

FEBRUARY 2026

THE SHOP

For performance, restyling & customization professionals

GAINING TRACTION WITH **DRAG** RACERS

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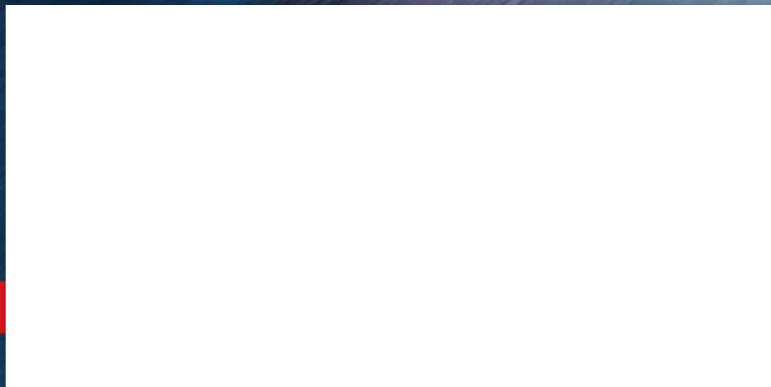


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ON THE COVER

With a growing number of series and classes and a seemingly never-ending supply of excitement, the drag racing market is as solid as ever, offering opportunities for speed shops and engine builders looking to get on a fast track to business success in 2026. See article on page 16. (Main photo courtesy Dodge/Stellantis; inset photo courtesy 3M)

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Jef White
Editor in Chief
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Racers Powering More Than Their Share of Aftermarket Growth

The positive buzz THE SHOP team heard from attendees and exhibitors at the 2025 PRI Show in December was recently confirmed by new data from MOTORMIA, an AI-driven platform for planning enthusiast builds and discovering aftermarket parts. Its new study reveals that racing enthusiasts are quietly powering a disproportionate share of automotive aftermarket growth and innovation.

Despite representing only 15% of MOTORMIA's user base, data shows that in 2025, racing enthusiasts accounted for 23% of total aftermarket value. For research clarity, users defined as "racing enthusiasts" selected "racing" as their goal when creating their build on the MOTORMIA platform, including drift, drag and track racing projects.

The numbers show racing's strong influence:

- Racers spend 68% more per build
- Racers install 26% more parts per build (9.5 vs. 7.5)
- The average component they choose costs 33% more

Across key categories, their spending per build surges even further, with:

- 50% more spent on brakes
- 30% more spent on cooling systems
- 44% more spent on suspension
- 41% more spent on ECU and engine management

"These are not casual modifiers," says Isaac Bunick, CEO of MOTORMIA. "Racing enthusiasts behave like real-world R&D teams. They're engineering, testing and pushing components to the limit. Their needs accelerate innovation for the entire industry."

The online platform has found that what enthusiasts are building digitally is a leading predictor of real-world buying behavior.

"MOTORMIA doesn't just track purchases—it tracks intent," Bunick notes. "We see emerging categories months before they hit the broader market. For manufacturers, this data is becoming as vital as traditional market research."

Even for brands not focused on racing, the behavior of racing enthusiasts holds lessons for the broader industry, as the company describes:

- Performance culture shapes mainstream trends: Innovations developed for racing become standard upgrades in the general market.
- High-intent segments deliver disproportionate revenue: Focused audiences, from racers to EV builders, outperform general audiences.
- Data-driven personalization is the new competitive advantage: Understanding motivations, budgets and planned builds unlocks smarter product development.
- D2C relationships matter more than ever: Racing users reward brands that provide expertise, specificity and direct engagement.

To summarize, racers "spend more, innovate faster and push the limits of what's possible," Bunick says. "If you want to see the future of this industry, follow the people chasing the next tenth of a second." **TS**

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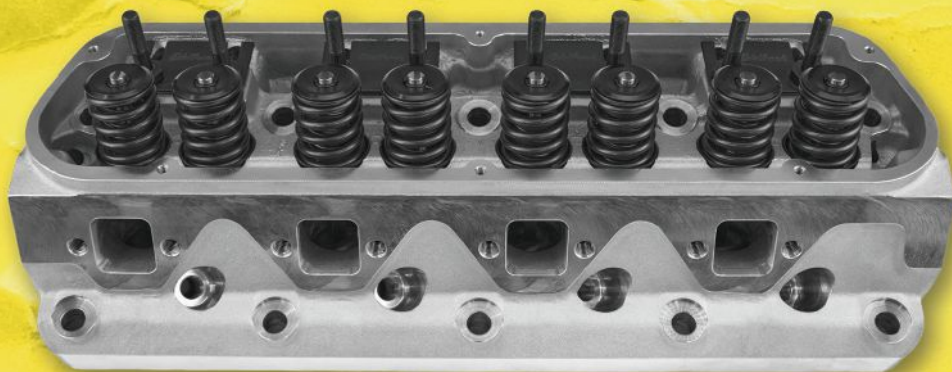
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The 2025 SEMA Show lived up to its billing as the automotive aftermarket's most influential business gathering. (Photo courtesy SEMA)

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2025 SEMA REPORT

SHOW

The 2025 SEMA Show has come and gone, living up to its billing as the automotive aftermarket's most influential business gathering. With more than 153,000 attendees from 140 countries and regions, 2,300 exhibiting brands—including 500 first-time exhibitors—and over 2,500 members of the global media covering every corner of the Las Vegas Convention Center, the show set the stage for ideas, products and automotive passion.

Held Nov. 4-7, the SEMA Show served as a dynamic crossroads for commerce and creativity, where the industry's top innovators and brands gathered to define the future of automotive performance and personalization. This year spotlighted ingenuity and resilience, offering a launchpad for product debuts, strategic partnerships and forward-looking insights.

"The SEMA Show is a global pop-up marketplace where business and culture intersect," says Tom Gattuso, SEMA vice president of events. "This year highlighted the industry's ability to adapt and innovate,

from emerging propulsion technologies to next-generation customization trends. By connecting manufacturers, buyers and enthusiasts in one dynamic environment—and extending the connection well beyond



From left: Mike Spagnola, SEMA president and chief executive officer; Steve Hill, Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority (LVCVA) CEO/president; Melanie White, SEMA board chair; Mohammed Ben Sulayem, Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA) president; Rep. Dina Titus, First Congressional District of Nevada; and Glen Cromwell, National Hot Rod Association (NHRA) president. (Photo courtesy SEMA)

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the show itself—it continues to shape the future of automotive performance, personalization and industry direction.”

A broad spectrum of propulsion technologies, from internal combustion and hybrids to hydrogen and battery-electric platforms, stood alongside new products and featured advancements in materials, connectivity and design, show officials noted. The future of advanced driver-assistance systems was also on display from market leaders introducing the latest tools and equipment to repair and modify ADAS-equipped vehicles.

OEMs also leveraged the show to launch bold concepts blending heritage with innovation, reinforcing the brands’ commitments to performance, personalization and alternative propulsion, including:

- Ford showcased its Ford Custom Garage packages, including performance accessories for the F-150 Raptor R and previews of future customization options.
- Honda highlighted race-inspired builds under its HRC Performance Parts banner, reinforcing its motorsports heritage.
- Mopar/Stellantis drew attention with the Ram 1500 “The Dude,” a retro sport truck concept, and the Dodge SIXPACK Charger concept—a 550-hp twin-turbo build featuring carbon fiber aerodynamic enhancements.
- Nissan introduced off-road and performance concepts, including a rugged Frontier Project Adventure and a track-focused Z NISMO showcase, complemented by immersive experiences and branded merchandise.
- Toyota unveiled the Camry GT-S and Tacoma H2-Overlander and revived the Scion name with the Scion 01 hybrid side-by-side, emphasizing creativity and versatility across segments and powertrains.

A wide variety of celebrities and racing legends made appearances throughout the week, leading up to Friday’s public events and that evening’s SEMA Fest. Millions more around the globe were able to follow and engage with the show through 31 hours of content livestreamed on SEMA Live, solidifying the show as the center of the automotive universe during the most powerful week of the year.

ANNUAL AWARD RECIPIENTS

The Specialty Equipment Market Association

(SEMA) announced the winners of its Content Creator of the Year, Gen-III Innovator of the Year and Person of the Year awards during the SEMA Industry Honors program at the 2025 SEMA Show. The awards recognize industry members for their significant and transformative contributions to the automotive aftermarket during the past year.

PERSON OF THE YEAR: DEAN CASE (MOTIVO ENGINEERING)



Person of the Year: Dean Case of Motivo Engineering (left). (Photo courtesy SEMA)

An advocate for SEMA and its Emerging Trends & Technology Network (ETTN) council, Case played an instrumental role in bridging the gap between the aftermarket industry and the Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE) community in 2025, according to officials when announcing the award. He also played a pivotal role in the success of the ETTN/SAE student career event at the SEMA Garage, the largest career fair the association has ever hosted. The event brought together a diverse range of experts and actively engaged schools and was carefully documented through professional videography, amplifying SEMA’s mission to a wider audience.

GEN-III INNOVATOR OF THE YEAR: ANDRIUS LISKUS (LABA7, UAB)



Gen-III Innovator of the Year: Andrius Liskus of LABA7. (Photo courtesy SEMA)

Liskus solved a major barrier in advanced suspension testing—accessibility. High-speed, high-precision damper testing typically requires large, stationary machines with high-voltage, high-amperage power inputs, which limits their use to specialized R&D facilities. With the EMA, or Electromag-

netic Damper Test System, Liskus and his team developed a solution that delivers lab-grade performance while running from a standard 110V socket. Race teams, independent developers and workshops can now run the same level of dynamic testing that was once only available inside OEM labs.

CONTENT CREATOR OF THE YEAR: WESTEN CHAMPLIN



Content Creator of the Year: Westen Champlin, center. (Photo courtesy SEMA)

The SEMA Content Creator of the Year Award recognizes and celebrates a content creator’s dedication to enriching automotive culture. Champlin’s made a significant impact in shaping a vibrant community and fostering a positive environment among automotive enthusiasts. Garnering more than 4 million subscribers on YouTube, 3.8 million followers on TikTok, 2.5 million followers on Instagram and 3.3 million followers on Facebook, his creative efforts on social media have elevated the discourse around automotive passions and inspired a deeper appreciation for the art and innovation within the industry.

