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ON THE COVER

Accessorizing with running boards or related vehicle entry products is a popular first step for drivers looking to make their trucks and SUVs more attractive and accessible. See article on page 12. (Photo courtesy Raptor Series; inset photo courtesy Subaru)

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Jef White
Editor in Chief
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Pursuing Possibilities

If you've read THE SHOP for a while, you know we like to start off each new year in this space with a recap of the various market articles we've presented over the last 12 months. It's a nice way to not only see how far we've come, but also recognize some of the many specialty product niches that keep the aftermarket fresh and going strong.

These days it seems that even the most specialized shops can benefit from a little bit of diversification, as the now pervasive "side hustle" culture looks to reward those who make their own opportunities. If you believe your business has the bandwidth to take on additional products or services,

use this as a guide leading to a stronger, more versatile company for 2026.

- **JAN 2025** – Running boards and steps help shops rise above; solving the lubrication equation; audio upgrades are music to drivers' ears.
- **FEB** – The drag racing market celebrates positive reactions; getting to work upfitting professional vehicles and fleets; an elevated car show lifts all Porsches.
- **MAR** – Solutions to help overlanders pack it in (and out); performance exhaust systems cut through the noise; how Larry Chen captures and catalogs automotive passion.
- **APR** – Grabbing ahold of the winch market; street suspensions provide a feel for the road; why the good ol' days are right now.
- **MAY** – Off-road bumpers make a strong first impression; the proven power of the diesel performance market; heat and sound control products bring calm to the chaos.
- **JUN** – On the rise with today's lifts and leveling kits; SEMA Cares is committed to helping kids; taking control with tuners and programmers.
- **JUL** – The versatile tonneau market has you fully covered; made-in-the-USA products offer nationwide appeal; slow your roll with the latest performance brakes.
- **AUG** – Industry manufacturers and suppliers have their own stories to tell; import performance packs a punch; the stable nature of shock upgrades.
- **SEP** – Rooftop tents offer a room with a view; Time Attack and HPDE set the pace for road racing; doing the math on today's show cars.
- **OCT** – Performance cooling systems beat the heat; gaining traction with drivetrain products; it's smooth sailing for roller rockers and lifters.
- **NOV** – Project vehicles help fire the imagination; aftermarket lighting spurs a love of shiny things; automotive influencers have changed aftermarket marketing.
- **DEC** – It's spin to win in oval track circles; why shops need a strong attachment to the towing aftermarket; AI's place in today's shops.

All this and more shows the dynamic nature of this industry and how new paths can be forged when needs arise. From all of us here at THE SHOP, the happiest of new years as your business pursues its many future possibilities. **TS**

THE SHOP

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2026

Retail Forecast

A volatile economic environment means different things for different parts of the market.

BY PHILLIP M. PERRY

(Image credit: ABIR - stock.adobe.com)



New York City-based journalist Phillip M. Perry publishes widely in the fields of business management and law.

The new year offers new opportunities for aftermarket shops that sell and install auto accessories. Forecasters warn, however, that the economic environment could be somewhat volatile in the coming months, with different income levels experiencing different realities.

“Our forecast for year-over-year retail sales growth is 3.8% for 2026, down from the 4.5% of 2025,” says Scott Hoyt, senior director of consumer economics for Moody’s Analytics.

One reason for the expected softening of the sales picture is that low- and middle-income consumers are expected to pull back after a round of defensive spending.

“Consumers have been hearing that prices will be going up, so they have adopted a

buy-now-instead-of-later mentality,” says Hoyt. Once their cupboards are full, there is less desire to shop the aisles. “This practice is a negative for the retail outlook.”

Tariffs and uncertainty have dampened consumer confidence. And that has kept retailers from raising shelf prices.

“It’s hard to say who is eating that—whether it’s importers, retailers or wholesalers,” says Hoyt, speaking of the costs of the nation’s trade policy.

Upper-income consumers, on the other hand, should continue their aggressive shopping. A robust stock market and a steady-if-unspectacular economic environment is fueling the fire.

“The U.S. economy is holding up admirably well despite a major trade shock caused by tariffs,” says Bernard Yaros Jr., lead U.S. economist at Oxford Economics. “We look for an acceleration in growth in 2026 as stimulus from the One Big Beautiful Bill gets underway.”

Oxford Economics expects real GDP to grow by 2% in 2026, up a bit from the 1.7% expected when 2025 numbers are tallied. Both years, among the most sluggish growth environments of the past decade,

are underperforming the 2.8% increase of 2024. (Gross domestic product, the total value of the nation’s goods and services, is the most commonly utilized measure of economic growth. “Real” GDP subtracts the effects of inflation.)

WEAK EMPLOYMENT

Strong employment figures are a traditional booster of consumer confidence and retail sales. Current reports, though, can be misleading.

Oxford Economics forecasts unemployment rates of 4.4% and 4.3% at the end of 2025 and 2026, respectively. That’s not much higher than the 4.1% clocked at the end of 2024. It’s also well within the 3.5% to 4.5% range many economists peg as the “sweet spot” that balances the dual risks of inflationary wage escalation and economic recession. (The lower the unemployment number, the greater the risk of inflation; higher numbers threaten a recession.)

The nation’s current immigration policy, though, casts some doubt on the traditional interpretation of those unemployment numbers.

“What’s happening is that job creation has

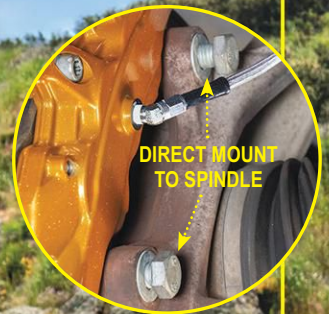
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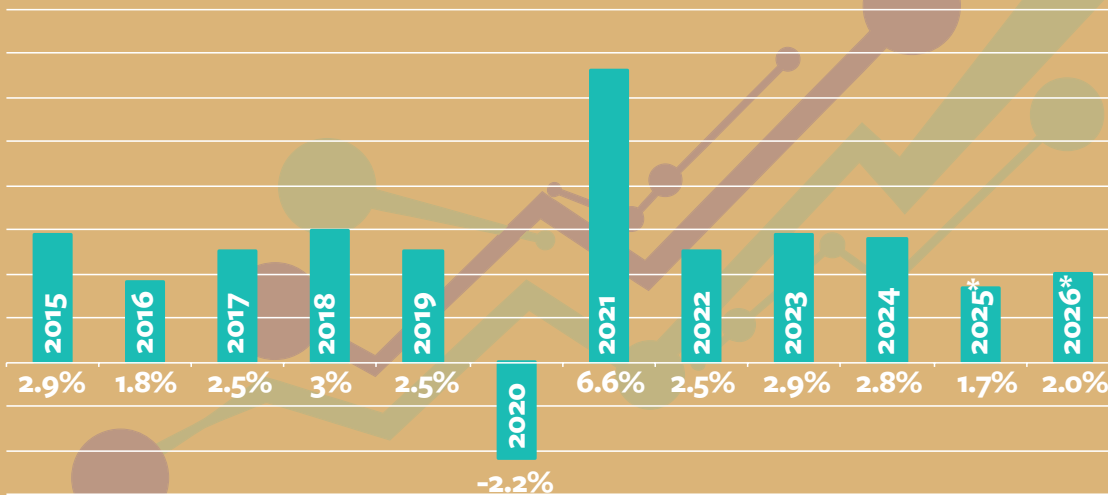


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A subdued economy will challenge retailers in 2026.

Source: World Bank;
* = projections by Oxford Economics.

come to a near standstill,” Hoyt believes. “In most environments, that would result in a significant increase in the unemployment rate. However, because of the restrictions on immigration, we have almost no labor force growth. So, the unemployment rate is barely rising, despite the fact that the number of job openings has plunged.”

In other words, the labor market is much weaker than the unemployment rate would lead one to believe. Employers are reluctant to hire because of uncertainty about the economy. People are finding it tougher to find jobs than the reported numbers would suggest, putting a damper on consumer confidence and retail sales.

As a result of the general employment malaise, shoppers will have less disposable income to spend. Moody’s Analytics (economy.com) expects the nation’s total wage and salary income to increase by 4.3% in 2026, a lower rate than the 4.9% of 2025. Both numbers are below the 5.8% recorded in 2024.

HIGHER PROFITS

The nation’s economic growth depends largely on the launch of new business initiatives. Unfortunately, companies are holding back for a number of reasons.

Interest rates, while declining, are still at the highest levels since 2022. Costs for materials and supplies are increasing. There is uncertainty about the nation’s future trade policy. Low- and middle-income consumers, nervous about inflation, are tapped out and closing their wallets.

Against such headwinds, a host of otherwise attractive projects can look less promising. One might also expect business profitability to suffer. Yet, Oxford Economics (oxfordeconomics.com) expects it to follow the same general pattern as the GDP.

“We look for corporate profits to rise by 4.9% in 2026,” says Yaros. “That’s up substantially from the 0.5% expected when 2025 numbers are finalized.”

The 2026 pace remains slower than the 7.9% clocked in 2024. The expected 2026 rebound in profitability stems from a belief that stimulus from Washington will lift all boats.

“We believe the passage of the One Big Beautiful Bill, with its tax cuts for businesses and households, should help the economy regather some steam in early 2026,” says Anirban Basu, chairman and CEO of Sage Policy Group (sagepolicy.com). The legislation’s 100% bonus depreciation should help fuel business investment, while large tax refunds should invigorate consumer spending. Both activities are important drivers of the nation’s economy.

The stimulus is arriving at the same time companies are getting a more solid footing on the nation’s shifting trade policy.

“There has been a bit of a shock to the system in and around tariffs over the past year, and it is taking some time for many operators to understand their impact,” notes Andrew Petryk, head of industrials at Brown Gibbons Lang & Company, an investment banker (bglco.com).

Specifically, importers have responded to Chinese tariffs by sourcing from other countries—a move that has also lent succor to the nation’s recent supply chain ills.

“Lead times have diminished as companies have found alternative or additional suppliers,” says Petryk. “Those that relied on one or two vendors now have three, four or five.”

Companies should also benefit from a decline in the cost of money over the coming months, as the Federal Reserve shifts its focus from fighting inflation to bolstering employment.



Strong unemployment numbers may be hiding reduced job opportunities.
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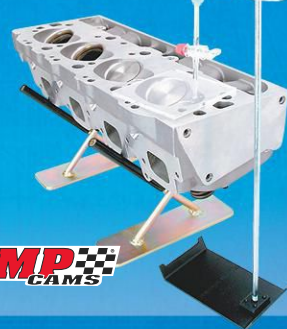
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"We look for inflation to peak at just above 3% when 2025 numbers are finalized, and for the Fed to cut interest rates into 2026 until the federal funds rate falls to about 3%," says Yaros.

That rate, while much higher than the rates of early 2022, is a considerable improvement over the 4.3% of mid-2025.

HOUSING DOLDRUMS

Retailers tend to do better when the housing sector is thriving. And here, the picture is currently murky.

"Housing is in a funk," says Yaros. "Single-family homebuilders are contending with a growing supply of unsold, completed new homes, as well as greater competition from the resale market and falling home prices in a rising number of regions."

The high cost of money isn't helping matters.

"A significant increase in interest rates since the summer of 2022 has increased the monthly payments required from buyers of new or existing homes," says Petryk. "They have also led to a significant market shortage, because families who bought homes three to five-plus years ago are loath to surrender their sub-3% mortgages."

Mortgage rates have an important impact on consumer attitudes that are vital drivers of the economy. While lower short-term rates may be coming from the Federal Reserve, it's unclear what effect they will have on the longer-term ones that apply to the funding of new homes.

"I do not forecast mortgage rates coming down enough to make a big difference in single-family construction," says Bill Conerly, principal of his own consulting firm in Lake Oswego, Oregon, (conerlyconsulting.com).

Wary builders. Reluctant sellers. Sluggish buyers. It's all affecting the housing market.

Oxford Economics expects starts to fall by 4.3% in 2025 and decline by another 2.3% in 2026 after dropping by 3.5% in 2024. Prices for existing homes are expected to increase only 1.5% in 2025 and 2.3% in 2026 after rising by 4.4% in 2024.

"The fact that there's not a lot of housing turnover can impact retailers, because when people buy or sell a home they tend to pur-

chase a lot of furniture, appliances, paint and so on," says Hoyt. "A lot of people are locked into their existing homes because they don't want to replace their low-percentage mortgage with a higher one. That's reducing housing turnover."

BUSINESS CONFIDENCE

For all business sectors, money and labor are not the only production factors on the rise.

"The real problem is the world has become much more expensive in the last few years," notes Basu. "Construction materials are more expensive. And, of course, there are tariffs on items like steel, aluminum and copper."

Little wonder the high cost of doing business is top of mind for many operators.

"As we head into 2026, the area of most concern for companies is profit margin," says Basu. "Many operators are simultaneously experiencing an increase in costs of delivering services while demand fades."

Given the variety of business concerns, many projects are being put on hold.

"It's hard to engage in cost savings when both materials and labor are becoming more expensive," says Basu. "Too often, the pro formas don't pencil out. Many companies are responding by not expanding their operations and trying to trim expenditures at the margins. They are focusing more on cash flow preservation by slowing hiring and being less aggressive in leasing and purchasing equipment, particularly equipment impacted by tariff pricing."

