spend time with customers to determine their level of knowledge and understanding of the market and what they're looking for. (Photo courtesy Borla Performance Industries)

Of course, you can't get to that level of partnership without your sales staff and installers knowing their stuff—but the extra effort definitely pays off.

"Doing your homework can help customers pick out the right products. In return, you'll sell more," says Domin.

Neal explains that a thorough understanding of all aspects of a build is needed to maximize potential.

"Owners have a lot of time and money invested in their Pro-Touring vehicles. From our vantage point, oils are usually the last thing or least considered to make the biggest impact. But that is farthest from the truth. Oil is the lifeblood of your setup, and knowing Red Line uses the best PAO/ester base stocks and additives to maximize protection and performance makes a difference, whether it's a Cars & Coffee, HOT ROD Power Tour, OPTIMA Ultimate Street Car or Goodguys autocross event."

Professional installation paired with quality parts often turns into word-of-mouth advertising, which is invaluable for local shops, says Burnett, noting "happy customers bring repeat business and referrals."

Do it right and, at the end of the day, everyone is happy, adds Hamrick.

"As long as you've given the customer the most realistic expectations of what has been done to their car, an unexpected benefit for the shop is to see the huge smile on their face as they take it for a drive. Customers want to be given the most genuine and honest answers to how and where they spent money on their car. When you do that, both the owner of the car and all the people working at the shop will see the benefits of installing the best products possible."



Making sure every aspect of the build is geared toward performance is a winning formula. (Photos courtesy Red Line Oil)





Give clients a realistic idea of what to expect at the beginning of each build. (Photos courtesy Wilwood)

MAKE AN IMPRESSION

While word of mouth is an effective marketing strategy to reach Pro-Touring enthusiasts, shops can do more to attract new projects.

"Make sure that your current and prospective customers know that you are in the Pro-Touring business. Things like social media, newsletters, email blasts and articles in local newspapers are good ways to get the word out," says Borla's Sayers.

Shops that make an effort to be part of their local Pro-Touring scene will begin to develop important connections and market insights, says aFe POWER's Santa Cruz.

"It's about knowledge and availability. Choose vehicle platforms that your customers compete with in parking lots and at their local track and know the various race event schedules, so you have the right product mix at the right time," he recommends. "Tires, suspension, brakes, air and fluid filters, chemicals and safety equipment would be on my short list."

The more drivers can see the quality of your work, the more they will turn to you for their next build, notes Burnett from Ridetech.

"Showcase your skills through a shop car, a partner's build or by sharing installs on social media," he advises. "Most importantly, deliver consistent quality—word travels fast when you overdeliver on someone's passion project."

Working with supplier partners helps, too.

"Network with companies to be sure you're selling the best application for each job," says Domin from Flaming River.

Confirming every aspect of the build is geared toward performance is a winning formula, says Neal from Red Line Oil.

"Not all oils are the same, and if you wouldn't install stock components on a Pro-Touring vehicle, why would you use stock oil?" he asks.

Meanwhile, there's no cutting corners if drivers want to get the most out of each build, says SPC's Przedpelski.

"Potential customers need to be made aware that their vehicles were designed and manufactured with parts and specifications that are now obsolete unless they are running bias-ply tires and are in the concours circuit," he notes. "Every vintage muscle car can take advantage of the increased alignment range and improved suspension geometry our arms provide to improve performance and enjoyment."

Viewed as a complete project, many customers respond well to a logical build plan that delivers a specific result.

"Position Pro-Touring as a 'performance

Showcase your skills through a shop car, partner build or by sharing install information on social media. (Photos courtesy Ridetech)











High-quality components that perform beyond expectations in unique applications is what Pro-Touring is all about. (Photos courtesy Specialty Products Co.)

with purpose' upgrade," Barsamian recommends. "Don't just sell the part—educate customers on how it improves the total driving experience. For example, explain how an ACT Mod-Twin clutch provides both lightweight pedal feel for street use and the torque capacity needed for big-power engines. Training staff to confidently communicate these benefits—and even showcasing installs on shop vehicles—helps customers see Pro-Touring upgrades as attainable and worthwhile."

A package approach with preselected complementary products can also be effective, with the understanding that every project will nonetheless require some customization to meet individual needs, says Wilwood's Hamrick.