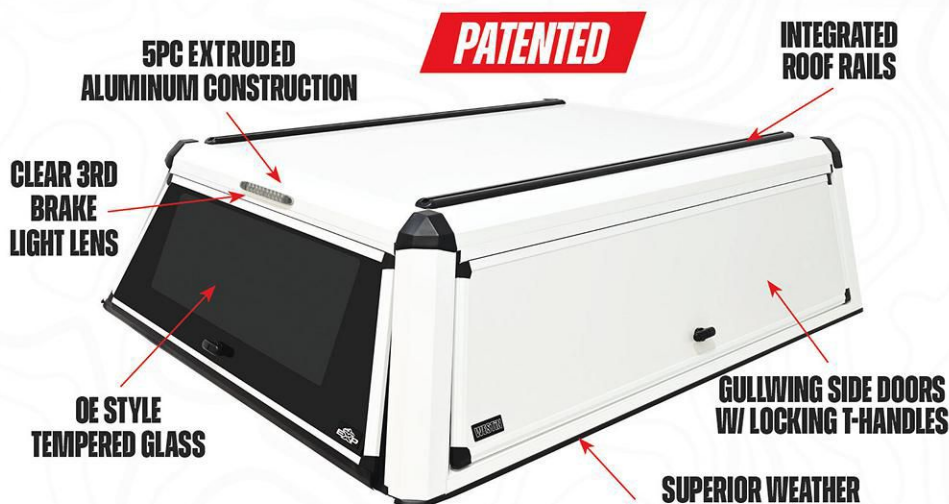
TREPANIER WINS BATTLE OF THE BUILDERS



“Fenderless,” a 1936 Ford roadster built by well-known customizer Troy Trepanier was crowned overall winner of the 2025 SEMA Battle of the Builders presented by Mothers Polish. (Photos courtesy SEMA)



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Thomas Dickerson earned the BFGoodrich Young Guns title with his personal 1967 Chevrolet C10 build. (Photo courtesy SEMA)

Well-known customizer Troy Trepanier was crowned the overall winner of the 2025 SEMA Battle of the Builders presented by Mothers Polish competition. His 1936 Ford roadster named “Fenderless” won the Hot Rod/Hot Rod Truck category and edged out three other class champions—Tim Franklin (Sport Compact/Import Performance), Ron Jones (Off-Road) and Thomas Dickerson (BFGoodrich Young Guns)—to secure the overall title.

Trepanier, a fixture in the custom car world, also earned the Battle of the Builders title in 2017.

“It was great to be back in the SEMA Battle of the Builders contest. It has grown a lot since we first won the event eight years ago,” says Trepanier. “We finally had a car worthy of being back in the competition. There were so many great cars this year. Everybody was a winner—the Top 40, Top 12 and especially the final four.”

Completed in January 2025, “Fenderless” is a completely scratch-built vehicle designed to resemble a 1936 Ford roadster, but with every dimension reworked to achieve ideal proportions as an open-wheel car. Every major component of the project was fabricated in-house at Rad Rides by Troy in Manteno, Illinois, including the body, chassis, suspension and all machined parts.

The car features a 1957 McCullough supercharged 312-ci Ford Y-block engine paired with a Bowler 4R70W transmission and quick-change rear axle with torsion bar suspension. The bodywork, paint and interior were handled entirely by Trepanier’s team, which finished the roadster with a modified Porsche Aventurine Green Metallic color to radiate elegance.

“Trepanier’s vehicle is a testament to the

level of creativity, craftsmanship and innovation that define the SEMA Battle of the Builders competition,” says RJ de Vera, SEMA vice president of marketing. “This program celebrates the builders who push the boundaries of what’s possible and inspire the next generation of automotive visionaries.”

SEMA Battle of the Builders recognizes top vehicle builders, celebrating innovation, craftsmanship and passion within the automotive aftermarket industry. Franklin won Sport Compact/Import Performance with a 1960 Porsche Custom 356 featuring a contoured body with rolled rocker panels and a fresh, streamlined look. Jones’ Off-Road-winning 1973 VW Thing was created from the ground up with a one-off chromoly long-travel tube chassis and features more than 350 machined pieces. Dickerson earned the BFGoodrich Young Guns title with a 1967 Chevrolet C10 built on his own with custom engine bay, glass, headlights and interior.

PRO CUP CHALLENGE



Automotive Concepts of Minneapolis won the 2025 SEMA PRO Cup Challenge for its accessorized 2025 Ford F-150 SuperCrew pickup. (Photo courtesy SEMA)

Automotive Concepts of Minneapolis won the 2025 SEMA PRO (Professional Restylers Organization) Cup Challenge for its accessorized 2025 Ford F-150 SuperCrew that demonstrates the value and artistry of the automotive restyling industry.



Tim Franklin won the Battle of the Builder’s Sport Compact/Import Performance category with a 1960 Porsche Custom 356. (Photo courtesy SEMA)



Ron Jones’ 1973 VW Thing was named champion of the 2025 Battle of the Builders’ Off-Road category. (Photo courtesy SEMA)

Held annually at the SEMA Show, the PRO Cup Challenge invites automotive restylers to design an accessory package for a new-model vehicle that appeals to a broad audience. Winner are selected for their marketability, creativity, ease of replication and profitability by a panel of judges.

Showcasing golden anniversary graphics celebrating 50 years of SuperCrew models, the F-150 was built around the theme “Black Label” and badged “5.0” to note the powerful 5.0L Coyote engine under the hood.

“Automotive Concepts’ build showcases exactly what the PRO Cup Challenge is about—turning creativity into real business opportunity,” says Kevin Gillis, PRO chair. “They’ve created a one-of-a-kind vehicle that dealerships can sell, customers will love and the aftermarket can capitalize on. It’s exciting, it’s attainable and we’re proud to honor them for this achievement.”

The Ford F-150 accessory package includes:

- Suspension lowering kit (UMI Performance)
- 22-inch wheels, 22X10 – 18 Battle (Arena Wheel Co.)
- 22-inch tires Proxes STIII 305/40-22 (Toyo Tire Co.)
- Fender flares/Extend A Fender (Bushwacker)
- Hood scoop (Air Design)
- Power sunroof, 700 Series (Champion Automotive)
- Window tint, 50% CTX (LLumar)
- Front lip spoiler (Air Design)
- Tailgate spoiler (Air Design)

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Dino Perfetti, left, and Nick Stanley, right, of Automotive Concepts celebrate their shop's win in the PRO Cup Challenge with Mike Spagnola, SEMA president and CEO. (Photo courtesy SEMA)

- Cab spoiler (Air Design)
- Brake caliper covers (Rough Country)
- Custom graphics/badging (AC/Luxwood)
- Leather interior (Katzkin)
- Side mirror covers, gloss black (Trim Illusion)
- Soft roll-up tonneau cover (Real Truck)

Meanwhile, Auto Additions from Westerville, Ohio, earned the PRO Cup Challenge People's Choice Award for its customized 2025 Lexus GX 550, as voted on by SEMA Show attendees. Themed the "Takumi Edition," the build features premium accessories from Eastman/LLumar, XPEL, Tri-State, Oracle Lighting, Rago Fab, Avery, VOXX, Luxwood and Katzkin.



Auto Additions from Westerville, Ohio, earned the PRO Cup Challenge People's Choice Award for its customized 2025 Lexus GX 550, as voted on by SEMA Show attendees. (Photo courtesy SEMA)

Additional companies that competed in the PRO Cup Challenge were Sun Line Sunroofs (2026 Chevrolet Silverado 1500); MARS of Billings (2026 Kia Sportage); Auto Trim Restyling (2025 Toyota 4Runner) and DV8 Customs (2025 Ford Bronco).

NEW PRODUCT AWARDS

Parts introductions are a major part of the SEMA Show, with some of the most innovative honored with New Product Awards. More than 1,300 components vied for top honors

across 15 categories in 2025, each evaluated for their breakthrough engineering and business potential.

BEST CAR CARE & PROTECTION PRODUCT

- **WINNER: Ngenco Paint Protection Spray (Ngenco USA – PPS)**
- Runner-Up: Optima Xem (Steamer Americas Inc.)

BEST COLLISION REPAIR & REFINISH PRODUCT

- **WINNER: Revv Integration Ecosystem (Revv ADAS)**
- Runner-Up: Multibench EXT (Spanesi)
- Runner-Up: GPR+ Pro Cart (KECO Body Repair Products)

BEST EMERGING TECHNOLOGY PRODUCT

- **WINNER: Dynam Labs VCU+**

(Dynam Labs Inc.)

- Runner-Up: Kinetic Vision (Kinetic Automation)
- Runner-Up: Flush Fastener (Flush Fasteners)

BEST ENGINEERED NEW PRODUCT

- **WINNER: 2024-25 Harley-Davidson M8 Supercharger Kit (ProCharger Superchargers)**
- Runner-Up: E-CLIK Universal Kit for Remote Reservoir Shocks (Suspension Direct Inc.)
- Runner-Up: Terminator X Bluetooth Module 558-483 (Holley Performance Brands)

BEST EXTERIOR ACCESSORY PRODUCT

- **WINNER: Hoodini 1973-80 C/K Series Pickup/Blazer Hood Hinges, Steel (Speedway Motors)**
- Runner-Up: FLATED Air-Carrier – Refresh (FLATED)
- Runner-Up: RealTruck MRC-3000 (RealTruck)

BEST INTERIOR ACCESSORY PRODUCT

- **WINNER: SRX-GM14128 (Stinger)**
- Runner-Up: RTX-88C-PU-X Chevy/GMC 1988-91 RTX Gauge System (Dakota Digital)
- Runner-Up: Custom CTX-60-Diamond Full Backrest Bench Seat, 60-Inch, Rustic Brown With Chestnut Stitch (Distinctive Industries)



More than 1,300 components vied for top honors across 15 categories in the SEMA Show's 2025 New Product Awards. (Photo by Jef White)



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Among the special displays at the 2025 SEMA Show was FutureTech Studio. (Photo by Jef White)

BEST PACKAGE DESIGN & DISPLAY PRODUCT

- **WINNER: Seat Cover Solutions Mini Product Display (Seat Cover Solutions)**
- Runner-Up: DashPlay Connected Car Experience (AutoMeter)
- Runner-Up: RealTruck Truck Bed Cover Hero Display (RealTruck)

BEST PERFORMANCE/ RACING PRODUCT

- **WINNER: SMART SuperCap HB1600X Starting Battery (MuxWiring Inc.)**
- Runner-Up: Gateway Lite (ECUMaster)
- Runner-Up: TH400, 4L80-E Adjustable Low/Reverse Servo Kits (Sonnax)