The generalized business hesitation is evidenced in the numbers.

"We look for business investment to increase by only 1.6% in 2026, after rising by 3% in 2025 and 3.6% in 2024," says Yaros.

LOOKING AHEAD

Entering the early months of 2026, economists suggest watching these key economic indicators for an idea of how the year will turn out:

• EMPLOYMENT:

"I would pay close attention to the unemployment rate," says Yaros. An unexpected decline in employment would spur faster interest rate cuts as the Fed seeks to reinforce economic expansion.

• CONSUMER SPENDING:

"How is the consumer faring?" poses Basu. "Bear in mind that many low- and mid-

The world has become much more expensive in the last few years.
(Image credit: setiadio - stock.adobe.com)

dle-income people are exhausted financially. Indebtedness and delinquencies are up for credit cards, mortgages and loans.”

• **INFLATION:**

“If we get stubbornly high inflation, that will prevent further progress on interest rates,” says Basu.

Oxford Economics still expects the nation to avoid a recession, and the expected 2% GDP growth is right around the level economists peg as the nation’s “natural growth rate”—one that supports business activity, helps maintain full employment and avoids triggering inflation.

“Retailers are most worried about how much they are going to have to pay for the goods that they’re selling, and what that will do to consumers’ purchasing power,” says Hoyt. “They are also worried about how weakness in the labor market will weigh on aggregate income growth. And finally, they are worried that a pullback in the stock market will dampen spending by high-income consumers.”

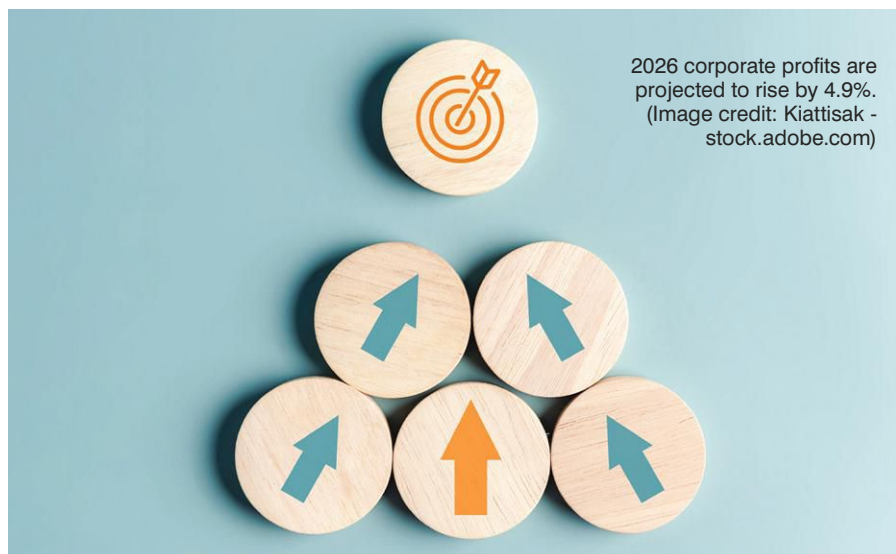
Perhaps of even greater importance, though, is a little heralded threat to productivity.

“One thing that sort of permeates the whole economic picture right now is the nation’s low population growth rate,” says Conerly. “Immigration is down due to Trump administration policy. The next generation entering their working years is about the same size as the retiring boomers, so there

will be no net growth in the labor force.”

Responding to this trend, retailers will look for ways to maximize their return on labor by increasing output per worker, notes Conerly, and automate when possible.

“The focus of businesses in 2026 will be increasing productivity—not by (pushing) people harder, but by providing them with better tools, better training and better first-level managers.” **TS**



2026 corporate profits are projected to rise by 4.9%.
(Image credit: Kiattisak - stock.adobe.com)

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Customers and vehicles are different, so fitment, finish and profile all matter when it comes to running boards and steps. (Photo courtesy Raptor Series)

ONE STEP AHEAD

THE BENEFITS OF
CARRYING THE LATEST
VEHICLE ENTRY PRODUCTS

BY JEFF WHITE

Accessorizing with running boards or related vehicle entry products is a popular first step for drivers looking to make their trucks and SUVs more attractive and accessible. Available in a variety of fitments and finishes, step products offer added convenience and protection to off-roaders and daily drivers.

The market continues to support well-built products that match the quality of today's vehicles while allowing a touch of individual style. Innovative wiring and attachment systems add versatility, helping aftermarket shops maximize potential.

If you're looking to keep your customers one step ahead with the latest entry products, suppliers have suggestions concerning market direction, sales strategies and hot new running board and step models to watch heading into the new year.

MAKE IT YOUR OWN

It's easy to see the opportunities available to shops that sell and install running boards and steps.

"The strength of the truck and SUV market gives shops every reason to be optimistic," says Jesse Brown, vice presi-

dent of operations for Raptor Series. "We're seeing consistent demand from customers upgrading to higher-quality, better-fitting running boards—momentum that we expect to carry well into 2026."

Folks want accessories that match their top-end vehicles, says Tony Savasta,



Customers look to shops for honest feedback on product performance. (Photo courtesy Dee Zee)

vice president of marketing for Westin Automotive.

“Consumer demand is shifting toward higher-quality, better-designed accessories, creating more opportunities to sell premium products instead of basic entry-level options,” he observes. “Innovations like improved traction surfaces, lightweight materials and modern drop-step designs are driving interest and giving shops more compelling upgrade paths to offer customers. With trucks remaining the top-selling vehicles in North America and owners consistently investing in customization, the running boards and steps category is positioned for steady, healthy growth—making it a strong profit opportunity for shops.”

Product versatility is a key attribute, says Rick Sanchez, director of sales and marketing for Steelcraft Automotive.

“The market for running boards and steps is still strong heading into 2026. The surge in truck and SUV ownership, coupled with customers personalizing their vehicles for lifestyle and family—not to mention the surge in fleet sales—continues to drive steady demand,” he says. “Consumers are looking for products that combine style, convenience and safety. As more buyers choose premium trucks and EVs, the focus on functional, high-quality accessories will only grow—making it a great time for shops to strengthen their running board and step offerings.”

Step products remain a primary product category for drivers of larger vehicles seeking go-anywhere convenience.

“The SUV and truck markets continue to grow, and customers looking for running boards are searching for options,” says Hugo Baeza, executive director at Romik. “Typically, OEMs don’t necessarily offer many options, so this is where professional shops can help customers.”

The products are a desirable upgrade at any stage of the pickup-owning journey, says Sara Ford, marketing manager for TrailFX.

“With major truck redesigns still a few years out, many vehicle owners will turn to the aftermarket to refresh their current models with updated styling and modern features,” she predicts. “Step products provide an easy, low-cost upgrade with no drilling or permanent modification required with a high-impact visual difference.”

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Dee Zee

Scott Moyer

Director of Marketing

■ HOT PRODUCTS:

AMP Research PowerSteps

■ FEATURES & BENEFITS:

Electric steps with auto-deploy and retract capabilities; enable easy entry/exit of the vehicle; clean aesthetic look; added ground clearance while the vehicle is in motion; integration through the OBD-II port communicates directly with the vehicle.

RealTruck

Jason Cassar

Senior Product Manager

■ HOT PRODUCTS: 5-Inch Sport Step Aluminum Slide Track Running Boards

■ FEATURES & BENEFITS:

Offer higher clearance and an aggressive look; full 5-inch-wide step area with punched holes for drainage; 10-year finish warranty.

Raptor Series

Jesse Brown

Vice President of Operations

■ HOT PRODUCTS:

RPT-R Running Boards

■ FEATURES & BENEFITS:

Designed for pickups; made in Europe; rugged steel construction featuring 11-gauge heavy-duty steel; bedliner-type coating resists scratches, corrosion and wear; 6-inch-wide step surface; support 450 pounds; height-adjustable bracket system.

Romik

Hugo Baeza

Executive Director

■ HOT PRODUCTS:

PowerGlide Electric Running Boards

■ FEATURES & BENEFITS:

Automatic extension and retraction; no-drill installation with vehicle-specific kits; no magnets.

Steelcraft Automotive

Rick Sanchez

Director of Sales and Marketing

■ HOT PRODUCTS:

Rough Country Multi-Color LED Running Boards

■ FEATURES & BENEFITS:

One-piece aluminum construction; corrosion-resistant black coating; integrated LED strip; 234 color options with five preset color and 12 dynamic lighting effects; Rough Country power retractable running boards also currently popular.

Rough Country

Tim Watts

Vice President of Sales

■ HOT PRODUCTS:

A4 Aluminum Step Bars

■ FEATURES & BENEFITS:

Precision-engineered from corrosion-resistant aluminum with a satin black titanium powder-coat finish; deliver lasting durability and sleek styling; unique hexagonal profile, slip-resistant step pads and OE-style installation to provide secure footing.

TrailFX

Sara Ford

Marketing Manager

■ HOT PRODUCTS:

Outlaw Drop Running Boards

■ FEATURES & BENEFITS:

Rugged with solid footing and increased functionality; made a splash at the 2025 SEMA Show; mandrel-bent steel tubing and 16-gauge die-stamped step plates create a strong, secure platform with excellent traction; 4-inch drop for easy vehicle entry and exit.

Westin Automotive

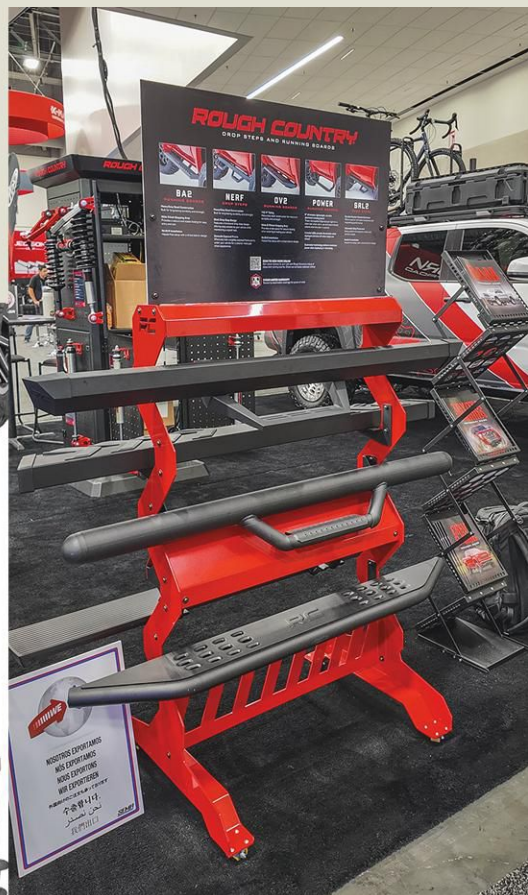
Tony Savasta

Vice President of Marketing

more fun for users, says Tim Watts, vice president of sales for Rough Country.

"These products deliver immediate, high-value functional benefits—improving vehicle entry and exit, enhancing daily usability and elevating the overall driving experience," he says. "Few aftermarket upgrades are used as frequently or relied upon as heavily as a step or running board."

Scott Moyer,



Boards and steps make life easier and more fun for truck, SUV and CUV owners. (Photos courtesy Rough Country)

director of marketing for Dee Zee, notes that universal designs can save storage space and help close deals.

"Our side steps are universal lengths for extended/double cab and crew cab trucks. The universal lengths reduce on-hand inventory, and with the addition of a custom-fit bracket kit, installation is a breeze," he says. "Our bracket kits also span multiple styles of side steps."

Jason Cassar, senior product manager for RealTruck, notes that the company has integrated products from the AMP, NFAB and Go Rhino brands, making running boards and steps one of its largest product categories.

"With a heavy focus on this space, we will be bringing new designs, materials and function that customers can be excited about in the years ahead," he says.

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

When it comes to selling running boards and steps, Ford recommends highlighting their utility.

"Many customers assume step bars are



Balance your customer's style with the desired step function for each application. (Photo courtesy RealTruck/AMP Research)

mainly cosmetic or only necessary for lifted vehicles when, in reality, they provide added accessibility, safer entry and exit, and protection from road debris on a wide range of trucks and SUVs," she says.

The products' popularity is also driving

manufacturer innovation, says Baeza.

"When a customer walks in with a hard-to-find vehicle, let's say a luxury SUV, most shops will immediately say 'No, nothing available,'" he reports. "At Romik, we specialize in these types of vehicles and

DUAL-STEP CONFIDENCE FOR EVERY JOURNEY.

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JEEP'S BADGE OF HONOR PROGRAM ADDS 6 NEW TRAIL CHALLENGES

Jeep recently updated its industry-exclusive Badge of Honor program, expanding it to include six new exploratory trail-based challenges, a new Digital Trails offering and an enhanced interactive app experience. The program is designed to bring more opportunities for exploration, recognition and community engagement to Jeep owners nationwide.

"The Jeep Badge of Honor program represents the spirit of adventure and community that defines our brand. Quite simply, no other brand can offer off-roading experiences quite like Jeep can," says Aamir Ahmed, global head of Jeep brand off-road and EVs. "With the expansion of these new features and an enhanced app experience, we're giving Jeep owners even more ways to explore,



connect and celebrate their off-road achievements."

The Jeep Badge of Honor program allows Jeep owners to earn digital and physical badges by completing designated off-road trails. Participants can download the Jeep Badge of Honor app to discover new trails and connect with a passionate community of fellow off-roaders and Jeep enthusiasts.