"I would never say a 'cookie-cutter' strategy is best, but if you get the correct details from the customer, then work with manufacturers that can confirm fitment details of their aftermarket products to other aftermarket products, you can hit a home run," he says. "Once you work with a few 'packages' that provide the best outcome for multiple customers, you can streamline your shop's business plan and give the best sales and service to the customer." ***TS***





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Nissan Performance Lowering Springs

Eibach, Corona, California, presents its PRO-KIT Performance Lowering Springs, now available for 2023-25 Nissan Z models. Designed to deliver upgraded performance and ride comfort using progressive technology, the kit lowers the vehicle's center of gravity for increased steering response and improved vehicle dynamics for a sportier, more balanced feel. The reduced height eliminates excessive ground clearance and fender gap.

Honda Performance Pump Modules

DeatschWerks, Oklahoma City, presents its DW400 Performance Pump Modules, now available for 2001-15 Honda Civic Si models. Capable of handling 750-plus-hp, the modules provide a high-flow, plug-and-play fuel system upgrade and include a preinstalled DW430c fuel pump, ethanol-compatible fuel filter and an integrated Performance In-Tank Regulator (PITR) to deliver increased flow and pressure. Compatible with the Civic's returnless fuel system, the units drop into the OE tank and retain all factory functionality.





Drag Race Rear Axle Brake Kits

Wilwood, Camarillo, California, presents all-new Rear Axle Drag Race Brake Kits based on newly designed XRD calipers and 11.25-inch SA (super alloy) scalloped and drilled rotors in both single- and dual-caliper configurations. Compatible with many of the popular drag race rear axle flange types including, Ford New Style (2.50-inch offset), Ford Old Style (2.36-inch offset), Olds/Pontiac (2.81-inch offset), and LAMB/Mark Williams (2.81-inch offset), the systems include forged aluminum, Type-III hard anodized XRD calipers with SA scalloped rotors to fit drag cars with wider tires that rely heavily on rear brakes.

Reduced Wrenching Bolts



ARP, Ventura, California, presents new Reduced Wrenching Bolts, the latest in its automotive fastener lineup. Offered in 5-packs by size, the bolts are available in polished stainless steel or black oxide-coated 8740 chromoly steel. The 3/8-inch bolts are offered with under-head lengths ranging from 0.500 to 5 inches, while the 7/16-inch bolts range from 1.5 to 5 inches—all in a choice of hex or 12-point heads. Both the polished stainless steel and 8740 chromoly bolts are nominally rated at 180,000 psi.



Diesel Racing Fuel

Hot Shot's Secret, Mt. Gilead, Ohio, introduces Adrenaline Outlaw R100+, a premixed, high-performance diesel fuel engineered specifically for the demands of pulling, drag racing, dyno competitions and other diesel motorsports. Formulated with elevated levels of cetane to maximize power output, the fuel incorporates advanced lubricity additives to protect fuel pumps and injectors from excessive wear. Beginning with a hand-selected base fuel distillation, the premium blend delivers performance and protection.



GM Truck/SUV Performance Packages

Holley Performance Brands, Bowling Green, Kentucky, has partnered with **Callaway Cars** on a line of Performance Packages for GM trucks and SUVs. The scalable, high-performance vehicle solutions are dealer-approved across multiple consumer verticals, providing reliable upgrades and warranty support. Packages vary in price, up to premium-level Pinnacle versions.



Ford Maverick Under-Hood Liner

Design Engineering Inc. (DEI), Avon Lake, Ohio, presents its new Under-Hood Liner for the 2022-25 Ford Maverick models. The precision-cut, adhesive-backed solution is designed to deliver performance, protection and refinement for the Maverick, which does not come with factory hood insulation. The liner reduces engine bay heat to protect hood paint, dampens engine noise for a quieter ride, is made in the USA and delivers a clean, factory-style appearance with a custom fit.

Infiniti Q50 Cat-Back Exhaust System



BORLA Performance Industries, Johnson City, Tennessee, presents its Cat-Back Exhaust System for 2016-24 Infiniti Q50 models that improves horsepower and torque. System 140978CFBA features Polyphonic Harmonizer and SwitchFire technology, delivering the aggressive ATAK sound with no drone or resonance inside the vehicle. Made from T-304 stainless steel and carbon fiber with black anodized center tips, the system features all-welded construction for durability and long life.



Vintage-Style Radio

Custom Autosound Mfg., Fullerton, California, presents its Slidebar Radio blending an authentic, vintage style with today's top features. Designed to fit your dash with no mods required, it includes a working slide bar that reveals a hidden digital display when moved. The radio includes 300 watts of peak power, Bluetooth, USB/MP3/WMA playback, iPod docking/control and aux-in for satellite or CD/DVD options. The LCD display offers seven color choices and shows artist, song and album info from connected devices.