BEST PERFORMANCE/ STREET PRODUCT

- **WINNER: Fox Body Mustang Short Long Arm Conversion System (Detroit Speed)**
- Runner-Up: LOCK Sleeve – Weld-Free Turbo Compressor Outlet Adapter; Suits Vibrant & Ticon Clamps (Turbosmart)
- Runner-Up: 1967-68 Mustang/Cougar Stealth In-Dash Hydraulic Master Cylinder Kit (Modern Driveline)

BEST POWERSPORTS & UTILITY VEHICLE PRODUCT

- **WINNER: Moto-Chok (Z-TRAK)**
- Runner-Up: INFLATiQ by RIMiQ Portable Tire Inflator With QwikFlow Technology (All-Fit Automotive + RIMiQ)
- Runner-Up: Vapor Trapper (Vapor Trapper)

BEST STREET ROD & CUSTOM CAR PRODUCT

- **WINNER: GM LS Compatible 376-ci Engine and ZF-8 Speed Automatic Transmission (BluePrint Engines)**
- Runner-Up: 2.00-Inch Drop, Aluminum, Bolt-In Hub ProSpindle Kit (Wilwood Disc Brakes)
- Runner-Up: Vapor Trapper (Vapor Trapper)

BEST TIRE & RELATED PRODUCT

- **WINNER: INFLATiQ by RIMiQ Portable Tire Inflator With QwikFlow Technology (All-Fit Automotive + RIMiQ)**
- Runner-Up: N'Fera Sport (Nexen Tire America)

BEST TOOLS & EQUIPMENT PRODUCT

- **WINNER: SPARQ Diagnostic (SPARQ)**
- Runner-Up: ValvoMax Bag-in-Box Oil Change System (ValvoMax Oil Drain System)

- Runner-Up: F6 Pro (Teslong)

BEST TRUCK & OFF-ROAD PRODUCT

- **WINNER: FOX 2019-On Jeep JK/JL/JT QSE Links (FOX)**
- Runner-Up: Disc Brake Adapter Axle Extender (Capivara Industries LLC)
- Runner-Up: 2024 Lexus GX550 1.25-3-Inch LIFT 3.0 STAGE 6 Suspension System Billet With Skid Plates CDEV (RANDYS Worldwide)

BEST WHEEL & RELATED PRODUCT

- **WINNER: Method 709 HD (Heavy-Duty) Bead Grip Wheel With Optional Forged Rings (Method Race Wheels)**
- Runner-Up: Method 709 Forged Impact Ring (Method Race Wheels)
- Runner-Up: MT Classic Forged Wheels (Mickey Thompson Tires and Wheels)

FUTURETECH STUDIO

Among the special displays at the SEMA Show was FutureTech Studio.

Designed to deliver an “interactive experience that brings tomorrow’s automotive aftermarket technology to life,” according to officials, the space combined hands-on demos, more than 45 cutting-edge displays, 30 vehicles and a dedicated Education Stage

featuring microlearning sessions and panels throughout the show.

“Innovation is the heartbeat of the automotive aftermarket,” says Luis Morales, SEMA director of vehicle technology and product development. “FutureTech Studio is where bold ideas meet practical solutions, giving the world a glimpse of how creativity and engineering will shape mobility for decades to come.”

FutureTech Studio celebrates ingenuity from every corner of the industry, from garage-built breakthroughs to multimillion-dollar prototypes.

Focus areas included Future Fuels, Drivetrains, Manufacturing and Technology. A personal electric aircraft was even on display. **TS**

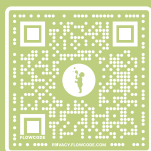
Designed to offer an interactive experience that brings tomorrow's automotive aftermarket technologies to life, FutureTech Studio combined hands-on demos, displays, vehicles and a dedicated Education Stage. (Photo by Jef White)



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PERFORMANCE

Drag Strip p. 24 / Fat Fender p. 28 / Products p. 30



GAINING TRACTION WITH **D**RAG RACERS

*Sales suggestions to
help shops hook up & go.*

BY JOHN CAROLLO

With a growing number of series and classes and a seemingly never-ending supply of excitement from participants, the drag racing market is as solid as ever.

Innovation and desire combine to push technologies forward, while old-fashioned camaraderie and a need for speed mean there's always a new goal to reach.

Add it all up and the drag racing market offers plenty of opportunities for speed shops and engine builders looking to get on a fast track to business success in 2026. To help, product suppliers list some of the industry trends they're watching and offer highlights of hot new products to help shops gain traction in the fast-paced world of straight-line competition.

POSITIVE OUTLOOK

Riding a wave of positive momentum from the recent successful SEMA and PRI industry trade shows, the drag racing market seems poised for a big year in 2026.

"Motorsports in general is very strong and drag racing is leading the way," says Mark Beatty, brand director at Red Line Oil. "The resurgence of the IHRA this year has everyone talking, the Red Line Oil PDRA series had a record-breaking year, the NHRA sold out races from coast to coast and the Drag Illustrated Winter Series is building the sport. Meanwhile, Drag and Drive-style events are growing by leaps and bounds. It's just a great time for drag racing."

More events and more series mean more opportunities, says Tom Kundrik, director of motorsports sales at FTI Performance.

"The return of the IHRA and the higher payouts will be huge for race shops, leading people to build new cars and engines and purchase many new parts," he predicts. "With the emergence of more racing series, customers can compete at any level. If they know that there is a place for them to race at any level, they will continue to make purchases to be faster and stronger every weekend."



Know what types of race cars compete in your area and keep the products racers need most in stock. (Photos courtesy Maradyne High Performance Fans)

The trends should make shops optimistic, believes Walt Sipp, director of service and motorsports for ProCharger Superchargers.

"Drag racing is expanding. With new series, more sanctioning bodies and additional classes emerging across the country, racers



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DRAG RACING PARTS

■ HOT PRODUCT:

13-120 Small-Block Chevy Pre-1990 Deep T Sump Drag Race Pan

■ FEATURES & BENEFITS:

Versatile pan offering superior oil control for extreme acceleration in street/strip and bracket applications; trap doors and baffling control oil movement; integrated windage tray; deep sump design; made in USA.

*Canton Racing Products
Christian Goncalves
Marketing Coordinator*

■ HOT PRODUCT:

FTI 252mm 10R80 Torque Converter

■ FEATURES & BENEFITS:

Billet cover; steel stator; mechanical diode; capable of handling 2,000 hp.

*FTI Performance
Tom Kundrik
Director of Motorsports Sales*

■ HOT PRODUCTS:

Drag Racing Products

■ FEATURES & BENEFITS:

With brands including RacePak, MSD, Stilo, Holley EFI, Holley carburetors, Accel, B&M, Earl's, Flowmaster, HANS, Hooker, Hurst, Lakewood, Mallory, NOS, Quick Fuel, RaceQuip, Simpson, Weiland, Speartech and Mr. Gasket, we cover drag racing.

*Holley Performance Brands
John McLeod
Senior Director Pro's/Motorsports
Sales, BU Leader Classic
Instruments, Race Pak and Speartech*

■ HOT PRODUCT: Nitro 70 Race Oil

■ FEATURES & BENEFITS:

Protects 12,000-hp Top Fuel and Funny Car components in NHRA and IHRA engines including the main bearings, upper end and piston skirts; separates fuel from oil during a run.

*Red Line Oil
Mark Beatty
Brand Director*

■ HOT PRODUCTS:

Smart Start Electric Fans

■ FEATURES & BENEFITS:

Eliminate in-rush current and transient voltage sag when the fan starts up, keeping fuel injection and ignition controls happy; same powerful airflow as our standard fans to keep hot race cars cool in the staging lanes.

*Maradyne High Performance Fans
Scott Stutler
Key Account Manager*

■ HOT PRODUCT:

Updated F-4X-140-1 Supercharger

■ FEATURES & BENEFITS:

Next evolution of record-setting ProCharger F-Series technology purpose-built for racers; updated aero package with an enlarged 14.5-inch housing, newly engineered high-efficiency impeller and a larger 5-inch outlet, all designed to maximize airflow.

*ProCharger Superchargers
Walt Sipp
Director of Service and Motorsports*

have more places to compete and more entry points for different levels of race cars. That means increased demand for proven power-adders, reliable combinations and parts that help racers stay competitive," he says. "On top of that, the continued growth of No-Prep, No Time, Drag and Drive, True Street and small-tire classes brings fresh customers into the sport every season. For shops, this translates into a bigger customer base, more builds and more opportunities to become the go-to expert for scalable, upgrade-ready supercharger solutions."

Strong growth indicators are present up and down the various classes, says John McLeod, senior director pro's/motorsports sales, BU leader Classic Instruments, Race Pak and Speartech for Holley Performance Brands.

"We're seeing an increase in Sportsmen-level racing. New series and Drag and Drive events are bringing new life and fresh energy to drag racing, and broader event coverage is helping as well," he says. "We'll

continue to support racers at every level with stronger backing and personalized guidance, especially when it comes to hard parts and safety equipment."

Scott Stutler, key account manager at Maradyne High Performance Fans, notes that even in an uncertain economy, market projections are cautiously optimistic.

"Job growth and growth in GDP are anticipated," he says. "When racers aren't thinking about their paychecks, 401(k) or grocery bills, they are thinking about racing. This should result in higher car counts at tracks, and higher car counts translate into product and service sales."

Serious racers are looking to find their niche and then excel.

"Optimism is driven by market segmenta-

tion and the idea that quality is better than quantity," says Christian Goncalves, marketing coordinator for Canton Racing Products. "As high-level drag racing becomes increasingly specialized and technical,



Most racers start with a modest goal—but horsepower addiction is real! (Photo courtesy ProCharger Superchargers)

Partner with manufacturers that offer broad product coverage, power level options and components that consistently perform. (Photo courtesy ProCharger Superchargers)





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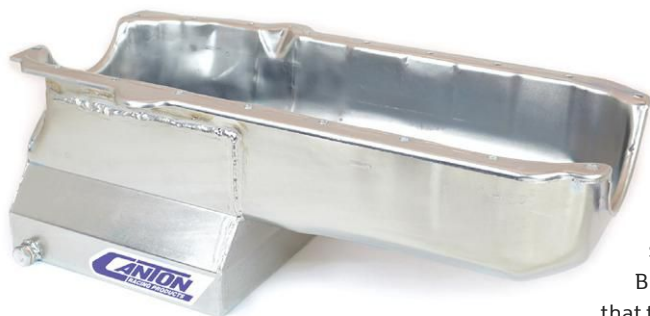
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Racers value product reliability. (Photo courtesy Canton Racing Products)

racers are moving away from cheap, unreliable engine components to go with a more reliable product, even at a higher price.”