Six new challenges have been created to inspire deeper exploration. Users will be challenged to complete a specific subset of trails or activities. Each completed challenge earns in-app badges and points, which they have the option to share on social media.

- **Month Streaker** – Complete at least one trail per month for six consecutive months
- **Marathoner** – Conquer 26 unique trails
- **Trail Titan** – Complete every Core Jeep Badge of Honor Trail
- **Explorer Extraordinaire** – Finish 10 unique trails
- **Digital Detour** – Complete any three Digital Trails
- **Moab Marvel** – Complete all Badge of Honor trails in Moab, Utah

Core Trails are also now available in previously unrepresented states. Learn more at jeep.com/badge-of-honor.

The Badge of Honor program looks to bring more opportunities for exploration, recognition and community engagement to Jeep owners nationwide. (Photo courtesy Jeep/Stellantis)

installing these products is not difficult."

Cassar says many drivers new to the market may mistakenly believe that "a step is a step," leading them to be viewed as a "commodity product."

"At first glance, a lot of these products look similar, but they each provide a slightly

different benefit to the customer, so you need to balance your customer's style with desired function," he explains.

Sanchez highlights some of the important differentiators.

"Construction materials, coating technology and bracket design make huge dif-

ferences in long-term performance and customer satisfaction," he explains. "Another misconception is that modern trucks require complicated installation, but most of our boards are fully bolt-on and designed for quick, clean installs that save techs time and increase profit margins."

Drivers want quality accessories that match their top-end vehicles. (Photo courtesy Westin Automotive)





Step products provide an easy, low-cost upgrade that deliver a high-impact visual difference. (Photo courtesy TrailFX)

Retailers and installers can find success broadening their target beyond traditional truck owners.

“SUVs and CUVs can gain significant usability and convenience from a quality step or running board,” says Watts. “Shops that recognize and promote this can better educate customers and unlock additional sales opportunities.”

Brown stresses the importance of understanding the inherent differences between brands and models, noting they should not be treated as interchangeable.

“Each vehicle and customer use case is different—fitment, finish and profile all matter,” he reports. “When shops focus on pairing the right design to the right vehicle, everyone wins.”

Savasta adds that even vehicles featuring factory step accessories are strong candi-

dates for aftermarket upgrades.

“Not all steps are the same. They vary widely in construction, fitment quality, traction, corrosion resistance and long-term durability. They may flex more, rust faster or could be placed in a less-than-ideal location or step height,” he says. “Don’t assume the customer won’t upgrade to better-built products or overlook the long-term benefits. Helping buyers understand these differences can lead to greater satisfaction, fewer call-backs and higher margins.”

SALES ON THE RISE

Romik’s Baeza recommends educating counter people on product availability and using online searches from quality suppliers to track down new vehicles and fitments.

“The government tariffs are making it hard for fly-by-night outfits to compete with established companies,” he notes. “The flow of cheap, low-quality imports is starting to die down. Shops should look at what their local distributors are offering. Educate your staff and be ready to answer questions from customers.”

Moyer from Dee Zee suggests working to become the local boards and steps expert.

“Customers come to your shop because they trust your expertise,” he explains. “They



Board and step models can vary widely in construction, fitment, traction and more. (Photo courtesy Westin Automotive)

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5" OVAL STYLE

5" TREAD STEP

5" OEM STYLE FULL TREAD

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Look for differentiators like construction materials, coating technology and bracket design to make the best choice for each project. (Photos courtesy Steelcraft Automotive)

want honest feedback on products, and many would rather have you handle the installation than do it themselves. Tell manufacturers what you need for sales tools to give your customers a full service experience and maybe even capture additional product sales to complete their truck setup in one stop."

Sanchez suggests representing step products as both a functional upgrade and a style enhancement.

"Shoppers often start with protection products—grille guards, bumpers or fender flares—but once they see how

running boards improve accessibility and appearance, they're eager to add them," he says. "Shops can boost attachment rates by displaying a demo vehicle or showroom sample so customers can feel the quality and see the finish firsthand. Keep a full-sized nerf bar or running board display in your store that's easy to access. This allows you to quickly take it to the customer's truck and hold it up, giving them a clear view of how great it would look. Lastly, partner with proven brands like Steelcraft Automotive that offer strong warranty coverage, fast fulfillment and U.S.-based support."

Despite their prevalence, Cassar from RealTruck notes that not every driver understands that running boards and steps can be easily added to most pickups and SUVs.

"There are a lot of customers in the market that don't know what their truck needs. If you have a customer shopping for truck and SUV accessories not specific to this product line, ask them about their vehicle. 'Does it currently have steps?' 'What is their condition?' 'Do you or family members ever have any issues getting into or out of the vehicle?' 'Do you ever need to easily access the top of the vehicle?'" he says. "Notice that the bottom trim of their vehicle may be getting beat up by road debris, rocks, etc. It may uncover an unmet need they didn't think about."

Raptor Series' Brown says that "nothing sells running boards like seeing them in person. When customers can touch the finish and see how they look installed, it builds instant confidence. A simple showroom display or demo setup can make a big difference in driving more sales."

TrailFX is among the



Drivers in the market for running boards are often searching for options. (Photos courtesy Romik)

companies that offer interest-generating hands-on displays, says Ford.

"Having step samples or an installed set in your showroom allows customers to see the finish, feel the stepping surface and understand the quality and stability," she says. "TrailFX makes this easy by offering 3-foot demo samples of all step products—giving customers the confidence to buy after interacting with the product in person."

Savasta encourages using eye-catching product layouts, such as those available from Westin Automotive, as entryways into fruitful discussions around vehicle use and driver preference.

"Explain to the customer that the first goal is to tailor their choice for function, so be sure to discuss how the truck is used with

your customer, so you'll match the perfect step to make entry and exit more comfortable," he says.

In the end, it's about pairing the vehicle owner with the choice that best meets all their needs, says Watts from Rough Country.

"Matching the right style and functionality to each customer is essential for creating a positive buying experience. While online images are helpful, nothing replaces the impact of seeing products in person," he says. "We have in-store step displays available by request. Using them—or even having select step systems installed on employee or company vehicles—gives customers a tangible sense of quality, finish and operation that they simply can't get online." **TS**

The market is seeing a consistent demand for higher-quality, better-fitting running boards and steps. (Photo courtesy Raptor Series)





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GETTING TO KNOW TODAY'S CAR AUDIO

New systems deliver the same enjoyment & sense of freedom a quality stereo has always offered.

COMPILED BY JEF WHITE

While it's maybe not the market it once was, audio upgrades still have their place in the restyling aftermarket, appealing to discriminating vehicle owners seeking the latest tech and the most enjoyable in-cabin experience.

Whether it's improving the sound quality in a classic pickup or

taking newer cars to the next level, today's audio systems bring drivers the same enjoyment and sense of freedom an upgraded stereo has always offered.

So, listen up as suppliers share their thoughts on hot new products, market trends and sales tips to put you in the know regarding mobile audio.

(Image credit: Athena - stock.adobe.com)

CUSTOM AUTOSOUND MANUFACTURING INC.

**CUSTOM AUTOSOUND
MANUFACTURING INC.**

**ALLEN ULIBARRI
GENERAL MANAGER**

■ Our hottest aftermarket audio product is...

The USA-850. It's SEMA's 2025 New Mobile Product of the Year, and we can't keep them on the shelf.

■ Its best features include...

With trademarked DigaDial and patented features, this radio offers programmable screens that allow the user to view an old-school analog display with a working red needle, or an all-digital display. It requires no assembly or extra parts and fits right into

your original dash, maintaining the vehicle's original dash integrity. Look at your dad or mom's classic display, yet listen with today's technology.

■ Why should professional shops be optimistic about the opportunities



Audio installers can help a new generation of drivers create their own in-car memories. (Photos courtesy Custom Autosound)

presented by offering aftermarket audio components and systems to retail and wholesale customers?

These classic cars, trucks and street rods are irreplaceable—one of a kind. You have the great opportunity and pleasure to not only maintain this generation's fond

memories, but to create the next generation's future memories.

■ What's one thing shop owners and installers should know about serving aftermarket audio customers?

Owners and installers must appreciate and communicate how precious these classic cars, trucks and street rods are to their customers when selling and installing aftermarket audio systems. Many of these vehicles are rarities and family heirlooms.

■ What's a tip for shops looking to increase sales and installations of aftermarket audio products?

Prominently display the product, preferably in the dash of a classic vehicle or sound board. Demonstrate and explain the details and features clearly to help your customer decide what is most important to him or her. Is it price? Is it function? Is it something else?

BOSS ELITE

BOSS ELITE

COLIN ROSS
ASSOCIATE BRAND MANAGER

■ Our hottest aftermarket audio product is...

Our most in-demand aftermarket audio product is the Elite line of floating head receivers, designed for drivers looking to level up their ride with top-tier tech and flexibility. The lineup comes in four screen sizes—9, 10.1, 12 and 14 inches—all built on a single-DIN chassis for an easy fit in just about any vehicle.

Each screen is fully adjustable, so it can move up, down or side-to-side to avoid blocking vents, buttons or gauges. That flexibility means every driver gets a clean install, a precise viewing angle and a premium experience built around their ride.



Many customers want custom setups and premium sound that goes beyond what factory systems can offer.
(Photos courtesy BOSS Elite)

■ Its best features include...

Our floating head receivers stand out with a mix of advanced tech and smooth integration. Select models feature wired and wireless Certified Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, plus built-in SiriusXM—keeping drivers connected and entertained wherever they go.

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BOSS ELITE (cont.)

What really takes things to the next level is iDataLink Maestro compatibility, which lets key vehicle functions—like steering wheel controls and factory data—show right on the receiver's screen. That means installers can keep and even enhance OEM features while giving customers a huge, modern touch-screen experience.

■ Why should professional shops be optimistic about the opportunities presented by offering aftermarket audio components and systems to retail and wholesale customers?

The market just keeps expanding in all directions. More and more customers want custom setups and premium sound that goes way beyond what factory systems can offer. Even though newer vehicles come with built-in OEM audio, they usually fall short on performance and flexibility—opening the door for serious upgrades.

Plus, with the rise of connected, digital, marine and powersports audio, there are now more ways than ever to reach new customers who want high-quality, personalized sound.

■ What's one thing shop owners and installers should know about serving aftermarket audio customers?

Aftermarket audio customers are after more than just new gear—they want a full,



personalized experience. They appreciate expert advice, clean installs and upgrades that boost both performance and convenience.

With the rise of big, Tesla-style touch-screens, customers now expect high-tech, fully integrated setups that look and feel better than factory systems. Shops that blend solid technical know-how with personalized recommendations—offering seamless installs packed with the latest features—will not only impress customers but also open the door for upsells and repeat business.

Bottom line: real success comes from delivering great products and an even better customer experience.

■ What's a tip for shops looking to increase sales and installations of

aftermarket audio products?

A great way for shops to boost sales and installs of audio gear is to focus on showing customers the real value—personalization, performance and safety. Don't just sell the hardware; show how upgrades like bigger screens, better sound and smart connectivity make everyday driving more enjoyable.

Modern stereos can even make driving safer with hands-free calling, voice control and clearer navigation—keeping drivers focused on the road. Giving customers hands-on demos and side-by-side comparisons while highlighting key features helps them see (and hear) the difference.

Shops that position themselves as go-to experts for performance, convenience and safety will see more sales, more upgrades and more repeat customers.

KICKER PERFORMANCE AUDIO

KICKER PERFORMANCE AUDIO

TOM HEATH
VICE PRESIDENT OF GLOBAL
SALES AND MARKETING

■ Our hottest aftermarket audio products are...

Speakers and subs.

■ Why should professional shops be optimistic about the opportunities presented by offering aftermarket audio components and systems to retail and wholesale customers?

Everyone enjoys music. You can't miss as

long as you promote the fact that you are there to provide them with entertainment while behind the wheel.

■ What's one thing shop owners and installers should know about serving aftermarket audio customers?

Just like anything, customer service is the most important aspect of doing business. If you are different in a good way, they will come back and refer others to you.

■ What's a tip for shops looking to increase sales and installations of aftermarket audio products?



Provide better customer service than you currently are. That includes shop cleanliness, organization and comfort. That's what makes you different from an online experience.

One of KICKER's top sellers is the Hideaway Compact Powered Subwoofer with integrated amp that installs under the seat. (Photo courtesy KICKER Performance Audio)



Hidden Radio

Custom Autosound Manufacturing Inc., Fullerton, California, presents its Secretaudio SST-V system, designed to offer a stealth audio solution for classic cars. Delivering 200 watts of power without altering the dash, the SST-V can be hidden under the seat or behind the dash and features Bluetooth for music streaming and hands-free calls, USB MP3/WMA playback, iPod and CD control, and satellite-ready capability via Bluetooth aux. Its RF remote allows full control without line-of-sight—ideal for street rods and vintage vehicles.



Vintage Vehicle Radio

Retro Manufacturing, Henderson, Nevada, presents the Retrosound Liberty DIN Radio. Designed as a smart solution for cut dashboards, the Liberty is purpose-built for vintage vehicles that have already been modified to accept single-DIN radios.

The system offers a clean-fitting, visually appropriate alternative that avoids the need for poorly matched modern units or expensive dash repairs while delivering modern amenities.