Subaru Exhaust

AWE, Horsham, Pennsylvania, presents its Axle-Back Exhaust Suite for 2022-newer Subaru VB WRX models. Available in sophisticated Touring Edition or rowdy Track Edition configurations that both reduce backpressure for increased performance, the 2.5-inch T304L stainless steel axle-back systems are made in the USA with a straight-through design and offer direct bolt-on installation. Quad 4-inch, double-walled, slash-cut tips are available in chrome silver or diamond black. ***TS***

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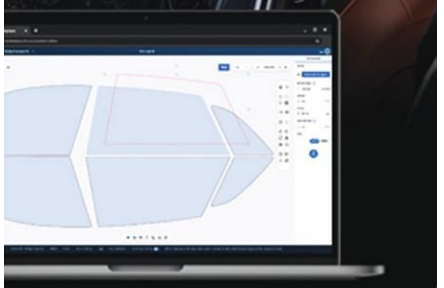
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The Do's & Don'ts of Attending the SEMA Show

BY JEF WHITE

Fall means the start of trade show season in the specialty automotive aftermarket, and the biggest of them all is the SEMA Show. Viewed by many as the industry's Super Bowl, SEMA—and the concurrent AAPEX show—offer a little bit of everything, including opportunities to build supplier relationships, check out the latest products and accessories, attend educational seminars, develop a peer network, meet and greet celebrities and influencers, see amazing project vehicles, do some team building and, hopefully, have a little fun.

Having only missed one year of traveling to Las Vegas for the SEMA Show since 1998, people often ask me what to expect. While I'm by no means a definitive source for answers, about a decade ago I shared some do's and don'ts for shop professionals hoping to maximize their experience. A colleague recently reminded me of that column and, when I couldn't find the original, I decided to write an update on the off chance it might help newcomers handle the show like a pro.

- **DO – CONSIDER ROI FIRST.** As stated, SEMA offers everything an aftermarket professional would ever need to run a successful business. But the days of cheap travel to Vegas are long gone, and the expenses only grow if you plan on taking a few employees with you and/or shutting down the shop for a few days. Only you know your financials, but most industry insiders agree that periodic visits to the SEMA Show are a must for serious specialty shops. Budget accordingly.
- **DON'T – PLAN TO WING IT.** Obviously, if you're making the investment to travel to SEMA, you'll want to get everything out of it that you can. Create a list of priorities, schedule important meetings in advance and make sure your team is on the same page long before landing in the desert to avoid wasted time and effort.
- **DO – START WITH EDUCATION.** The show's training sessions, seminars and roundtable talks are invaluable chances to build your business and market knowledge and hear from the industry's top performers. The times are also set in stone. Use the SEMA Show app to identify can't-miss presentations and then build the rest of your schedule around them.
- **DON'T – IGNORE BASIC TRADE SHOW BEST PRACTICES.** The helpful hints found in any basic trade show article are there for a reason. Don't think you're the exception. That means wearing comfortable shoes, staying hydrated, packing plenty of business cards, remembering a note-taking device, arriving early and staying late, going easy on the after-parties, etc.
- **DON'T – UNDERESTIMATE THE SIZE OF THE LVCC AND/OR THE CROWDS.** The Las Vegas Convention Center is a big place, and with constant upgrades and improvements, it only seems to be getting bigger. The various halls, for the most part, are far apart, and the crowds make traveling in a straight line nearly impossible. Again, use the app and compare booth numbers for important meetings in advance to create an efficient schedule.
- **DO – TAKE TIME TO ADMIRE, AND STUDY, THE PROJECT VEHICLES.** On top of all the business benefits, SEMA is also one of the world's best car shows. It can seem that each display vehicle is brighter and crazier than the next. But savvy shop owners know to look past the glitz and identify the projects that most resemble those they build at home. When you find them, take photos and notes, identifying subtle touches and emerging trends you can incorporate into your own work.
- **DO – MAKE TIME FOR NEW PRODUCTS.** For many shop owners, one of the highlights of the show is seeing the latest part introductions. That's best done at the New Products Showcase, this year located in the lower level of the South Hall.
- **DON'T – FORGET TO FOLLOW UP.** Your time at the show will fly by, and even the details of your most important meetings will soon grow fuzzy once you're back home dealing with the day-to-day realities of running a shop. Your detailed notes should include specific plans for follow-ups—to suppliers, peers and others—in order to plant and grow the seeds you gathered at the show. ***TS***

The SEMA Show offers everything an aftermarket professional would ever need to run a successful business. (Photo by Jef White)





Jef White is editor in chief of THE SHOP magazine. Visit him and the team at the 2025 SEMA Show, booth No. 23323.

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