SETTING THE STRAIGHT-LINE RECORD STRAIGHT

Confidence is an important aspect of all successful shops serving drag racers.

But suppliers remind them that there's always more to learn.

“One common misconception is that not having parts in stock doesn't matter,” says McLeod. “Racers are more apt to buy what they can see and feel. Anyone can sell race parts, but having knowledgeable staff members who know the parts and what they do will generate more sales. Also, never under-

estimate the value of face-to-face connection with your customers.”

Kundrik has heard from shop owners frustrated that they can't always get the correct information needed to recommend the correct parts.

“On the manufacturing side, we continue to branch out to our current shops to ask what they need from us—either product information or installation information,” he notes. “We want relationships with shops to be an open book, and we are all here to make customers happy.”

Goncalves uses oil pans as an example of a product line with potential.

DODGE CHARGER DRAG PAK

Dodge recently launched its first Dodge Charger Drag Pak—the all-new 2026 Dodge Charger Hustle Stuff Drag Pak by Direct Connection. The brand's newest purpose-built race car unites SRT Hemi race engine power with a drag race-ready version of the new Charger.

Only 50 serialized units will be built. The limited-production drag car is engineered for grassroots NHRA Sportsman drag racers, with each of the 50 race cars NHRA-approved for Factory Stock Showdown (FSS) competition.

The Charger Hustle Stuff Drag Pak is the first race car to be included under the umbrella of the newly reestablished Street and Racing Technology (SRT) Performance division, responsible for SRT high-performance models, Direct Connection performance parts and American brand motorsports initiatives, including Dodge competition in NHRA and the Ram brand's return to the NASCAR Truck Series in 2026.

“The Dodge Charger Hustle Stuff Drag Pak is mission-engineered to equip our FSS drivers with an upgraded, championship-winning, supercharged Hemi race engine wrapped in a next-level race car incarnation of the all-new Dodge Charger,” says Kevin Kidd, motorsports competition director for Stellantis American Brands. “The Challenger Drag Pak's swan song was back-to-back NHRA Factory Stock



The all-new 2026 Dodge Charger Hustle Stuff Drag Pak by Direct Connection is a purpose-built race car uniting SRT Hemi race engine power with a drag race-ready version of the Charger. (Photo courtesy Dodge/Stellantis)

Showdown crowns, and this first-ever Charger Drag Pak is purpose-designed to extend Dodge's legacy of drag strip domination.”

Key features include:

- All-new exterior look and feel
- Upgraded version of the championship-proven, 354-ci Hemi V-8 engine
- Special plaque on billet cover of the 3.0L Whipple supercharger
- Engineered with upgrades, including newly designed Gen-III aluminum Hemi engine block, all-new H-beam connecting rods, Diamond aluminum pistons, all-new forged-steel eight-counterweight crankshaft and more
- Charger Hustle Stuff Drag Pak capable of sub-8-second elapsed times
- All-new, upgraded and strengthened four-link rear suspension with Mark

Williams Enterprises 9-inch rear axle and 4.30:1 final drive ratio

- Reduction of both static and rotating weight throughout for increased performance compared with the previous-generation Challenger Drag Pak
- Hustle Stuff equipment includes all-new, lightweight carbon-fiber front fascia, hood, doors and hatch
- Engineered with lightweight K member and front and rear bumpers
- Three-speed Coan Racing transmission with micropolished internals and lightweight aluminum driveshaft
- Double-adjustable coil-over shocks
- Holley EFI Dominator ECU and Racepak 6.86-inch digital dash display
- Fully programmable Racepak Smartwire power distribution module
- White Knuckle exterior color with 18 high-impact hues available.



With the emergence of more racing series, drag racers of all abilities will be looking for the right products to match their performance goals. (Photos courtesy FTI Performance)

"Many racers only look for the cheapest pan that fits—not one that is performance-engineered," he says. "Professional shops need to educate customers that the oil pan is a critical, actively working fluid control component that is designed to save their engine under race conditions."

Beatty notes that one challenge for shop professionals is finding ways to keep up with the seemingly constant changes and advancements in cars and equipment.

"Companies are developing new parts faster than we have ever seen," he observes. "As a shop owner, you need that person on your staff that stays up to date, talks the talk, and walks the walk. I say all the time that 'real knows real.' If you want a place at the drag racing table, make sure you belong."

Stutler finds that while racers are always looking for ways to save money, they also value quality, service and support.

"Online price wars are a race to the bottom and e-tailers cannot compete with the service and support from a local professional shop," he says.

Finally, Sipp explains how, when it comes to drag racers, there's always another milestone to reach.

"Horsepower addiction is real. Most racers start with a modest goal, but once they get comfortable, they want more power, more boost and faster ETs. That's why scalability matters so much," he says. "Shops that understand this mindset—and guide racers toward equipment with a proven upgrade path—end up with long-term,

loyal customers who keep coming back as their competitive ambitions increase."

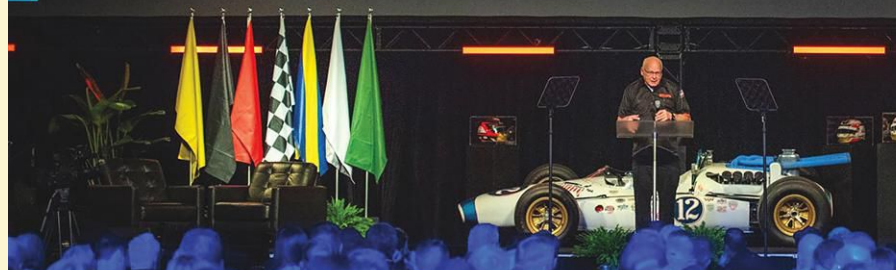
WINNING FORMULAS

Looking to put drag racing-related sales on the fast track? Holley's McLeod says to start with inventory.



The drag racing market seems poised for a big year in 2026. (Photo courtesy Red Line Oil)

HALL OF FAME



Performance Racing Industry (PRI) welcomed three new members into its hall of fame during the 2025 PRI Show in Indianapolis. Now in its second year, the Hall of Fame recognizes individuals whose careers, leadership and innovation have made a lasting impact on motorsports.

PAUL “SCOOTER” BROTHERS

Brothers has been immersed in motorsports and automotive performance his entire life. From his early days at Racing Head Service to leadership roles at Competition Cams and COMP Performance Group, Brothers consistently drove innovation in engine technology and performance products. As SEMA chairman of the board, he was instrumental in the acquisition of PRI in 2012. His contributions to the Society of Automotive Engineers, NHRA, NASCAR

and the broader racing industry have left a legacy of leadership, mentorship and industry advancement. He is also a partner in Driven Racing Oil, which provides specially blended racing and high-performance motor oils.

JOHN KILROY

Kilroy dedicated more than two decades to growing PRI Magazine and the PRI Show, serving as editor for 22 years before becoming vice president and general manager. Known for his deep respect for the racing industry, he played a pivotal role in shaping PRI's coverage and the annual trade show experience. Kilroy passed away in 2022, leaving a legacy of dedication, professionalism and passion for motorsports.

CHRIS RASCHKE

Serving as director of sales and mar-



Paul “Scooter” Brothers was one of three inductees into the 2025 PRI Hall of Fame. (Photos courtesy Performance Racing Industry)

keting at Automotive Racing Products (ARP), Raschke represented the brand at racing events, trade shows and car shows. He also pursued land speed racing at the Bonneville Salt Flats, earning the prestigious Red Hat and Black Hat for record-setting achievements, including driving the Speed Demon streamliner to 459.734 mph. Raschke was killed in a land speed attempt in August 2025, leaving an enduring impact on the motorsports community.



Innovation and desire combine to push technologies forward. (Photo by Jef White)

“Have parts in stock and have staff members on the phones and in the shop who have racing knowledge,” he recommends. “Maintain a strong website. Build relationships with your suppliers. Be at the track or events and build customer contacts.”

Strong supplier partnerships keep businesses from having to go it alone, Sipp adds.

“Shops thrive when they partner with manufacturers who offer broad product coverage, multiple power-level options, and components that demonstrate consistency at the highest levels of drag racing,” he says. “Building a relationship with a company like ProCharger can also generate referral traffic and long-term partnerships. When shops align with a brand that racers trust, sales grow naturally.”



Racers are more apt to buy when they can see and feel the products. (Photo courtesy Holley Performance Brands)

Goncalves from Canton Racing Products suggests focusing on “consistency insurance” with products that will last a full race season.

“Drag racing is all about repetition. Shops should stock and recommend fluid control components (quality oil pans, Accusumps, tanks) that guarantee a consistent oil supply, preventing mid-season failures,” he says. “These products build a reputation for reliability, leading to more high-value, long-term customer relationships.”

To find those customers, Maradyne’s Stutler says having a constant presence at the local drag strip is a great launching point for sales.



Having a consistent presence at the local drag strip is a great launching point for sales. (Photos courtesy Holley Performance Brands)

“Support of the local racing scene is appreciated by the racing community and a great way to get them in your door. Knowing what race cars are on your local track and having the inventory needed to support them will build your business within the local racing scene.”

FTI Performance’s Kundrick is a proponent of face-to-face interactions between shops and drag racers to really get to know them and their needs.

“This is a relationship-based business,” he explains. “With the addition of many series, there are plenty of opportunities to reach new customers and to continue to build the relationships with your current customers.”

In other words, get involved.

“Find a series, find a track, find a team and show them you are sincere and want to be a part of the action,” says Beatty from Red Line Oil. “There are many entry levels for shops of all sizes to become involved. You don’t need a crazy budget—what you need are the right people in the right places for your business.” **TS**



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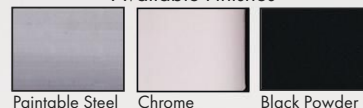
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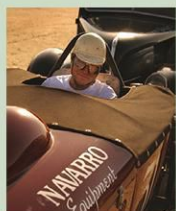
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So, You Want To Own a Drag Strip

An interview with the owner of Rocket City Dragway.