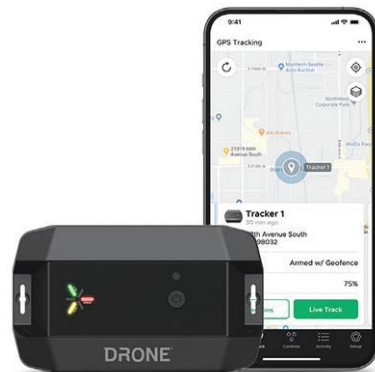
Audio Line

BOSS Audio Systems, Oxnard, California, presents its enhanced Elite line of audio components with premium features and a new, updated look. The enhanced Elite lineup introduces several key improvements, including select WX head units with user-friendly GUI design, expanded DSP customization capabilities and seamless iDataLink Maestro integration. Meanwhile, updated branding includes a refreshed, modern logo that reflects its premium positioning, along with sleek, high-contrast packaging designed to stand out on showroom floors.



New Speaker Line

Rockford Fosgate, Tempe, Arizona, presents its new PUNCH Speakers. Featuring three new speaker lines engineered for precision, performance and fitment-focused design, the multiconfiguration collection includes the P1, P2 and P3 Series—each developed for simple installation and optimized for today's vehicles. Every model features Rockford Fosgate's Auto Fit Architecture, incorporating new frames, optimized mounting holes and a removable motor cover. The speakers are offered in a wide range of sizes, from 2.5 to 6-by-9-inches.



GPS Tracker

Firstech, Seattle, presents the Drone XT GPS Tracker, a battery-powered, wireless, magnetic GPS tracking solution designed for long-term monitoring of vehicles, trailers, boats and other assets. Highlights include a built-in lithium-ion battery that's rechargeable via USB-C cable, unlimited-range telematics via a cellular network, versatile mounting with magnetic case, movement and environmental sensors that trigger location updates only when needed, and the Drone-Mobile smartphone app for iPhone and Android.



Next-Gen Apps

VOXX By Gentex Corporation, Orlando, presents its next generation of VIPER and DIRECTED SMART-START apps with a completely refreshed user experience. Designed to deliver faster response times, enhanced vehicle control feedback and a more intuitive interface for a truly connected car experience, key app highlights include an all-new interface, redesigned vehicle status page, streamlined menu structure and updated vehicle imagery. Starter-Kill functionality can be activated in standalone configurations of the VSM550 and DSM550 security systems. **TS**

20 Lessons Learned From 20 Years in the Wraps Business

The principles of service, consistency & adaptability can be applied to any company.

BY MATT POLSTER
PHOTOS COURTESY SPEEDPRO –
SPEEDPRO.COM/ADDISON/PORTFOLIO

Matt Polster is the owner of SpeedPro Addison, a national brand specializing in a variety of printed products. Learn more at speedpro.com.

When I first ventured into the world of finding creative solutions for vehicle graphics at SpeedPro Addison, I expected a learning curve and was ready to take the opportunity, despite minimal industry experience. It was a leap of faith—a bold decision driven by ambition and a strong belief in myself.

The road has been challenging, but the lessons I've learned have been invaluable—lessons that go far beyond printing vehicle wraps and customizations. The principles of service, consistency and adaptability that have shaped my journey can be applied to any business.

As SpeedPro Addison, the business I bet my career on, celebrates its 20th year, I look back on the journey with pride, knowing how much we've learned, grown and engaged



The principles of service, consistency and adaptability can be applied to any business.

with the community. SpeedPro Addison has transformed my career and shaped my life, my team and my business in ways I never imagined.

These 20 lessons are a distillation of that experience—lessons that any business owner can use to navigate their unique path to success:

1 KNOW WHAT PEOPLE ACTUALLY PAY YOU FOR

Clients don't just pay for materials and

installation. They're paying for your reliability, attention to detail and ability to deliver on their vision quickly. Ensuring consistency in branding, especially across a fleet of vehicles, is essential to meeting their expectations and building long-term trust.

2 RELATIONSHIPS OVER TRANSACTIONS

It's not enough to simply complete a project and move on. One client came to us after facing spacing and consistency issues with

partial wrap placements from a competitor that the client felt didn't prioritize relationship-building. By fixing these issues and delivering high-quality work with consistent communication, we were able to build a long-term relationship. Following up after the job also allowed us to earn their trust, take on future projects and turn them into a consistent client. The power of follow-up and nurturing relationships cannot be underestimated.

3 SHOW UP WHEN IT MATTERS MOST

A last-minute request from an out-of-state client in need of a vehicle wrap over a holiday weekend tested our commitment. We went the extra mile, working through the weekend to meet their needs. This dedication helped us secure their loyalty and future business.

4 YOUR TEAM IS YOUR GREATEST ASSET

Our team and its deep understanding of customer needs is integral to our success. Whenever I ask clients for feedback, they consistently highlight the value of working with our people and not just receiving a great product. Strong communication, a shared understanding of goals and a customer-first attitude are essential to creating a strong team and culture.

5 HIRE CHARACTER, TRAIN SKILL

At SpeedPro Addison, we hire people with a service-first mindset, ensuring alignment with our values. Our team is stronger because we prioritize character over skill. Skills can be taught, but character is

ingrained. Once you have the right candidate in place, invest in them with the right training and tools and you'll see them flourish.

6 PEOPLE BUY FROM PEOPLE

Our company's success stems from the service-oriented culture we've cultivated. When mistakes happen, we take responsibility and focus on fixing issues rather than casting blame. This approach fosters trust and has kept customers coming back for 20 years.

7 PASSION GETS YOU STARTED—DISCIPLINE KEEPS YOU GOING

A recent project with a major commercial real estate client showcased how discipline drives success. We were tasked with wrapping a trailer, but unexpected challenges arose—shifting ground from rain, submerged tires and old vinyl. Despite these setbacks, the team stayed disciplined, communicating necessary budget and equipment changes to the client. We couldn't walk away, and our disciplined approach ensured the project was completed success-

fully, proving that discipline sustains a business through complex projects.

8 NOT EVERY CLIENT IS A GOOD FIT

Sometimes, saying "no" is the wisest choice. We've turned down projects that didn't align with our strengths, preferring to refer clients to trusted partners. This honesty builds trust and clients often return for future work that does align with our strengths, knowing we always have their best interests at heart.

9 LEARN FROM THE MISSES

A difficult client once taught us the value of trusting our expertise. He came to us with a custom-painted car, and though I knew the results might not meet his expectations, we decided to try to make it work. Miscommunication surrounding our abilities led to a poor review, and after a month of trying to get it removed, we realized we should have set clearer expectations up front. Experiences like this show the importance of clear communication and not overpromising to please clients.

10 PROCESSES SET YOU FREE

Our commitment to strict quality control ensures that every project meets



Strong communication, a shared understanding of goals and a customer-first attitude are essential to creating a strong team and culture.

By consistently exceeding client expectations shops build long-lasting relationships and ensure repeat business.



high standards. Multiple standard checkpoints minimize mistakes and help maintain the quality we're known for.

11 CONSISTENCY BEATS INTENSITY

Rushing through a job might help check another task off the to-do list, but consistency is what wins in the long run. We ensure that every task is done with precision, reinforcing our commitment to quality.

12 CELEBRATE THE WINS

Recognizing and celebrating small wins boosts morale and momentum within the team, ensuring continued success and motivation. Who doesn't appreciate kudos for their good work?

13 KNOW YOUR VALUE & PRICE FOR IT

Pricing is about more than just materials and labor. It's about how your cost structure compares in the market and the experience provided, from initial contact to post-project follow-up. Our clients don't just get a vehicle wrap—they get a professional, seamless experience that adds value.

14 UNDERPROMISE, OVERDELIVER

It's a simple-but-effective rule—by consistently exceeding client expectations, whether by working overtime or handling unexpected challenges, we build long-lasting relationships and ensure repeat

business. It's critical to avoid going back on your word in business, as that leaves a lasting negative impression. Exceed expectations consistently, however, and you gain customers and recommendations over the long run.

15 COMMUNITY IS A COMPETITIVE EDGE

Our involvement in the local community—such as recently donating graphics for a special needs school gala—has helped strengthen our neighborhood and created valuable connections that may turn into future business opportunities. Even if those opportunities are indirect benefits, customers like to work with good people. Building goodwill benefits your team, your local community and your business.

16 BRAND EXPERIENCE MATTERS

Every touchpoint with our clients, from the first call to post-project follow-up, shapes their experience. By ensuring we're responsive, consistently available and helpful, we create a brand that stands for service and excellence.

17 ADAPT OR FADE

The key to staying competitive is embracing change. Whether it's adopting new printing techniques or exploring new materials, SpeedPro's willingness to adapt ensures we stay relevant and continue delivering high-quality results.

18 YOUR SPACE REFLECTS YOUR STANDARDS

Our studio is a reflection of our dedication to professionalism and quality. From the moment you enter, you can tell we work hard to maintain a clean, organized and welcoming environment.

Every office detail underscores our commitment to the high standards we uphold in our projects. After all, no one wants to eat in a dirty restaurant, and no one expects quality graphics to come from a disorganized, dirty shop.

19 BE EASY TO WORK WITH

Clients value our open communication, honesty and willingness to help with any issues. A positive, can-do attitude goes a long way in smoothing out the complexities of any job.

20 THERE'S NO FINISH LINE

Even after 20 years, we remain committed to continuous improvement. We understand that perfection is a myth, but the pursuit of excellence drives us to constantly raise the bar, both professionally and personally.

The lessons I've learned over the past 20 years have shaped SpeedPro Addison and facilitated my personal and professional growth.

In entrepreneurship, there's no finish line—only the next challenge to tackle, the next lesson to learn and the next milestone to reach. **TS**



ADVENTURE

APPROVED

STEEL OVERLAND RUNNING BOARDS

Protect your rig from obstacles on the road or on the trail with TrailFX Overland running boards. Engineered from Q235A steel with an extremely durable titanium black powdered coated finish, these low-profile boards mount directly to factory mounting points for hassle-free installation. The vented step surface provides a secure stepping area for safe entry and exit, and the rocker-wrap styling protects the underside from potential damage. Tackle any terrain confidently, with TrailFX Overland running boards.



Exclusively distributed by
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Tonneau Cover

Bestop, Broomfield, Colorado, presents its Supertop For Truck 2 Tonneau Cover that uses the rails that come with the company's Supertop for Truck 2 soft top. Designed as an economical, versatile cover that fits the truck lifestyle, the fully integrated system makes it easy to transition from top to tonneau. Features include heavy-duty tonneau fabric and an EZ-Roll and bow system.

Annex Room

Overland Vehicle Systems (OVS), Santa Fe Springs, California, introduces the Nomadic Awning Annex Room, now available in both HD (heavy-duty) and XD (extreme-duty) styles. Engineered to integrate seamlessly with full-size 180- and 270-degree Nomadic Awnings, the annex adds 56 square feet of versatile, weather-resistant space built for outdoor retreats. Highlights include superior ventilation, easy access and installation, and heat and light blocking with a blackout undercoat.



Jeep JL Rear Bumper

Artec Industries, North Salt Lake, Utah, presents its all-new Jeep JL Bantam Rear Bumper. Built for strength, clearance and style, the bumper offers a high-clearance design to maximize departure angles on tough trails. Heavy-duty steel construction is complemented by sleek styling to match the JL's factory lines, while trail-ready mounting points accommodate recovery gear and accessories. The bumpers are available in bare steel or black powder-coat.

Lightweight Winch

Superwinch, San Dimas, California, presents its Scorpion 10000SR 10,000-pound 12V DC Winch with Synthetic Rope. Engineered for strength and reliability, the winch offers a full 10,000-pound pulling capacity in a lightweight, compact design. Equipped with a high-torque permanent magnet motor and instant dynamic braking, it features a versatile, clockable four-stage planetary gearbox with dual-range gearing. Safety enhancements include a full load-holding brake, integrated overload shut-off and 3/8-inch synthetic rope with soft shackle.



Off-Road Lights

KC HiLiTES, Flagstaff, Arizona, presents its SlimLite 6 Off-Road Lighting System, part of the KC SlimLite line. Designed for performance with an unmistakable design, the 6-inch round SlimLites are suited for A-pillar and bumper mounting on Jeeps, trucks and SUVs. The next-generation SlimLite 6 delivers increased brightness, improved LED technology and an upgraded housing with Moisture-Block technology for durability. A new dual-power mode allows seamless switching between full power for maximum visibility and a dimmed (20% output) mode.



Bronco Coil-Over System

MetalCloak, Rancho Cordova, California, presents its new Rock-Sport Black Coil-Over System for new-gen Ford Broncos. Featuring a patent-pending Parabolic Valving System that improves ride quality, durability, and on- and off-road performance, the coil-overs combine aesthetic elegance with internal design sophistication. They serve as the centerpiece of the company's Bronco 6G 2.5- to 4-inch Game-Changer Suspension & Lift Kit.



New Wheel Offset & Bolt Pattern Variants

ICON Vehicle Dynamics, Riverside, California, and its **ICON Alloys** brand presents its new Wheel Offset & Bolt Pattern Variants for 18-inch Recon PRO wheels including Hammer PRO. New variants include: 6-on-5.5-inch bolt pattern with 25mm offset; 6-on-5.5-inch bolt pattern with no offset; 6-on-135mm bolt pattern with 6mm offset; 8-on-170mm bolt pattern with 6mm offset; and 8-on-6.5-inch bolt pattern with 12mm offset. Hammer PRO combines off-road technology and the patented InnerLock bead retention system for strength and style.