BY TONY THACKER

PHOTOS COURTESY TONY THACKER & ROCKET CITY DRAGWAY



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

You don't have to be a rocket scientist to run a drag strip, but if your name is David Sharp, it certainly helps. We sat down with Sharp—who is an M-level senior manager with Boeing in Huntsville, Alabama—to discuss his recent purchase of Huntsville Dragway (subsequently renamed Rocket City Dragway), his thoughts on the business and his love of racing.



HOW DID YOU GET INTO RACING? WAS YOUR DAD INTO IT?

My dad started in the auto business in 1961, so I have been around it my whole life—ironically, I was at Rocket City when

I was six weeks old. Dad raced Gassers, and he still owns the '67 Nova that he bracket raced after I graduated high school in the 1980s.

I was always interested in anything automotive and would ride my bicycle from my dad's shop to Cecil Hicks Race Cars. Cecil knew I was inquisitive and was always patient with my questions. Later, Cecil built the first NHRA Funny Car World Champion car for Shirl Greer. Dad would take me to the Spring Nationals in Bristol, Tennessee, where I got my first dose of nitro.

I used my allowance to buy car magazines and study them. The internet is great, but the disappearance of printed media and its technical content definitely left a void. When I turned 16, I got a 1969 Camaro and a group of us started doing car shows, which eventually evolved into a major monthly gathering at our local

Rocket City Dragway provides a safe place for young enthusiasts to show off their racecars and performance builds.



David Sharp, right, took over Huntsville Dragway in 2023 and renamed it Rocket City Dragway in honor of the area's aerospace industry. Sharp's son Dawson, left, runs the track prep and race operations.

A&W—enough for Car Craft Magazine to visit us and feature our Southern car culture and strong Pro Street presence.

Unfortunately, after the local Madison County Dragway closed in 1982, many locals turned to street racing. I have attended oval track and dirt track races, land speed races and even Pikes Peak races, but I always return to drag racing due to the horsepower and speed.



WHAT'S THE HISTORY OF ROCKET CITY?

Rocket City was originally established as Manassas Drag Strip by Richard Stocks and the Coachmen Car Club on Turner Family Farms in Harvest, Alabama, in 1961. In 1964, it became Satellite Dragway and remained that way until 1972, when it became Madison County Dragway.

In 1983, it became Huntsville Dragway. That lease expired in 2023, and I took it over that November, renaming it Rocket City Dragway to align with Huntsville's rich aerospace industry.



I BELIEVE THAT YOU ACQUIRED THE TRACK ESSENTIALLY FOR YOUR SON?

My 20-year-old son Dawson caught the gear-head bug early after attending his first Hot Rod Reunion when he was three months old. He could quote the firing order of a small-



The Alabama track enjoys a rich racing history.

DON'T MISS...
TEXAS TORNADO
 EDDIE HILL
SUNDAY
 July 29, 1962
 Eddie Hill shown as He pops the chute on big AA/Dragsler.
Two Supercharged Pontiac V-8s
Manassas Drag Strip
 9 MILES NORTH ON ARDMORE HIGHWAY
 2:30 P.M.

block Chevy when he was five, and as he got older, he would pick any small engine left for scrap and get it running to make a little money.

For his 16th birthday, he got a six-cylinder '55 Chevy with 49,000 miles and he does all his own work. He decided that he wanted to increase his mechanical skills and delay college. When both of your parents are aerospace managers you can guess how his decision initiated much dialogue until the opportunity to obtain the local dragway arose, providing Dawson and his friends a safe place to race.

So, we acted on it, and Dawson runs all the track prep and race operations. He is young but learning, thanks to help from Kurt Johnson's Total Venue Concepts team. I'm proud to say that last year the door car track record was reset with a 3.65 ET and, unbelievably, we had a 0.897 60-foot time recorded on a 152-degree track.

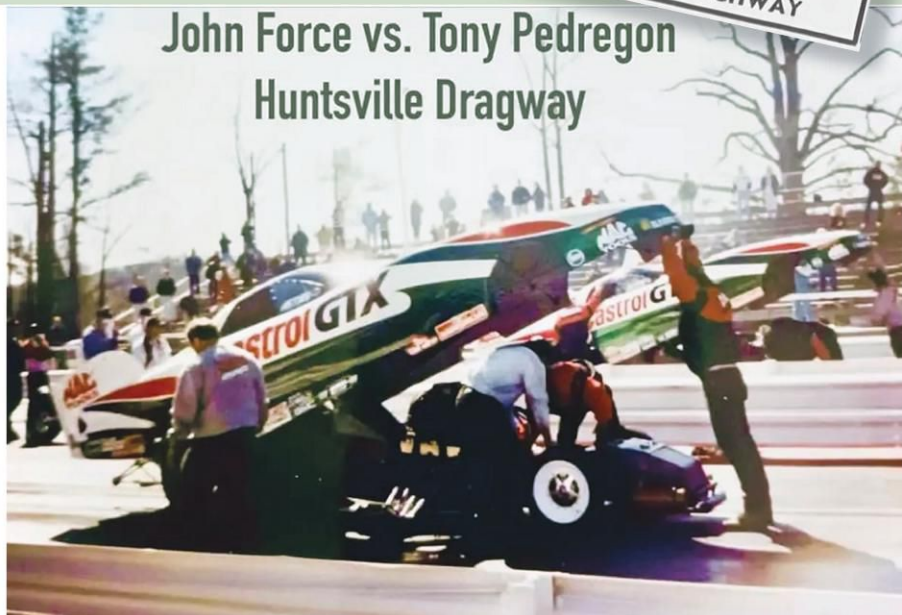
It's obvious to me that young racers operating newer, computerized street cars need a safe place to race. We provide it at Rocket City.



HOW BIG IS THE VENUE?

The Turner Family Farms has been here since the late 1800s and originally consisted of many thousands of acres, of which Rocket City Dragway and Event Center occupies 105 acres in the middle of farmland in Harvest, approximately four miles from Huntsville city limits and 15 miles from the Tennessee state line. The space allows plenty of room for community events, carnivals, concerts, racing, car shows, etc.

John Force vs. Tony Pedregon Huntsville Dragway



HOW MANY EVENTS DO YOU HOST AND WHAT TYPES?

Huntsville enjoys all four seasons, allowing us to be open eight of the 12 months. Our general rule is two regular weekends and two big events every month with one of those a Shock & Awe-type event.

Shock & Awe events are aimed at bringing in people that normally would not come to a drag strip. We look at Rocket City as a blank canvas with endless possibilities. We are blessed in this region to have seven other tracks within a 100-mile radius, but scheduling events around weather and the other venues' programs can be challenging.

We have our monthly International Hot Rod Association (IHRA) points series, along with big money Drive for Five bracket racing. The first Tuesday night of every month is the

Performance Torque Converter's Tuesday Street Drags.

Meanwhile, we host everything from a 200,000-square-foot bouncy house to music festivals to the Fall Smokies Sick Week Drag-n-Drive. We even have a Halloween Cruise, Car Show & Swap Meet in November.

Incidentally, this was the first time for Sick Week in the Deep South and Gassers featured in 1/8-mile drag racing where there is no bad seat to see all the adrenaline-based action.



WHICH EVENTS ATTRACT THE LARGEST CROWDS, AND DO YOU SEE ANY EMERGING TRENDS?

I lean toward the philosophy of IHRA founders Larry Carrier, Ted Jones and Bill

From regular IHRA racing to special events, Rocket City Dragway is keeping traditional drag racing alive and thriving.



The space allows plenty of room for community events, carnivals, concerts, racing, car shows and more.

Doner in providing fans something that makes them say “wow.” I want kids to experience the same type of events I saw when I was younger.

Hot rodders and racers generally support us—the challenge is to put on events that catch a family’s curiosity. Outlaw Pro Mods, Outlaw Drag Radial, Outlaw Dragster and Nitro are all really popular (categories) in

the South. You see the theme that the term “Outlaw” and “Run What U Brung” equates to big power and big speed.

YOU’RE IN THE MIDDLE OF A POTENTIALLY BIG CATCHMENT AREA, SO WHERE DO THE MAJORITY OF SPECTATORS COME FROM?

Huntsville is a hotbed of growth, with 10



people a day moving here from other states. We have been rated one of the Top 5 places to live for multiple years running.

Alabama only makes up 1.3% of the national population; however, Huntsville was recently named the 27th largest city in the U.S.—and is even larger by land mass than Chicago. This provides many opportunities to attract new visitors to our event center and racetrack.

THERE’S ALSO A GROWING MOVIE COLONY DOWN THERE. HAS THAT HELPED WITH HAVING A CLOSED FACILITY FOR FILMING?

Yes, Alabama is a growing film location, and the Alabama Film Office is working to attract productions because of the state’s diverse landscapes, small-town charm and rich history. In 2024, “The Rivals of Amziah King” was filmed around Huntsville and other locally shot films include “Big Fish,” “42,” “Selma” and “Get Out.” TV shows filmed here include the 2021 reboot of ABC’s “The Wonder Years.”

Besides film and TV production, the region has everything from beaches to the U.S. Space & Rocket Center, which is a top tourist attraction.

IS CLEETUS MACFARLAND A ROLE MODEL OR ARE YOU GOING YOUR OWN WAY?

Garrett Mitchell, aka Cleetus MacFarland, is a guy that just “gets it” and has a knack for



The goal is to provide family-friendly fun that is executed in a safe, timely and efficient manner.

providing content that attracts fans by the thousands. What Cleetus and Street Outlaws have done to bring a new audience and spark interest in racing and hot rodding is invaluable to the sport.

Each business and racetrack has to find what attracts fans and what attracts racers, and determining both of those is sometimes hard. We simply try to bring family-friendly fun that is executed in a safe, timely and efficient manner.

YOU'RE ON MOST SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS, IS THAT THE WAY YOU SEE MARKETING GOING?

Deciding what to do to maximize exposure is the biggest struggle. Most older people that have automotive businesses probably struggle a little with social media. Is it Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, live feeds, short reels, commercials, printed media, flyers or all of the above?

Once we get the mix figured out it will definitely make us more productive and profitable.

WHAT ELSE AM I MISSING?

Rocket City Dragway enjoys a rich racing history. In 1993, it was the first and only track to hold an 1/8-mile IHRA national event. It was the first track to hold a \$1 million race in 1996 and in 2005 it was the first track to pay Top Fuel more than \$100,000.

Today, we are in the first phase of a multi-year journey. We want both young and old

to experience "The Tradition of Horsepower & Speed" with our emphasis on Southern hospitality.

We model ourselves as the "Friendliest Track in the Nation" and hold a wide array of

events not only for race fans but the whole community.

We strive to ignite a spark in our younger fans to carry on the hot rod and racing culture for generations to come. **TS**






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BY MARK C. BACH
PHOTOS COURTESY MARK C. BACH



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

Imagine a 40-year-old carpenter becoming the head of a custom shop with 55 employees in Gilbert, Arizona. While Jason Noel might have once envisioned a life covered in sawdust, a chance decision by his father-in-law changed his career direction, and now Fat Fender Garage has become a major player in the truck restoration market.

Noel focused on woodworking in high school, taking all the shop classes he could find. He became a proficient carpenter and loved making things with wood. While his first car was a 1966 VW Beetle, he gravitated toward new cars and didn't think much about working on them.

Later, his father-in-law built a large shop behind his house and soon bought an old truck to restore. Noel was asked if he would

like to help, and when he realized the truck bed was made of wooden planks, he decided to lend a hand.

Soon, the truck was built, and his father-in-law suggested selling it on eBay. They made a \$9,000 profit, which Noel's father-in-law generously handed over.

The transaction showed Noel that there was money to be made buying and selling old trucks. He soon was finding pickups, fixing them up a little and then flipping them for sale. He recalled seeing how Chip Foose had restored a 1956 Ford that belonged to Foose's father and realized restoration/customization could be a profitable business.

Noel initially gravitated toward 1953-56 Ford trucks, and when he realized he would need to create a business for his efforts, he came up with the name Fat Fender Garage.

GETTING ROLLING

Noel quickly realized he was not a proficient mechanic, he says, and hired an employee to assist with the mechanical aspects of each project. He then hired a painter to cover cosmetics. Meanwhile, Noel enjoyed the creative part of the job, helping customers imagine what these coveted relics could become. To this day, he often helps design the styling and rendering for his trucks' interiors.



Jason Noel's Fat Fender Garage in Arizona has become a major player in the truck restoration market.

Noel was becoming so successful with his Fords that city zoning officials took notice, and he had to set up a new, 5,000-square-foot shop in 2016. That year also marked the first of many customers who came to him wanting a truck restored. Until then, he had been flipping trucks and selling the final products to buyers.

Noel was anxious to figure out how to make and keep his business successful. He spoke with Jonathan Ward, owner of ICON 4x4, who gave him two meaningful pieces of advice—one was to "build cool stuff" and the other was to not be afraid to "fire" customers who are not a good fit for your business.

Noel also talked to a marketing representative from Ringbrothers, who noted that their shop gained more market presence after selling the parts they initially had created for their custom builds.

Recognizing that quality parts for Ford trucks were lacking, Noel and Fat Fender Garage (fatfender.com) looked to fill the



With an early focus on Ford trucks, Fat Fender Garage now accepts custom pickup projects of many makes and models.

void. In 2018, the business expanded into a 15,000-square-foot shop that served them well until 2024, when they moved to the current Gilbert location, boasting 43,000 square feet.

Today, Fat Fender employs seven full-time engineers focused on designing manufactured products, as roughly 40% of its business is in the parts arena. Noel calls it a winning recipe for his business.

"We got into designing parts. We were building better products, and we were into building cool stuff."

The business also offers interior packages, shipping 10-15 kits as part of its overall average of 500 parts orders each month.

DOWN TO BUSINESS

Fortunate to be at the forefront of the market when consumer interest in older Ford trucks ignited, Noel worked to quickly expand his shop's reputation among Blue Oval fans. His business model is to "err on the side of quality," building trucks that can be driven while developing new parts as needed.

Noel recognizes that he must be disciplined in following sound business practices, as implementing these builds is expensive.

"There were a lot of years we didn't financially break even—it's hard to make money," he says.

The builder is always seeking ways to improve and admits that, in his early years, he made mistakes quickly but also learned from them just as fast.

Noel notes that many businesses cite their staff as their greatest asset. He goes one step further, believing that employee relationships make or break a company.

As such, he encourages workers to offer new viewpoints and concepts, noting "I'm tired of being the guy with all the ideas. I like to collaborate."

The goal is for customers to develop trust in the shop and crew. As such, Noel listens to clients' ideas and tries to steer them to a final product they will both be proud of.

Once a truck project is launched, Fat Fender does all the work in-house other than powder-coating. Noel says an all-in approach helps control outcomes while adhering to required timelines.

Besides its line of full-blown custom trucks (the Designer Series), Fat Fender also offers its Revival Series of builds. Once the shop has a Porterbuilt Fabrication PB Built chassis delivered, the crew can take a customer's existing truck, add a new Ford Coyote engine and have it all wrapped up in about 90 days.

As part of the process, customers can choose from suspension packages with different drops and rear wheel openings. The timeframe lengthens, of course, if substantial body or paint work is needed. To handle its various projects, Fat Fender has split its crew, with one set working on custom builds and the other focusing solely on the Revival trucks.

Fat Fender is not a service center, and Noel says the shop rarely needs to redo any of its

work. All trucks undergo 1,000 test miles before the keys are turned over as part of a process to detect any minor flaws that need to be addressed.

A MARKET WITH HIGH DEMAND

Noel, 52, has strong views on the future of the truck restoration field. He sees customers wanting high-quality builds done right, with short delivery timelines.

Drivers may desire modern upgrades such as traction control and antilock brakes, he notes, but overall, they appreciate a more analog feel to the truck. He's observed the public pulling back from too much technology, saying, "they want to drive, not swipe."

Fat Fender creates restored trucks that can be driven daily and not just on weekends. Noel adds that, while he believes the current movement toward electric vehicles will be short-lived, fuel-efficient trucks will always be coveted.

Increased consumer demands may even force some smaller shops to grow or develop partnerships, he predicts, noting that "future restoration shops will be capable of producing 50-100 restored vehicles a year."

With a winning formula, Noel and Fat Fender have developed a business model and processes that have produced industry innovations, accolades and plenty of satisfied customers. The former carpenter ended up building something special. **TS**



Stock Your Shelves With These
Go-Fast Components



Toyota Twin-Disc Clutches

Competition Clutch, Anaheim, California, offers its 245 Series Twin-Disc Clutch Kits, with an application engineered for pairing the Toyota 2JZ engine with a T56 transmission. Available in both street and track versions, the 245 Series delivers an

easy clutch pedal feel and smooth engagement, with the strength to handle serious horsepower across three performance levels, up to 1,200 hp.

GM A-Body Chassis

Ridetech, Jasper, Indiana, introduces its MOMENTUM Series Chassis, now available for 1968-72 GM A-Body coupes including the Chevrolet Chevelle, Buick Skylark and GSX, and Oldsmobile 4-4-2, with additional chassis applications to follow. The all-new platform gives classic muscle car builders a clean-slate foundation for their next project—delivering modern handling, increased performance and design flexibility beyond the limits of factory frames. Expanded wheel and tire clearance supports a wider range of modern fitments.



Ford Ranger Raptor Cat-Back Exhaust

BORLA Performance Industries, Johnson

City, Tennessee, presents its

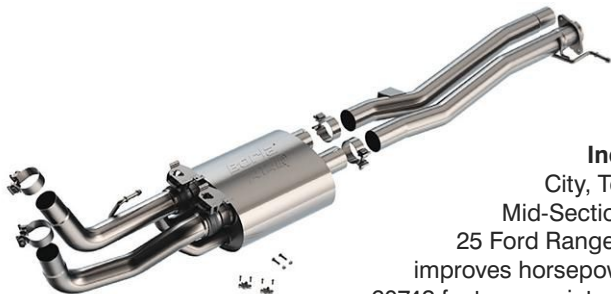
Mid-Section Exhaust for 2024-

25 Ford Ranger Raptor models that

improves horsepower and torque. System

60742 features an internal H-pipe and active valves and delivers the company's aggressive

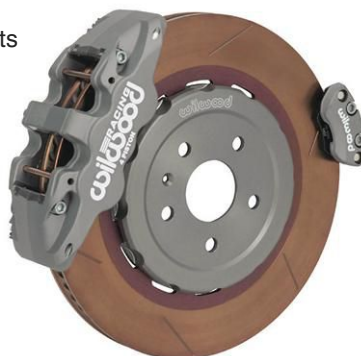
ATAK sound with no drone or resonance inside the vehicle. Featuring all-welded construction for durability and long life, the system is made from T-304 stainless steel and works with Borla or OE tailpipes.



C8 Corvette Race-Ready Big Brake Kits

Wilwood Racing, Camarillo, California, presents its new Race-Ready Big Brake Kit packages for the front and rear of 2020-25 C8 Chevrolet Corvettes.

The feature-rich kits are built around proven Aerolite race calipers using Thermlock piston technology for improved heat management, and Lug-Drive dynamic mount Spec37 floating rotors that are race-ready out of the box using a proprietary burnishing process that eliminates the need for any bedding-in procedures. Complete bolt-on kits work with the factory master cylinder and onboard computers.



Mustang Dark Horse Lowering Spring Kit

Eibach Inc., Corona, California, presents its PRO-KIT Performance Lower Springs, now in stock for 2024-25 Ford Mustang Dark Horse editions. Designed to deliver upgraded performance and ride comfort using progressive spring technology, the kits lower the center of gravity for increased steering response and improved vehicle dynamics. The reduced height eliminates excessive ground clearance and fender gap for enhanced aesthetics.



LS Intercooled Intake Manifold

ProCharger, Lenexa, Kansas, presents its all-new, billet LS Intake Manifold with integrated air-to-water intercooler. Designed to allow maximum charge-air cooling with a slim design to fit most factory hoods, the manifold is capable of cooling 1,250-plus hp and available as a standalone product or as a full kit that includes the intercooled manifold, an accessory drive and ProCharger supercharger. Applications for LS and LT engines are available now, with SBC, BBC, Gen-III Hemi and Coyote engine fitments coming soon.



Hybrid Lubricant Line

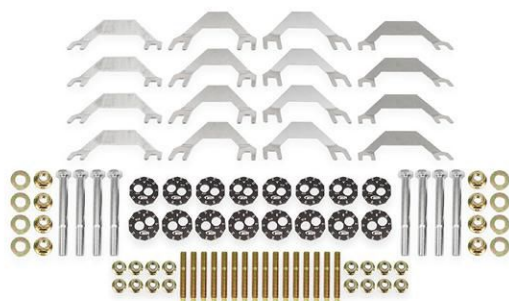
Lucas Oil, Indianapolis, presents its new Hybrid Lubricants product line designed exclusively for hybrid vehicles. The Hybrid Oil Treatment and Hybrid Fuel Treatment with HybridShield Technology formulations are engineered to solve the hidden problems facing new and used hybrid engines due to frequent “dry starts” that can lead to increased wear and tear, engine deposits and reduced performance.