Ford Lightning Lift Kit

Eibach Inc., Corona, California, presents its PRO-TRUCK-LIFT that combines a series of PRO-LIFT-KIT springs and PRO-TRUCK Sport shocks to create a tuned suspension system engineered for on-and off-road performance. Now available for 2022-25 Ford F-150 Lightning models, the systems are designed and tested to deliver maximum ride height without compromising the integrity of factory bushings, ball joints and other components.



Rivian Mini Rooftop Tent

iKamper, Seattle, presents the **Rivian x iKamper Skycamp Mini** rooftop tent. Featuring a premium design offering functionality and all-season comfort, the tent builds on the company's Skycamp 3.0 Mini with PFAS-free construction and a Rivian-inspired aesthetic including exclusive color options,

black-out hardware, Rivian-keyed mounting bracket locks and a sleek, aerodynamic hardshell that minimizes drag to maximize range. It comes outfitted with iKamper's deluxe RTT Comfort self-inflating air mattress.



Rugged-Terrain Tires

Hercules Tires, Huntersville, North Carolina, presents its TIS RT1 Rugged-Terrain Tires designed to bridge the gap between all-terrain and mud-terrain performance. Engineered for light trucks, SUVs and crossovers, the tires offer off-road capability without sacrificing on-road comfort. Optimized tread and siping absorb vibrations and reduce noise for a smooth, quiet ride, and a dual buttress construction and bolstered sidewalls enhance durability and allow for a customized look. Scalloped shoulder lugs and open shoulder grooves deliver improved traction.

Accessory Panel System

1UP USA, Dickeyville, Wisconsin, presents its RakAttach Accessory Panel System (APS) for the RakAttach swingout hitch mount, giving cyclists, overlanders and adventurers a new way to maximize space on any rig—with or without a bike rack. Designed to transform a hitch into a mobile gear garage, camp kitchen and workbench all in one, the three-part system fits fully loaded between the vehicle and a loaded bike rack or works as a standalone hitch unit when the bike rack isn't needed. Features include 200 pounds of capacity on the MOLLE panels.



Toyota Rear Seat Safe

Pop & Lock, Green Bay, Wisconsin, a **Vehicle Security Innovators** company, presents a new Rear Seat Safe (RSS) for late-model Toyota Tundra and Tacoma applications. Designed for the OEM storage compartments under the rear seats, the patent-pending safe provides a secure, lockable storage space for valuables. It fits 2022-newer Tundra and

2024-newer Tacoma models and installs in under 30 minutes. The safe is built from high-strength steel and aluminum, features a four-dial combination lock and aligns with the 60/40 split seat configuration. **TS**

EV ROUNDUP

Recent happenings
in the world of
electric vehicles.



Ford took inspiration from the Model T when designing its new Ford Universal EV Platform and Ford Universal EV Production System. (Photo courtesy Ford Motor Co.)

FORD INTRODUCES UNIVERSAL EV PLATFORM, PRODUCTION SYSTEM

Ford Motor Company rolled out its new Ford Universal EV Platform and Ford Universal EV Production System over the summer, seeking a “simple, efficient, flexible ecosystem to deliver a family of affordable, electric, software-defined vehicles.”

The effort will kick off with a midsize four-door electric pickup that will be assembled at Ford’s Louisville Assembly Plant for U.S. and export markets. Its launch is scheduled for 2027.

“We took a radical approach to a very hard challenge: Create affordable vehicles that delight customers in every way that matters—design, innovation, flexibility, space, driving pleasure and cost of ownership—and do it with American workers,” said Jim Farley, Ford president and CEO. “We have all lived through far too many ‘good college tries’ by Detroit automakers to make affordable vehicles that end up with idled plants, layoffs and uncertainty. So, this had to be a strong, sustainable and profitable business. From day one, we knew there was no incremental path to success. We empowered a tiny skunkworks team three time

zones away from Detroit. We tore up the moving assembly line concept and designed a better one. And we found a path to be the first automaker to make prismatic LFP batteries in the U.S.”

Farley reports the platform reduces parts by 20% versus a typical vehicle, with 25% fewer fasteners, 40% fewer workstations dock-to-dock in the plant and a 15% faster assembly time. The midsize truck will have a targeted 0-60 time as fast as a Mustang EcoBoost, with more downforce.

“We took inspiration from the Model T—the universal car that changed the world,” said Doug Field, Ford chief EV, digital and design officer. “We assembled a really brilliant collection of minds across Ford and unleashed them to find new solutions to old problems. We applied first-principles engineering, pushing to the limits of physics to make it fun to drive and compete on affordability. Our new zonal electric architecture unlocks capabilities the industry has never seen. This isn’t a stripped-down, old-school vehicle.”

A new approach to manufacturing will transform the traditional assembly line

into an “assembly tree.” Instead of one long conveyor, three sub-assemblies run down their own lines simultaneously and then join together. Large single-piece aluminum unicastings replace dozens of smaller parts, enabling the front and rear of the vehicle to be assembled separately.

Because of the integration between the Ford Universal EV Production System and Platform, assembly of the truck could be up to 40% faster than the Louisville assembly plant’s current vehicles, officials predict. Some of that time will be reinvested into insourcing and automation to improve quality and cost, ultimately netting a 15% speed improvement.

“We put our employees at the center and recreated the factory from scratch,” said Bryce Currie, Ford vice president, Americas manufacturing. “We live and breathe continuous improvement, but sometimes you need a dramatic leap forward. We expect ergonomic breakthroughs and complexity reduction—through elimination of parts, connectors and wire—will flow through to significant quality and cost wins.”

TOYOTA ANNOUNCES POWERFUL ALL-ELECTRIC BZ WOODLAND SUV



Toyota presents its new 2026 bZ Woodland BEV SUV. (Photos courtesy Toyota)

Toyota has rolled out a new, rugged addition to its battery-electric vehicle (BEV) lineup with the first-ever 2026 bZ Woodland. Equipped with standard all-wheel drive with X-MODE, the bZ Woodland offers a highly capable combined system net output of 375 hp with a manufacturer-estimated all-electric driving range rating of up to 260 miles.

It also brings additional midsize SUV utility, with 8.3 inches of ground clearance, a 3,500-pound towing capacity and available all-terrain tires.

“With zero emissions and a powerful drive, the bZ Woodland is bringing outdoor-inspired style to our BEV lineup,” says Dave Christ, president, Toyota Group. “This latest entry in our bZ line embraces the spirit of adventure with surprising capability, rugged style and an all-electric powertrain that’s backed by Toyota.”

The bZ Woodland takes the Toyota hammerhead front end with full-width LEDs and adds wide, black over-fenders for a powerful

stance. It also has a slightly different vehicle profile due to nearly 6 inches of additional length and just under 1 inch of additional height in the rear, giving it more than 30 cubic feet of rear cargo space.

Standard roof rails offer utility for accessories like luggage or bicycle racks. For the finishing touch, bZ Woodland-unique 18-inch aluminum wheels with removable covers give it a modern-yet-rugged feel.

The SUV is offered in a single, well-equipped grade, officials note. A Premium Package with JBL Premium Audio, a fixed glass panoramic roof, digital rearview mirror, ventilated front seats and memory driver seat/side view mirrors, and optional all-terrain tires will also be available.

Exterior paint options also capture its outdoor spirit, with colors including the all-new Stepping Stone along with Halo, Steel, Pavement, Raven Black and Trueno Blue. Models are expected to arrive in early 2026.

SUBARU UNVEILS ALL-NEW EV SUV

The all-new 2026 Uncharted EV is Subaru’s latest addition to its growing electric vehicle lineup.

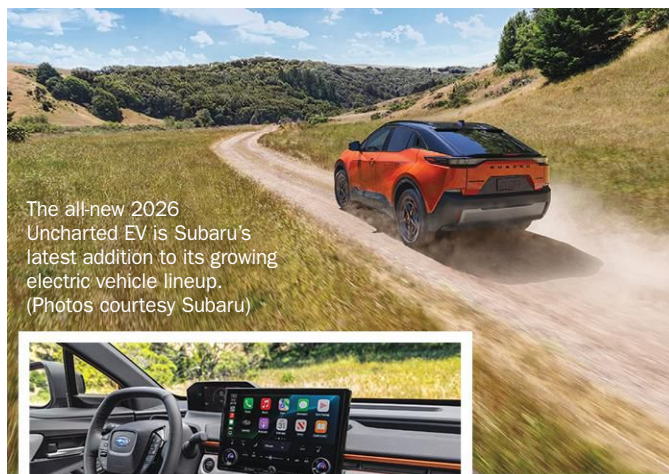
Delivering up to 338 hp and fast-charging from 10% to 80% in approximately 30 minutes, the small compact SUV includes available Symmetrical All-Wheel Drive with an estimated available range of more than 295 miles on a single charge.

As the first Subaru all-electric small compact SUV, the name “Uncharted” signals the vehicle’s capability and fun-to-drive nature, according to officials, taking owners and passengers to their next adventure. It will be available in two front-wheel drive trim levels, as well as the all-wheel drive Sport and GT models.

Performance highlights include straight-line stability, handling and grip on loose surfaces such as gravel, dirt or snow through extensive chassis development. The interior features a standard 14-inch touchscreen for infotainment, including wireless Apple CarPlay and Android Auto compatibility, as well as dual wireless smartphone chargers in the front center console and dual USB-C chargers for rear seat passengers.

The Uncharted also includes a suite of EyeSight driver-assist technologies including available Pre-Collision Braking, Front Cross Traffic Alert, Blind Spot Monitors, Lane Departure Alert, a panoramic view monitor, Emergency Stop Assist, Traffic Jam Assist, Lane Change Assist, Advanced Adaptive Cruise Control and more.

Wheel designs in 18 and 20 inches are offered, as well as a high-



The all-new 2026 Uncharted EV is Subaru’s latest addition to its growing electric vehicle lineup. (Photos courtesy Subaru)



contrast, two-tone roof exclusively on the Uncharted GT for enhanced curb appeal. At the rear, the sleek combination lamps, black badging, high beltline and seamless rear design complemented by a silver-painted lower rear fascia enhance visual impact. Low-profile roof rails on all-wheel drive models add more options for carrying gear.

LUCID AIR GRAND TOURING SETS RANGE WORLD RECORD

Electric vehicle (EV) maker Lucid Group recently set a new official Guinness World Records title for the longest journey by an electric car on a single charge.

Covering just under 750 miles without charging, the Lucid Air Grand Touring conducted its record-breaking journey between St. Moritz, Switzerland, and Munich, Germany, including alpine roads, highways and secondary roads.

"This range record represents a significant milestone—it's yet another clear demonstration of the technological edge that defines Lucid," says Eric Bach, senior vice president of product and chief engineer at Lucid. "Our Lucid products combine world-class vehicle efficiency with the most advanced drive units, ultra-high voltage architecture and battery management technology available today, which lets a Lucid travel farther with less energy."

At the heart of the Lucid Air Grand Touring lies Lucid's advanced proprietary electric powertrain technology. With a WLTP range of 596 miles and 13.5 kWh/100km, the sedan



A Lucid Air Grand Touring EV sedan set a world record by traveling approximately 750 miles on a single charge. (Photo courtesy Lucid Group)

reaches a top speed of 167 mph. Thanks to ultra-fast charging capability, the battery can gain up to 245 miles of range in just 16 minutes.

The new Guinness World Records title marks the second successful partnership between Lucid and Umit Sabanci, a London-based entrepreneur with a passion for setting and breaking Guinness World Records titles, and his team. In 2024, Sabanci set the record for the

most countries visited on a single charge in a production battery electric vehicle, crossing nine countries—also in a Lucid Air Grand Touring.

"When I completed the nine-country journey in 2024, it was just the beginning," says Sabanci. "This new achievement takes that journey even further. I'm proud to be part of a movement that proves electric mobility isn't just the future; it's already redefining what's possible today."

SUMMER HEAT VS. SPEED: WHAT REALLY IMPACTS EV RANGE?



A recent study shows that vehicle speed has a greater effect on EV range than driving in higher temperatures using the A/C. (Photo courtesy Geotab Inc.)

Having survived another hot summer, many electric vehicle (EV) drivers may be wondering how high temperatures and the resulting heavier air conditioning use they prompt affect driving range.

Data from connected vehicle solutions company Geotab Inc. and its affiliates shows that, while hot weather does have an effect, driving speed is usually the single biggest factor in range loss.

Using anonymized telematics data from over 3 million trips, Geotab compared how temperature and speed affected energy use in light-duty EVs, including sedans and

cargo vans. At higher speeds (50-80 mph) in hot temperatures (86 degrees), aerodynamic drag has a far greater effect on range than cabin cooling.

"Drivers tend to worry about using the air conditioning in hot weather, but our data shows that your right foot can make the biggest difference, particularly at high speeds," says Charlotte Argue, senior manager, sustainability, at Geotab. "Just slowing down by 10 or 15 mph can extend your range by 20% to 30%, depending on the vehicle."

Data shows that even modest increases in speed lead to steep range losses. For

example, a 65 kWh electric van cruising at 50 mph in 86-degree heat with the air conditioning on has a typical range of around 143 miles. Increase that speed to 60 mph and the range drops to 121 miles. At 70 mph it falls further to 103 miles, and by 80 mph it's down to just 88 miles—an overall 39% drop in range between 50 and 80 mph.