Duramax & Subaru Engine Gaskets

MAHLE, Farmington Hills, Michigan, presents all required Gaskets for Duramax L5P 6.6L and Subaru FA24F



2.4L engine rebuilds. Available in complete sets or as individual components, the OE-quality gaskets are engineered to meet the full-service engine repair needs of vehicle owners, technicians and automotive shop professionals.



Corvette C7 Camber Bolt & Stud Kit

BMR Suspension, Lakeland, Florida, presents its Camber Bolt and Stud Kit for 2014-19 Chevrolet Corvettes. Designed to improve camber and alignment adjustability for street performance, road racing and handling applications, the kit features heavy-duty aluminum shims and studs that prevent wear

on the frame during alignment changes. Laser-etched camber lockout plates are also included to allow for camber adjustments from minus-2.1 to plus-1 degrees.



SBC Camshafts

Air Flow Research (AFR), Valencia, California, presents its Stage 1 and Stage 2 Camshafts, now available for small-block Chevy applications. Specifically developed to unleash the full potential of AFR's Eliminator CNC and Enforcer As-Cast cylinder heads, the camshafts deliver race-ready gains in a drop-in solution, backed by real-world dyno testing. They are crafted in partnership with **Andrews Products**.

Mazda Miata Clutch Kits

Centerforce, Prescott, Arizona, presents a variety of new Clutch Kits for 1.6L and 1.8L Mazda Miata models, 1990-2005. Centerforce II kits offer increased holding capacity from the stock clutch setup without losing the creature comforts of a smooth, light-weight pedal feel. For turbocharged or higher-horsepower Miata models, the Dual Friction setup increases torque capacity to withstand the increased strain and load on the transmission. Both kits include everything needed for installation, including hardware, instructions and a clutch adjustment tool.



High-Temp Clear Coat

ZyCoat, Olathe, Kansas, presents its ZyClear High-Temperature Clear Coat. Engineered to withstand temperatures up to 2,100 degrees ambient and 1,200 degrees substrate surface temperature, the clear coat delivers superior oxidation resistance and heat protection for performance exhaust systems.

ZyClear preserves the natural stainless steel finish, ensuring long-lasting aesthetics and durability. **TS**

Restyling

AFTERMARKET ACCESSORIES

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Products p. 44



The work truck segment remains strong and resilient. (Photo courtesy Westin Automotive)



To the Commercial Customer Club

Upfitting work vehicles can improve workflow consistency & client retention.

BY JEF WHITE

Shops looking for improved workflow consistency or higher client retention can find them both in one place—the fleet upfitting market. Joining the commercial customer club means long-term relationships with professionals looking to prioritize safety and utility over price savings.

Opportunities can be found through municipal and dealership fleet departments, local independent contractors and other businesses whose employees drive company vehicles. Product functionality and reduced installation downtime take on added significance, with successful jobs building long-term trust and loyalty.

If your shop has an interest in serving commercial clients, product suppliers have important information on market trends, sales strategies and hot new products. From there, it's just a matter of getting to work.

THERE'S WORK TO DO

Shops looking to enter the professional and fleet market can do so knowing there's likely strong demand in their area.

"The work truck segment continues to

Fleet buyers value productive relationships with shops, as uptime, durability, warranty support and product availability are all priorities. (Photo courtesy Westin Automotive)



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WORK TRUCK PRODUCTS

■ HOT PRODUCT:

Drone XC LTE Dash Cam

■ FEATURES & BENEFITS:

Live view over LTE; using the DroneMobile app, fleet managers can visually check in on what is happening in front of their vehicles 24/7/365; paired with GPS tracking features, it puts managers in the driver's seat of their fleet's vehicles.

*Firstech LLC
Justin Lee
Marketing Director*

■ HOT PRODUCTS:

Work Lights

■ FEATURES & BENEFITS:

From everyday solutions to nearly indestructible models like the RokLUME series, the lights are designed to meet the demands of any work environment; choose from a variety of light patterns and select from good, better and best options.

*HELLA
John Roney
Product Manager
Performance Products*

■ HOT PRODUCTS:

SuperSprings

■ FEATURES & BENEFITS:

Bolt-on helper spring solution for work trucks dealing with sag, sway and inconsistent load support; simple installation with mounting directly above the factory leaf pack; automatically adjusts to loads; made in USA; half-kits correct driver-side lean.

*SuperSprings International
Alex Hodschayan
Director of Marketing*

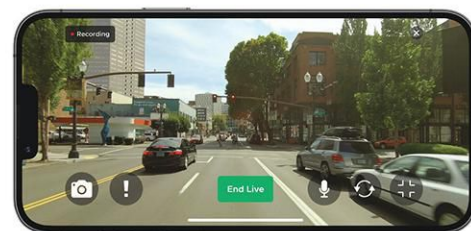
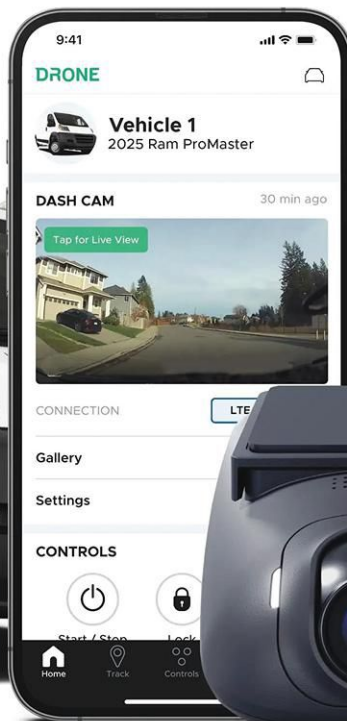
■ HOT PRODUCTS:

The HDX Line Including HDX Drop Steps & HDX Grille Guards

■ FEATURES & BENEFITS:

Built for real-world jobsite abuse while still delivering a clean, professional look; heavy-duty steel construction; corrosion-resistant finishes; vehicle-specific fitment; grille guards available in 1- or 3-piece models; Brute toolboxes also available.

*Westin Automotive
Tony Savasta
VP of Marketing*



Rising insurance costs and mandates for digital efficiency are helping drive demand in the work truck market. (Photos courtesy Firstech LLC)

grow, with industry reports showing strong year-over-year increases in commercial truck and van sales," says Alex Hodschayan, director of marketing for SuperSprings International. "Fleets are actively replacing aging units and upfitting new ones with heavier tool systems, service bodies and crane or boom equipment—all of which put more strain on the suspension. Even in a mixed economy, fleets still have to keep trucks safe, level and on the road, which means shops that offer smart, efficient upgrades are in a great position. We're seeing a clear shift toward practical, bolt-on solutions that reduce downtime and extend the service life of these vehicles, and that trend isn't slowing down."

Upfits are always needed, meaning consistent orders from repeat customers.

"Work trucks aren't discretionary purchases—they're essential tools," says Tony Savasta, vice president of marketing for West Automotive. "With infrastructure spending,

fleet replacement cycles, and continued demand from construction, utilities and service industries, the work truck segment remains strong and resilient, even when consumer markets soften."

A convergence of rising insurance costs and mandates for digital efficiency is helping drive the demand, says Justin Lee, marketing director for Firstech LLC.

"Loss from claims remains the No. 1 threat to fleet operators, and products that mitigate that risk present shops and fleet managers alike with an instant return on their investment and mental peace of mind," he explains.

Product and vehicle innovations and advancements also continue to push boundaries, says John Roney, product manager, performance products, for HELLA.

"New technologies are reshaping the work truck landscape and that trend will accelerate," he says. "As a company deeply



A strong inventory will show you understand the needs of commercial clients. (Photos courtesy HELLA)

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VERSATILE - CUSTOMIZABLE - EASY TO INSTALL

6-PIECE MODULAR DESIGN: CUSTOMIZABLE MOLLE PANELS & STORAGE INSERTS

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embedded in OE expertise, we see these advancements moving beyond passenger vehicles into light-, medium- and heavy-duty commercial trucks. Shops that embrace these changes and position themselves as technology-ready will thrive.”

LET’S MAKE IT WORK

An attractive aspect of dealing with fleet customers, says Hodschayan, is that managers first focus on function and safety, and not necessarily the lowest price point.

“Cost is definitely a factor, but most fleet

managers place equal weight on safety, reliability and how quickly a truck can get from the upfit bay to the jobsite,” he reveals. “That’s where a solution like SuperSprings gives shops a real advantage. They deliver better load support and long-term dura-

MERCEDES-BENZ USA DONATES ALL-ELECTRIC ESPRINTER VANS



Brand ambassadors donated Mercedes-Benz eSprinter vans to deserving organizations as part of MB’s 12 Days of Christmas – Holidays With Love initiative. (Photos courtesy Mercedes-Benz)

As part of its annual 12 Days of Christmas – Holidays With Love initiative, Mercedes-Benz brought together 12 brand ambassadors to help give the gift of sustainable, reliable transportation to deserving organizations by donating all-electric eSprinter vans.

“Mercedes-Benz USA is proud to celebrate this holiday season together with our incredible brand ambassadors through our most ambitious Holidays With Love activation yet,” says Jee-Seop Kim, managing director, Mercedes-Benz Vans USA. “The versatile, all-electric eSprinter is a true workhorse and the perfect tool to help empower and more sustainably mobilize the highly deserving charities across the country selected by our ambassadors so they can keep up the crucial work they do serving the communities where they operate.”

Participating ambassadors and their selected organizations include:

- Martha Stewart, Northwell’s Northern Westchester Hospital (NWH)
- Chris “Ludacris” Bridges, The Ludacris Foundation (TLF)
- Lucy Liu, The Asian American Foundation (TAAF)
- Jess Hart, Baby2Baby
- Bijan Robinson, Atlanta Public Schools (APS)
- Madelaine Petsch
- Brad Guzan, Northside Youth Organization (NYO)
- Matt Ryan, Raising Expectations Inc.
- Kirk Cousins, City of Refuge
- Nigel Sylvester, Springfield Rifles and Riflettes Youth Sports Inc.
- Miles Chamley-Watson, American Heart Association (AHA)
- Tracee Ellis Ross, The Los Angeles Regional Food Bank

“I am delighted to donate a Mercedes-Benz Sprinter van to Northwell’s Northern Westchester Hospital, a place I have long admired and supported for its world-class medical expertise and unwavering commitment to our community,” says Stewart. “The hospital’s compassionate care, innovative programs, and dedication to supporting every patient and family truly sets it apart. It is my hope that this vehicle will further enhance its ability to reach and serve those who depend on it.”