The pattern is similar for electric sedans, though they're slightly more aerodynamic. At 50 mph at 86 degrees, drivers can expect 277 miles. At 60 mph it's 251 miles and at 70 mph it's 226 miles. At 80 mph it drops further to 200 miles—a 28% drop from the most efficient cruising speed.

In summer, the impact of heat is largely visible at lower speeds, where drag is otherwise minimal.

"Modern EVs have increasingly large batteries and many can comfortably handle most daily driving—including fleet routes—on a single charge," says Argue. "But range, on EVs or ICE vehicles, will always vary with real-world conditions—temperature, topography, traffic and, yes, speed."

TRACKING WORLDWIDE EV DEMAND

Share of EVs Around the World
Share of BEVs and PHEVs of new car sales and registrations in 2024



*EVs include battery electric and plug-in electric vehicles.
Data Sources: International Energy Agency, European Automobile Manufacturers' Association

Presented by
tradingpedia

The electric vehicle (EV) market continues to grow around the globe as new vehicle models and improved charging infrastructure offered improved user experiences.

Financial analysis platform TradingPedia released highlights of a recent report that sheds light on sales of electric vehicles worldwide and the brands selling the most units in 2025. The research team analyzed global EV sales by examining new car registration data from the European Automobile Manufacturers' Association (ACEA) for January-December 2023 and 2024, alongside figures from the International Energy Agency (IEA). It also looked at sales figures for the first three months of 2025.

Data shows that in Norway, battery electric vehicles (BEVs) and plug-in hybrid electric vehicles (PHEVs) together accounted for 92% of new-car sales and registrations in 2024, the highest share globally. Following Norway are two more Nordic countries, Sweden and Denmark, where around 60% of new vehicle sales are battery-electric or plug-in hybrids.

Other takeaways include:

- EVs make up nearly half of new-car sales in Finland and the Netherlands.
- India, Mexico and Chile recorded the lowest share of EVs in new vehicle sales, each with just over 2%, while Japan followed closely at 2.8%—surprisingly low given its reputation as a technology leader and pioneer in hybrid and electric vehicles, with brands like Toyota and Nissan at the forefront of EV innovation.
- When it comes to the largest number of EVs sold globally, China led with 11.3 million battery-electric and plug-in hybrid vehicles purchased in 2024. This represented a 39.5% increase from 2023 and accounted for 48% of all new-car sales in the country.

- The United States ranks second in global EV sales, with 1.2 million battery electric vehicles and 320,000 plug-in hybrid electric vehicles sold, firmly establishing itself as the leader in the North American market. However, with federal EV tax credits having ended in September 2025, sales growth may slow or plateau in the near future unless new incentives or policies are introduced.

In 2024, Chinese automaker BYD overtook Tesla as the world's top EV seller, highlighting China's growing dominance in the market. BYD not only became China's best-selling car brand—surpassing Volkswagen—but also outpaced Tesla in Europe for the first time since expanding there in 2022.

Globally, BYD sold more than 900,000 electric and plug-in hybrid vehicles in the first quarter, nearly tripling Tesla's sales, while other Chinese brands like Geely, Wuling and Xpeng also ranked among the top EV sellers, making up half of the world's

Top Selling Car Brands by EV Sales in Q1 2025

Auto Brand	Country	Revenue in Q1 2025	EV Sales in Q1 2025
1 BYD	China	\$23.75B / €20.49B	932,456
2 TESLA	United States	\$19.34B / €16.68B	336,681
3 GEELY	China	\$10.11B / €8.72B	260,404
4 WULING	China	N/A	157,539
5 BMW	Germany	\$9.14B / €33.76B	133,968
6 Volkswagen	Germany	\$8.93B / €7.56B	132,709
7 X P E N G	China	\$2.2B / €1.9B	94,008
8 Li Auto	China	\$3.61B / €3.12B	92,864
9 LEAPMOTOR	China	\$1.4B / €1.21B	87,522
10 Mercedes-Benz	Germany	\$38.52B / €33.22B	86,800
11 TOYOTA	Japan	\$86.28B / €74.37B	77,159
12 XIOMI	China	\$2.59B / €2.34B	75,849
13 VOLVO	Sweden	\$12.9B / €11.2B	74,483
14 AION	China	N/A	71,890
15 KIA	South Korea	\$20.7B / €17.8B	71,558
16 HYUNDAI	South Korea	\$22.8B / €20.3B	62,912
17 DEEPAI	China	N/A	62,672
18 Audi	Germany	\$17.9B / €15.4B	62,019
19 Ford	United States	\$40.7B / €35.1B	53,714
20 AITO	China	N/A	46,404

*EVs include battery electric and plug-in electric vehicles.
Data Sources: Clarifit, Financial Reports

Presented by
tradingpedia

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EV DRIVERS WILLINGLY PAY MORE TO REDUCE CHARGING TIME



EV drivers value convenience when charging almost as highly as charging speeds. (Photos courtesy Konect)

Electric vehicle (EV) drivers value convenience when charging almost as highly as charging speed, according to a new survey of 1,000 U.S. EV owners commissioned by Konect, Gilbarco Veeder-Root's EV Charging offering, which is operated by Vontier. The research highlights critical gaps in today's charging networks, showing drivers expect the experience to be as user-friendly as filling with fuel.

When asked which features make sites more appealing, almost a third (32%) of drivers said they would favor the chargers nearest to them. They also don't want to wait once they arrive, as 36% said they avoid locations with unreliable chargers, while 29% prefer to have more than one charger available on-site.

Detours of between 10 and 20 minutes to find chargers are a dealbreaker for 21% of drivers, while almost twice as many (37%) won't go more than 20 minutes off track to plug in.

They are willing to pay for convenience, however, as 93% of respondents say they would accept higher charging costs to avoid a 20-minute detour, with an average price premium of 63%.

"This survey makes one thing clear—people don't just want fast charging; they want fast access to charging," says Merrick Glass, managing director at Konect. "It's not solely about charging speed anymore—it's about where the chargers are, how easy they are to reach and what the experience feels like when you get there."

The survey also highlights the importance of the wider overall on-site experience EV drivers are now demanding while they are plugging in.

Free Wi-Fi ranked as the most desirable feature, at 36% of respondents, while 30.6% said clean restroom access was a key factor. Loyalty perks and reward programs (27.5%), as well as on-site food and drink options like a café or restaurant (27.4%), also play a role in charging site preferences.

"People are treating EV charging more like stopping at a convenience store and less like filling a tank," adds Glass. "They're calculating time, comfort and experience, not just price-per-kilowatt-hour."

Konect builds and manages EV charging infrastructure for convenience retailers.

TAIGA MOTORS, AQUA SUPERPOWER PARTNER ON WATERCRAFT CHARGING

High-performance electric powersports vehicle company Taiga Motors Inc. and Aqua superPower, the first global marine fast charging network, have joined forces to accelerate electrification of watercraft and marine-targeted machines.

With a broad technology portfolio ranging from Level 2 destination chargers to high-power DC fast charging up to 250kw, solutions can be tailored to fit each location, use case and vehicle mix, according to company officials. Aqua superPower's expanding network of chargers, already spanning 59 sites across North America and Europe, will integrate with Taiga vehicles and those of other manufacturers for fast plug-and-play charging.

"Scalable infrastructure is key to unlocking the full potential of electrification," says Sam Bruneau, CEO of Taiga Motors. "With Aqua superPower's expertise, we're making it easy for individuals and fleets to go electric—especially in high-volume use cases where the sustainability impact is multiplied."

The partnership creates economies of scale by aligning Taiga's growing demand for powersports vehicles and watercraft charging with Aqua superPower's infrastructure and charging software offering—lowering deployment costs and accelerating network expansion for both recreational and fleet applications.

"By combining demand and deployment, the companies overcome the two-sided market challenge inherent in electrification," says Karen Gill, COO of Aqua superPower. "Infrastructure must often lead the way—but, by joining forces, Taiga and Aqua are accelerating both sides of the equation."

Taiga Motors Inc. and Aqua superPower have joined forces to accelerate electrification of watercraft and marine-targeted machines. (Photo courtesy Taiga Motors Inc.)



MULLEN AUTOMOTIVE CHANGES NAME TO BOLLINGER INNOVATIONS

EV manufacturer Mullen Automotive Inc.'s name change to Bollinger Innovations Inc. took effect July 28, 2025. The company's Nasdaq stock symbol change to BINI occurred the same day, and the CUSIP number for the company's common stock was not affected.

"Our transition to Bollinger Innovation is complete and we now have commercial Class 1, 3 and 4 under one unified brand," says David Michery, CEO and chairman of Bollinger Innovations.

The Southern California-based automotive company manufactures vehicles in Tunica, Mississippi. Both the ONE, a Class 1 EV cargo van, and THREE, a Class 3 EV cab chassis truck, are California Air Resources Board (CARB) and Environmental Protec-



EV manufacturer Mullen Automotive Inc.'s name change to Bollinger Innovations Inc. took effect in July.
(Photo courtesy Bollinger Innovations)

tion Agency (EPA) certified and available for sale in the U.S. through dealerships serving key West Coast, Midwest, Pacific Northwest, New England and Mid-Atlantic markets. Bollinger Motors, part of Bollinger Innovations, launched its B4 Class 4 electric truck in 2024.

EV9 SUV POWERS THE 'KIA CONNECTED HOME'



The Kia Connected Home presents a sophisticated showcase of how Kia's flagship EV9 SUV can power and connect with residential spaces.
(Photo courtesy Kia America)

Kia America is inviting visitors to California's Kia Forum to explore the connection between vehicle and home.

The Kia Connected Home presents a sophisticated showcase of how Kia's flagship EV9 SUV can power and connect with residential spaces through innovative energy capabilities. The EV9 features vehicle-to-home (V2H) functionality, which can—for properly equipped homes—enable energy transfers during power outages or peak energy times.

First unveiled at CES 2024, Kia Connected Home exemplifies the brand's commitment to sustainable innovation and future mobility, according to officials. The installation is designed within Kia's "Opposites United" design framework, merging advanced technology with thoughtful

design to envision how electric vehicles can support integrated and efficient living environments, according to the company.

"We see our vehicles not just as transportation, but as an extension of your home," says Russell Wager, VP of marketing, Kia America. "Bringing the Kia Connected Home to the Kia Forum lets us show the community how Kia's vision for the future fits into everyday life."

The display also features an interactive EV9 driving simulation, inspired by Kia's award-winning Unplugged Ground experience in Seoul. An immersive simulator places guests behind the wheel of an actual EV9, enhanced with a first-person 3D perspective and responsive turntable technology that replicates the sensation of driving through diverse environments. **TS**



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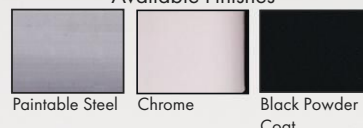
"Retrofit" means that we have designed and developed a column that will fit your specific vehicle, often times with no modification required to your vehicle. When you buy one of our Retrofit columns, you are getting a perfectly engineered aftermarket column that will sit in the original steering column location, and in most cases, will put the steering wheel back in its original position. This is not a stock replacement, it's better!



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PERFORMANCE

From Bottle to Throttle

Performance oils & fluids can be the missing ingredient for customers seeking maximum horsepower.

BY JOHN CAROLLO

Performance oils and fluids are often more important to the overall speed equation than one might initially think. Offering increased reliability and efficiency for today's high-tech powertrains and drivetrains, these pour-in performance enhancers help maximize the potential of everything from racers to daily drivers.

Often an area where consumer knowledge is lacking, shops that strive to become lubrication experts can help clients get the most out of any performance project—both today and down the road.

An educated sales staff can explain the subtle differences between formulations while offering assurances that new blends can bring positive results.

To get the ball rolling, performance oils and fluids suppliers share their thoughts on common misconceptions, sales strategies and breakout products to help translate the benefits from bottle to throttle.

RAPID CHANGES

If it seems like the performance oils and fluids market is changing at hyper speed these days, the reason is simple—offerings must adapt to meet the needs of today's high-tech powertrains and drivetrains.

"The oil market and oil specifications are changing continuously due to the development of increasingly complex engines," says Steffen Niemiets, senior application specialist, technical department North America/Oceania/LAC for LIQUI MOLY USA Inc. "That's

Performance oils and fluids are always evolving, allowing for new and better choices. (Photo courtesy Royal Purple)

why our products are being constantly further developed, adapting them to all current requirements."

Many new demands start at the top and work their way down.

"The biggest factor influencing the market right now is the rapid evolution of transmission and engine technology," says Josh Steinmetz, brand manager for Hot Shot's Secret. "OEMs are pushing for higher efficiency and tighter tolerances, which demand fluids that perform under extreme pressure and heat. This is driving the need for more specialized formulations—fluids

PERFORMANCE OILS & FLUIDS

■ **HOT PRODUCT:** Signature Series 100% Synthetic Motor Oil

■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**

Offered in a wide variety of viscosities covering most makes and models; emissions-compatible; service intervals of up to 25,000 miles or one year; robust detergent package keeps engines clean and resists thermal breakdown and oxidation.

AMSOIL

Jamie Prochnow

Director, Dealer Sales –

Retail & Commercial

Alex Thompson

Director, Product Marketing –

Automotive & Commercial

■ **HOT PRODUCT:** VP Pro Grade Full Synthetic SAE 0WT Racing Oil

■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**

NHRA Pro Stock championship-winning oil; designed to create the perfect balance of protection and performance.

VP Racing

Jaret Lozano

Manager – Lubricants Division

■ **HOT PRODUCT:** Green Diamond ULV Transmission Fluid

■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**

Engineered with advanced 100% Group III base oils and proprietary friction modifiers for ultra-low viscosity applications; improves shear stability and oxidation resistance; delivers smooth, consistent shifting; reduces wear and lowers temps.

Josh Steinmetz

Brand Manager

Hot Shot's Secret

■ **HOT PRODUCT:** Speed Tec Gasoline Performance Additive

■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**

Formulated with top-tier ingredients; provides improved throttle response under partial engine load; guarantees maximum engine performance and efficiency.

LIQUI MOLY USA Inc.

Steffen Niemietz

Senior Application Specialist,

Technical Department

North America/Oceania/LAC

■ **HOT PRODUCT:**

MT-LV (70W/75W) GL4 Gear Oil

■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**

Used in many 2018-newer manual transmissions, transfer cases and dual-clutch transmissions; features high-quality PAO/ester base stocks; delivers quicker shifts and low fluid friction to improve power transfer and fuel economy.

Red Line Oil

Art Kendrick

Director of Performance & Retail

■ **HOT PRODUCT:** High-Performance Street (HPS) Motor Oil

■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**

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Cody Wolf

Senior Sales Manager –

Global Powersports & Performance

that not only meet specs, but enhance performance, reduce wear and extend service intervals.”

Cody Wolf, senior sales manager – global powersports and performance for Royal Purple, agrees that evolving engine technology is bringing about the need for advanced oils.

“As tolerances get tighter, compression goes up and performance increases, the demands on motor oil also rise dramatically,” Wolf says. “It’s critical that lubricant

Learn about the latest developments in the market in order to sell the right products. (Photo courtesy LIQUI MOLY)

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ROLEX MONTEREY MOTORSPORTS REUNION NAMED MOTORSPORT EVENT OF THE YEAR

The Rolex Monterey Motorsports Reunion received the Motorsport Event of the Year Award at the International Historic Motoring Awards (IHMA) ceremony in November. WeatherTech Raceway Laguna Seca's venerated motorsports event, which hosted its 51st running in August, was recognized as the pinnacle of collector car competitive motorsport events, according to officials.

"Each year our team invests endless time and energy to make the Rolex Monterey Motorsports Reunion even better than years past, and this year's event truly set a new bar for excellence," says Mel Harder, WeatherTech Raceway Laguna Seca president and general manager. "We are honored to be recognized on a global stage and would like to thank the partners, participants and loyal fans who help make this event possible."

The 2025 Rolex Monterey Motorsports Reunion featured a



celebration of Formula 1's 75th anniversary, including more than 50 rarely seen historic and modern F1 machines. Also included was a gathering of 24 original

International Race of Champions (IROC) cars, spanning all seven generations and piloted by legendary Formula 1, NASCAR, INDYCAR and sports car racing drivers.

With 14 race groups featuring more than 400 historic racing machines prepared to period-correct racing specs, the 2025 Rolex Monterey Motorsports Reunion brought to life an interactive racing museum that looked to educate, entertain and inspire.

Now in its 15th year, the International Historic Motoring Awards celebrate the achievements of racers and organizations worldwide. The car community nominates contenders in 15 categories that are voted on by a panel of distinguished judges that includes Jay Leno, Rob Kauffman, Donald Osborne and Sandra Button.



The Rolex Monterey Motorsports Reunion was named Motorsport Event of the Year at the International Historic Motoring Awards (IHMA) in November. (Photos courtesy WeatherTech Raceway Laguna Seca)



Performance lubricants are engineered for specific engines and applications. (Photos courtesy AMSOIL)

manufacturers continue to advance their products and keep consumers informed about their engine's needs."

Carmakers often try to leverage the necessity for new types of fluids by charging more, notes Art Kendrick, director of performance and retail for Red Line Oil, driving consumers to the aftermarket for substitutes.

"Increasingly, expensive OEM fluids are

pushing customers to look for alternative products they can use in their vehicles," he explains. "Performance lubricants typically exceed the OEM specifications, perform better and often cost considerably less. This is driving growth in dealerships and shops."

Jaret Lozano, manager – lubricants division for VP Racing, has seen how "the continued tightening of requirements and technological shifts have led to yet a deeper demand for advanced formulations. Demand for lower-viscosity synthetic oils, to satisfy high efficiency and protocols, continues to increase. This is seen in the evolving ICE, EV and industrial worlds where longer service life, performance and new high-performance standards are key. Consequently, this has put a strain on demand for conventional-type oils."

Jamie Prochnow, director, dealer sales – retail and commercial, and Alex Thompson, director, product marketing – automotive and commercial, for AMSOIL, identify two other factors affecting the market: "Increasing emissions restrictions and

efficiency demands continue to drive innovation into modern lubricants and provide opportunities for formulators to address new challenges within an otherwise mature market. While some may think many recent new product categories are gimmicky, in reality they are purpose-built products engineered to deliver optimal protection and performance for the unique operating conditions of the intended application."

IN THE KNOW

Shops may be surprised that many customers know very little about performance oils and fluids. The good news is that it opens up an opportunity for an informational discussion.

One common misconception, of course, is that all oils are more or less the same.

"Lubricants are often seen as a commodity, but in actuality, a performance lubricant is engineered for specific engines and applications," note Prochnow and Thompson.

Niemietz offers an example.



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The market is pushing for fluids that meet specs, enhance performance, reduce wear and extend service intervals. (Photo courtesy Hot Shot's Secret)



"Every oil, whether used in a racing car or in a daily driver, must deliver 'maximum performance.' Only, the definition of 'maximum performance' is different. A 'race only' oil has to deliver this maximum performance for one race only, whereas a motor oil for daily use has to do so for one year and 10,000 miles."

While general standards exist, particularly for oils, there are still important distinctions, Steinmetz says.

"There's a huge difference between products that simply meet a spec and those that exceed it with advanced additive technology," he notes. "Educating customers that premium fluids deliver measurable benefits—like reduced operating temps,

smoother shifting or longer component life—can help justify the investment."

On the flip side, however, are drivers who think the products are too specialized for their needs.

"A common misconception shops must deal with is that customers often believe performance oils are only for performance or racing applications," Kendrick explains. "It's been an uphill battle to explain the features and benefits that come with using a performance product."

Wolf notes that some brand-conscious drivers are hesitant to change from products they've used in the past.

"We often hear that because Customer A has always used Brand X, they cannot make

a change—but that's simply not true," he says. "As long as the alternative product matches the intended application, switching is fine. Most oils and fluids are compatible across brands, and upgrading your product is often acceptable and beneficial."

Still, brand loyalty can be an advantage, notes Lozano.

"As much as technology has moved the goal posts and changed how oils and fluids are made to meet higher standards, a large number of customers are still looking for

tried-and-true brands with key features and benefits," he says. "This is seen at the retail level as well as with the true racer."

SLICK SALES

Shops can benefit from tips, tricks and best practices to achieve maximum sales of performance oils and fluids and the happy customers that come with them.

A great first step, according to Prochnow and Thompson from AMSOIL, is simple—"recommend them."

"Shop technicians are seen as experts in the field. Customers trust their opinions," they say. "Armed with the right information, (shops) have great influence on the lubricant choices of their customers."

Hot Shot's Secret's Steinmetz says it's best to start with a simple discussion.

"Focus on performance-driven education. When technicians understand and can explain why a product performs better—using real data or customer success stories—it builds trust and makes upselling a natural part of the conversation," he says. "Demonstrating improvements in wear reduction, shifting quality, efficiency or longevity goes a long way toward increasing sales."

Lozano from VP Racing says it's best to "understand the customer, where they come from and what they are looking for as it relates to the liquid and the specific application. Some may only be concerned



Performance lubricants typically exceed OEM specifications, perform better and cost less. (Photos courtesy Red Line Oil)



High performance at an achievable price point is the perfect blend. (Photos courtesy VP Racing)



with price, but most want the best of both worlds—high performance while maintaining strong protection at a viable price. Many oils today are very good, but they are not all created equal when it comes to aligning the best liquid with the overall needs of the equipment and, as important, the customer's desires and goals."

A knowledgeable sales staff will help build solid relationships and trust, says Niemietz from LIQUI MOLY.

"Be educated about the latest developments in the market in order to sell the right products to the customer," he says. "Specifications and classifications are evolving rapidly. Also, inquiring about the customer's project will help you understand his individual needs and the project's requirements better. Don't underestimate asking questions in order to recommend the right products."

Royal Purple's Wolf encourages shops and drivers to continuously search for the best solutions.

"Stay open-minded and willing to try new ideas and products. Since products are constantly evolving, there may be better options available than what you currently use," he

explains. "Don't hesitate to contact manufacturers with questions—they are experts willing to help. Most importantly, find brands and products that align with your shop's business strategy so you can consistently deliver value to your customers."

In the end, application is king, says Ken-

drick from Red Line Oil, and opportunities arise with related purchases and projects.

"Always consider which performance oil or additive is required to install the part you're selling," he says. "If the customer needs additional products to complete the installation, don't miss the opportunity to sell them everything. This makes the shop more profitable and keeps the customer from potentially making another trip elsewhere to buy additional parts." **TS**

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Race Helmet Lineup

Holley Performance Brands, Bowling Green, Kentucky, presents its Next-Generation Helmet Line from **Stilo**, **Simpson** and **RaceQuip**, developed in alignment with the recently released Snell SA2025 safety standards. Stilo's ST6, WRX and Venti models now carry both FIA and SA2025 approvals, delivering premium protection and comfort for grassroots and professional racers. Simpson blends legacy and innovation with its refreshed SA2025 lineup. And RaceQuip strengthens its position as the accessible safety brand with the all-new NX25.

Rear Outboard Dirt Sprint Brake Kit

Wilwood Racing, Camarillo, California, offers its Rear Outboard Dirt Sprint Brake Kit. The powerful, lightweight rear outboard option matches the ever-evolving brake requirements of chassis design, tires and driver needs in competitive Sprint car racing. All components are race-proven and rigorously tested at tracks across the United States. The lightweight brake kit uses a SA (super alloy) scalloped and drilled 10.50-by-0.19-inch rotor, dynamically mounted with T-nut hardware to a Type III hard anodized splined aluminum adapter plate.



F-150 Supercharger System

ProCharger, Lenexa, Kansas, presents its all-new High Output PRO Supercharger System, designed to transform 2024-25 Ford F-150 models into true performance machines. Delivering up to 80% more horsepower on 93-octane fuel

and supporting over 1,000 hp with E85 or race gas, the system is designed for reliability to surpass 200,000 miles, making it suitable for daily driving and work trucks. Benefits include increased torque for towing, smooth on- and off-road power and optimum compatibility for 10-speed transmissions.

Mustang GT Exhaust

AWE, Horsham, Pennsylvania, presents its SwitchPath Exhaust for 2018-23 Ford S550 Mustang GT models. With a bespoke 3-inch H-pipe with slip-fit adapters to accommodate the factory header configuration while facilitating a full 3-inch inlet for upgrade options, ample differential clearance and Tier 1 OEM-supplied valves to retain all of the factory valve behavior, the system is made in the USA and available in Touring and Track editions.



Subaru WRX Performance Module

DeatschWerks, Oklahoma City, presents its DW400 Performance Module for 2015-21 Subaru WRX applications. Built for modern power goals, the 700-hp drop-in pump module delivers increased fuel flow and pressure with full return-less system compatibility. Featuring a preinstalled DW430cc pump, ethanol-compatible fuel filter and Performance In-Tank Regulator (PITR), it drops into the OE tank and retains all factory functionality.



GM 4L80E Billet Transmission Pan

Rad Rides by Troy, Manteno, Illinois, presents a machined Billet Transmission Pan for GM 4L80E transmissions. Highlights include O-ring seal, vibrant magnetic drain plug, 17 ARP stainless bolts, filter, boot, bracket and extension. **TS**

Performance Roller Rockers & Lifters, Part II

Understanding the term 'rollers' & the advantages they offer.

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY MIKE MAVRIGIAN



Mike Mavrigian owns and operates Birchwood Automotive in Creston, Ohio, where he builds custom engines and street rods

and performs vehicle restorations. He has written thousands of technical articles as well as nine books on automotive technology during the past 30 years. He can be reached at 330-435-6347 or birchwdag@frontier.com. Visit Birchwood's website at birchwoodautomotive.com.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the second in a two-part series exploring the features and benefits of roller rockers and lifters. Part I, which addressed full roller rockers, shaft-mounted rockers, rocker arm materials and rocker arm ratio, appeared in the October 2025 issue of *THE SHOP*.

The use of roller camshafts and lifters reduces lobe contact friction and allows the use of more aggressive camshafts, as well as eliminates the concern of flat tappet cam break-in issues.

The obvious advantage lies in the reduced friction between the lifters and cam lobes. A flat tappet lifter rubs against the cam lobe, while a roller lifter glides across the lobe as the roller wheel rotates.

In terms of camshaft "break-in," while a flat tappet cam requires a break-in period to allow the lifters to properly rotate in their bores in order to mate the two surfaces and avoid a "dig-in" of the lobe to the lifter, a roller lifter setup essentially requires no time-consuming break-in period, providing the lifter is properly lubricated.

Another feature/advantage of roller lifters is that their locations can be changed during service, since roller lifters are not "mated" to individual cam lobes. Where flat tappet lifters are used, once the cam has been "broken in," each lifter must remain in the original location. If flat tappet lifters are not kept in their original order (for example, during service, you forget to keep them in order), your only recourse is to install a new set of lifters and repeat the break-in process.

Be sure to pay attention to the lifter maker's oil recommendations (especially with hydraulic lifters), as some manufacturers specify a certain viscosity based on their lifter design. Some makers, depending on the specific lifter model, may recommend the use of 5W-20, 5W-30 or 10W-30 oil and to avoid anything heavier than 40W. Just pay attention to their recommendations before selecting the oil. Lighter viscosity oil may be needed to suit smaller oil passages and tighter clearance tolerances.



Today's roller cams/lifters allow for more aggressive cam profiles. (Photo courtesy Crower)

The frictional reduction that rollers offer is only one aspect of the advantages that roller cams and lifters offer. Roller lifters provide increased acceleration and lifter velocity. Because a roller lifter doesn't "dig" into the lobe during operation, the cam lobe lift curve can be broader, without the need to increase lift or duration.

Today's aftermarket performance engine blocks may feature taller lifter bores as compared to OE blocks. Using a standard-height lifter may require notching the lifter bore for pushrod clearance. To address this, aftermarket lifter manufacturers such as Jesel, Crower, Crane, COMP, Morel, Isky, etc. offer 0.300-inch taller lifters, eliminating the need to notch the top of the lifter bores.

When dealing with cylinder heads that feature shallower valve angles, rocker arms often require an offset to accommodate the relocated valves due to both angle and increased valve diameter. As a result, lifter pushrod cups often need to feature an offset to provide proper rocker-to-pushrod-to-lifter alignment.



The location of oil feed holes on hydraulic and solid lifter bodies must align with the oil galleries within the lifter bore to ensure adequate oil delivery.



An example of a "normal" linked pair of roller lifters for a 23-degree head, where both intake and exhaust pushrod cups are centered in the lifter bodies.



Roller lifters cannot be allowed to rotate in their bores. Aftermarket roller lifters are available with tie bars that orient a pair of lifters, keeping their roller wheels in plane with cam lobes.



Offset lifters accommodate cylinder heads that feature relocated valves, such as with 18-degree and shallower valve degree heads that require offset rockers.



Mechanical/solid roller lifters are available in a variety of body diameters, roller wheel diameters and structural designs. The example shown here is a set of Morel Black Mamba lifters.



Short-bodied lifters are available for weight savings, with ear length maintained to provide link bar clearance above the block's lifter bores.



Several roller lifter makers including Morel offer needle-less bronze axle bushings, which eliminates the need for needle bearings.



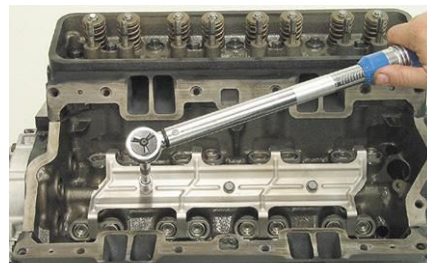
One side of the bronze axle bushing is threaded and secured/installed with a spanner wrench. This also makes the bushing serviceable.



Here, a "dog bone" guide is used to orient the lifter wheels at the cam lobes, registering a pair of lifters together to prevent lifter rotation.



A lifter guide is installed, slipped onto a pair of lifters.



To secure the lifter guides in place, a tempered sheet metal hold-down is secured to the block in this OE Ford 5.0L example.

Offset pushrod cups feature the cup moved from the center of the lifter to 180 degrees right or left, depending on the individual cylinder location. Offset lifter pairs may feature a centered cup at the exhaust lifter and an offset cup at the intake lifter, or offsets at both lifters. Various combinations are available to suit specific aftermarket cylinder heads.

DIAMETERS MATTER

Performance aftermarket roller lifters are offered with a variety of body and roller wheel diameters. For small-block Chevy applications, for example, commonly available body diameters include "standard" 0.842-inch, 0.847-inch, 0.903-inch, 0.904-inch, etc. Lifter diameters can vary among manufacturers.

Regardless of whether you plan to use an OE or aftermarket block, it's critical to measure lifter bores and correct as needed to achieve proper oil clearance for the specific lifters you select. Always adhere to the lifter maker's clearance specifications, but

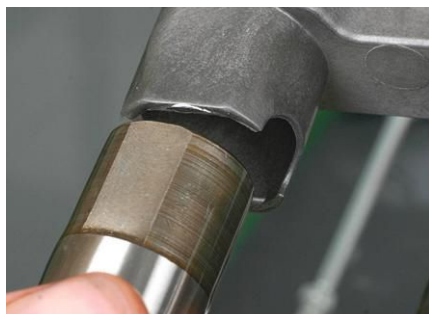
in general terms, oil clearances of 0.0015- to 0.0018-inch are recommended.

Don't assume any dimensions. Regardless of the lifter printed specs, measure the lifter body diameters before performing milling or honing of lifter bores.

Roller lifter wheels are offered in a range of diameters, ranging from 0.700-inch all the way up to a whopping 1.220-inch. A larger diameter roller rotates slower and reduces the loads needed to open the valvetrain.

You may have to adjust your cam specs when using a larger diameter roller due to an increase in duration. A larger diameter roller may also allow you to get more aggressive with your opening ramp design.

It is critical to understand that a roller lifter must not be allowed to rotate within its bore in order to keep the roller wheel aligned with the cam lobe, allowing full wheel contact and free rotation of the wheel. While a flat tappet lifter is designed to rotate in its bore during operation to prevent the lifter from "digging" into the lobe, a roller lifter must be guided in a fixed vertical plane



OE LS lifters are guided within a plastic "lifter tray."



A group of LS lifters secured in a lifter tray. The flats on the lifter bodies align with female flats in the tray.



(left to right) A cartridge roller lifter is designed for purpose-built iron and aluminum high-pressure drag race engine blocks that can accept the 1.312-inch O.D. bronze bushing.

Roller lifter wheels must be kept in plane with the cam lobes in order for the wheels to rotate against the lobes. One method of maintaining this alignment involves the use of "keyed" lifters, which feature a male key that rides through a female keyway in a special bronze lifter bushing that is press-fit to the block's lifter bores.

Note the male keys on these keyway lifters. Depending on the manufacturer, the lifter bodies may be DLC coated (a nanocomposite diamond-like carbon treatment) that provides reduced friction, a hardened surface and high corrosion protection. (Photos courtesy Jesel)

to allow the roller wheel to rotate without "skidding."

Several available designs accomplish this. An OEM offering may feature individual lifters with opposing flat spots on the lifter body. In order to keep the lifters guided in plane, a "double dog bone" plate captures a pair of lifters, serving as a guide. The plate—somewhat resembling a double-ended open-end wrench—features flat internal surfaces that guide the flats on the lifter. The dog bones are held in place by a tempered sheet metal brace that's bolted to the block's lifter valley, with fingers that hold down the center of each dog bone.

One common approach with aftermarket roller lifters involves a pair of lifters that are connected by a pivoting link bar or "tie bar." The bar holds the pair of lifters in plane, preventing each lifter from rotating in their bores. The link bars pivot on each lifter, allowing freedom of vertical lifter movement. The link bar length is designed to accommodate the engine style (SBC, BBC, etc.) in terms of lifter bore-to-bore spacing.

An example of performance lifter design evolution is "keyed" lifters that require special bronze bushings. The bushings are interference-fit to the engine block's parent lifter bores. These feature a male key (usually located in-line with the roller axle, 90 degrees from the roller wheel rotational plane) that rides in a milled groove slot in the bronze bushing.

This style requires no link bar, since the

keys maintain roller lifter alignment relative to the cam lobes. The bronze bushings must be installed to the lifter bores in order to locate the vertical grooves, keeping the lifter roller wheels in plane with the cam lobes.

The design eliminates the weight of the link bars, reducing valvetrain reciprocating mass. Manufacturers such as Jesel offer a special keyway bushing installer tool to achieve correct bushing keyway position/alignment.

Another lifter design evolution is the "cartridge"-style roller lifter. This unique approach features a bronze guide and lifter system that is easily serviceable, even track-side. Instead of a press-fit bronze guide, the parent bore is opened to accept a drop-in 1.312-inch O.D. bushing.

The bushing is secured to the block with an aluminum collet and a single screw. The collet engages to the outside of the bushing with a fine thread that allows for bushing height location 0.0125-inch increments. Once height is established, a set screw prevents the installed bushing location from changing.

The 1-inch-diameter lifter drops in, guided by channels machined into the bushing. The distinct advantage of this style is its ease of service, since the bushings are easily removed when needed for block cleaning, bushing wear or, in the rare event of a lifter failure, eliminating the need to remove a press-in bushing and reinstall and hone a new bushing.

To cite Jesel's cartridge roller lifters as an example, these lifters also feature a large 1.220-inch roller wheel, which reduces the pressure angle of the lifter. **TS**

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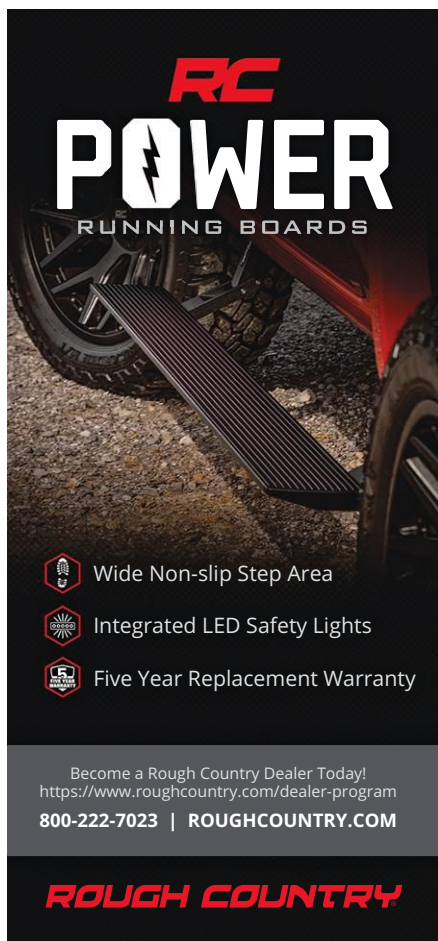
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Different Generations Spend In-Car Time Differently

How do drivers prefer to spend their in-car time? For many, it depends on their age. A new study commissioned by vehicle appearance and protection services company Ziebart finds that vehicles often serve as a personal safe haven for drivers, with each generation treating that alone time in their car differently.

To better understand the critical role cars play in daily life, the third-party study, conducted by Talker Research, also explored how drivers care for their vehicles inside and out to extend their lifespan.

GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES

The average American spends more than 50 minutes a day commuting to and from work, according to the United States Census Bureau. Talker Research found that while cars serve primarily as a vehicle to get from Point A to Point B, time spent driving is often seen as precious, with many treating their vehicle as a sanctuary that reflects generational values:

- Millennials reported using their car time the most for self-improvement, with 44% planning their future and 39% listening to podcasts.
- Gen X drivers are the most upbeat, with the overwhelming majority (89%) blasting music and 18% giving themselves pep talks in the car on the way to work or a big event.
- Gen Z drivers cherish their alone time in the car, with 55% opting for a silent ride and 43% using the time to process a long workday. One-quarter report they've even used their car as a place to take a quick nap (while parked, of course).

"As a company that's been in the automotive business for more than 65 years, we wanted a fresh look at how our customers use their vehicles and why they care for them the way they do," says Thomas A. Wolfe, president and chief executive officer of Ziebart. "These findings reaffirm what we see in our stores every day—people



A new survey shows cars often serve as a personal safe haven for drivers, with each generation treating that alone time in their car differently. (Photo by why kei on Unsplash)

share an emotional and practical bond with their cars."

MAKING IT LAST

Of note to professional shops, despite the differences in how drivers use their time on the road, the desire to protect and prolong the life of their vehicle is universal. According to the survey, the average car is 9 years old, with many owners hoping to make their cars last at least another four years. In fact, drivers reported it would be an average of three years before they could comfortably afford a replacement.

With the pressure on to keep current vehicles in top condition, nearly half (46%) of drivers have stepped up their car care routines in the past year. More than half reported doing more frequent interior (57%) and exterior (51%) cleaning, while others are more regularly checking tire pressures (43%) and oil levels (43%).

Beyond the basics, preventative care has also taken priority. As their vehicles age,

drivers reported their top concerns as:

- Rust (26%)
- Paint deterioration (23%)
- Undercarriage damage (22%)
- Interior leather and fabric deterioration (17%)

"It's easy to remember oil changes and tire checks; there are even warning lights to remind you," says Wolfe. "But drivers don't always realize that rust, fading paint and worn interiors can be just as damaging to a car's longevity. These findings show that people care deeply about protecting their vehicles, which is exactly why Ziebart exists—to help preserve the cars that mean so much to them."

For the recent report, Talker Research surveyed 2,000 U.S. car owners between June 6-12, 2025.

*This article originally appeared on theshopmag.com. Visit today and sign up for the free daily e-newsletter. **TS***



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