The Holidays with Love concept began in 2023 and was created to emphasize the power of connection and the memorable moments made with Mercedes-Benz during the holiday season.



The industry has seen a shift toward practical, bolt-on solutions that reduce downtime and extend the service life of work vehicles. (Photos courtesy SuperSprings Intl.)

bility, meaning fleets get a safer, more reliable truck without the added maintenance or complexity. When shops present that full picture, fleet customers quickly understand the value.”

Roney agrees it’s a misconception that fleet managers want the cheapest fix.

“In reality, different applications have

different requirements and there is no one-size-fits-all solution,” he says. “Many fleets prioritize durability and performance over initial cost, especially for vehicles operating in demanding conditions.”

It’s the partnerships that make the difference, says Savasta.

“Most fleet buyers value their supplier

relationships when uptime, durability, warranty support and product availability are priorities,” he explains. “If a product fits properly, reduces downtime and lasts longer, value quickly outweighs initial cost.”

And shops shouldn’t forget that user experience is part of overall system value, Lee says.

Continued on page 39



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FLEET RENEWALS, REGULATORY SHIFTS FUEL NORTH AMERICA USED TRUCK MARKET



Construction and short-term project operators favor leasing and usage-based payment models over outright purchases. (Photo by Dylan McLeod on Unsplash)

The North America used truck market is anticipated to expand from a valuation of \$16.1 billion last year to more than \$24.43 billion by 2030, exhibiting a robust CAGR of 7.20% between 2025 and 2030, according to new research by Markntel Advisors.

The robust market is expected to enjoy quicker fleet renewal, increased used truck sales and rising values of late-model commercial vehicles. Growth will be primarily driven by interlinked factors:

- **Regulatory Impact:** The EPA's Phase 3 greenhouse gas regulations set for 2027 create a compliance imperative that drives fleet operators to replace older trucks with newer, cleaner models. This regulatory push causes a marked reduction in average truck age, enhancing demand for late-model used trucks that align with emissions standards. Therefore, they will accelerate fleet modernization cycles and directly expand the used truck market as operators seek cost-effective compliance alternatives to new truck purchases.
- **E-Commerce Growth & Logistics Expansion:** The 14.7% rise in e-commerce sales in 2024 intensifies the need for efficient and scalable freight capacity. Subsequently, the 10% expansion in small and medium logistics fleets primarily leverages used trucks as budget-friendly, rapidly deployable assets to meet surging delivery volumes. This dynamic promotes sustained demand for used trucks configured for last-mile and regional haul applications, underpinning used truck market growth in North America.
- **Technological Adoption & Integration of Telematics:** A 30% increase in telematics installs on used trucks enhances operational efficiency through data-driven route planning, predictive maintenance and safety monitoring. This elevates the functional value and resale prices of used trucks, making them more attractive investments. The technological upgrade trend also pushes more owners

to cycle their fleets faster, thereby intensifying turnover in the used truck market.

- **Infrastructure Investments:** Federal infrastructure spending under the Infrastructure Investment & Jobs Act (IIJA) drives growth in construction and heavy industry—sectors that rely heavily on durable used trucks. Approximately 9% increased demand from these sectors represents robust secondary market activity driven by public projects, reinforcing overall market expansion.

Together, these drivers create a compelling environment where regulatory compliance, e-commerce momentum, technology upgrades including rising adoption of electric truck across fleets, and infrastructure development converge to sustain strong growth and liquidity in the North America used truck market, according to research officials.

The North America used truck market is anticipated to expand from a valuation of \$16.1 billion last year to more than \$24.43 billion by 2030.
(Photo by Erik Mclean on Unsplash)





Opportunities can be found through municipal and dealership fleet departments, local independent contractors and other businesses whose employees drive company vehicles. (Photos by Jef White)

“At the end of the day, business owners are consumers too, and they will embrace products that are intuitive and easy-to-use,” he notes.

TIPS FOR GETTING TO WORK

As is the case in many markets, as shops deliver project-specific answers to work truck customers, relationships grow stronger.

“Position yourself as a solutions partner, not just an installer,” says Savasta from Westin Automotive. “Understand how the truck is used, recommend products that improve safety and productivity and be ready with fast turnarounds. Reliability and expertise are what keep fleet customers coming back.”

Avoiding downtime is an important factor for fleet managers looking to get their vehicles back on the road quickly. Therefore, offering those efficient, practical solutions will earn their trust.

“Shops can add real value by pointing out opportunities work truck customers might not be aware of—especially when a simple upgrade can improve load handling, reduce driver fatigue or prevent recurring suspension issues,” says Hodschayan. “When shops introduce options like SuperSprings or SumoSprings as practical, maintenance-free solutions that streamline upfits and reduce downtime, it opens the door to conversations that fleet customers genuinely appreciate. It’s not about pushing products—it’s about giving them insights that make their trucks safer, more reliable and easier to keep in service.”

A strong inventory will show you understand the needs of commercial clients, says Roney from HELLA.

“Partner with stable, quality brands from trusted suppliers. Having the right parts on hand is critical, because you cannot make the sale

if you don’t have the product and you will not earn repeat business if the parts don’t perform,” he notes. “Reliability and availability are keys to building long-term relationships.”

A final key, says Lee from Firstech, is to cater specific solutions that make sense for each work or fleet vehicle.

“Dealers will have the most success selling products that business owners can easily understand and integrate into their day-to-day operations,” he says. **TS**

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SuperSprings

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Coil SumoSprings

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Knowledgeable consumers recognize the value of a quality product. (Photo courtesy 3M)



Joining the PPF Ranks

Now is a great time for shops to take advantage of everything paint protection film has to offer.

BY JEF WHITE

With growing appeal to a wider customer base and a strong reputation of performing as advertised, paint protection film has established itself as a favored aftermarket upgrade. The need for professional installation and the ability to scale to fit any project type provide shops consistent business opportunities and an offering that can stretch beyond typical automotive boundaries.

Color options, selectable finishes and performance upgrades deliver added versatility for creative shops looking to maximize PPF and attract new clients. Meanwhile, dealer programs and related support from suppliers

improve sales and installations for more happy customers.

For shops considering adding PPF services, suppliers are here with advice on market trends, sales techniques and the latest product offerings

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

When shops choose to add paint protection film sales and installation to their list of services, they quickly find a wide, enthusiastic customer base.

"The most compelling reason for optimism is the mainstreaming of PPF as a standard investment—not just for high-end luxury vehicles, but for everyday drivers," says Brittany Folino, senior product manager, automotive, for Avery Dennison Graphics Solutions, citing two key trends:

- 1. Increased Consumer Education:** "Social media and digital content have demystified PPF. Consumers now understand the value proposition: PPF is an insurance policy that significantly preserves their vehicle's finish and maximizes resale value, especially as vehicle transaction prices continue to climb."
- 2. The Rise of Color PPF:** "The introduction of products like our Neo Matte Black

PPF and the forthcoming PrismaPro Dry-Applied Color PPF (previewed at SEMA 2025) allows shops to capture the high-margin color change market while offering the superior protection of PPF. This dual-purpose film opens up new revenue streams beyond traditional clear protection."

Consumer familiarity and a reputation for performing as advertised are boosting the PPF market.

"As paint protection films continue to gain global popularity, heightened customer awareness of their advantages has significantly strengthened the market," says Alex Sikorski, CEO of Premium Tech Coating Inc. "The introduction of color PPF—along with distinct benefits such as self-healing capabilities, hydrophobic performance and resistance to yellowing—is poised to capture a portion of the traditional vinyl wrap market, ultimately driving more consumers toward professional PPF service providers."

More drivers are seeking out paint protection film for a wider range of projects, says Kevin De Silva, customer experience and merchandising marketer for 3M.

"Consumer awareness of PPF has expanded significantly, driven by a growing focus on vehicle preservation, rising new car prices and increased visibility of premium aftermarket services. This creates a sustained demand curve that benefits shops offering high-quality installations," he says.

Manufacturers are working hard to create and update premium PPF films that are easier to install on complex vehicle contours. (Photo courtesy Avery Dennison Corporation)



“The combination of growing consumer demand, improved business support tools and strong brand alignment positions professional installers and managed shops for continued opportunity.”

Current car buying trends are making paint protection films more desirable to more drivers, says Julie Childress, channel marketing manager for Eastman Performance Films.

“Consumers have a growing interest in preserving the resale value of their vehicles. This is helping to drive PPF adoption beyond luxury buyers into more mainstream markets,” she notes. “As owners keep vehicles longer and advanced paint finishes become more expensive to repair, PPF is starting to shift from a niche upsell into more of a necessary service. That creates recurring revenue, higher average ticket jobs and cross-sell opportunities for shops that invest in training and quality installations.”

Various appearance and protection offerings allow professionals to tailor solutions for individual projects, says Bradley View, auto market manager – NAM for Solar Gard Saint-Gobain.

“The advancements in PPF technology and the growing variety of options are major reasons for optimism,” he says. “Base PPF products keep improving, and with the rise of color PPF and other innovations, shops can now offer more customization and value than ever before.”

MAKE IT STICK

Manufacturers are working hard to create and update premium PPF films that are easier to install on complex vehicle contours, avoiding high labor costs and material waste, says Folino. Specialized training then helps shops maximize efficiency.

“Many shops believe that for a film to offer extended durability (such as 5-, 7- or 10-year durability), it must be stiff and nonconforming, slowing down the installation process, especially on parts like mirrors and bumpers,” she notes.

As PPF’s visibility grows with consumers, shops will see more customers with higher expectations. Education and a team approach will help ensure clients get the product they want and more.

“Drivers expect the film will not only protect the underlying surface but also withstand everything the environment

throws at it, from high-speed gravel to everyday abuse,” says View. “They often overlook the needed upkeep of the product. While inherently very durable, paint protection film still requires maintenance to preserve its high-gloss appearance and other beneficial properties like hydrophobicity. It’s critical that installing dealers are honest about the product’s capabilities and ensure customer expectations are clearly addressed.”

Creative uses, meanwhile, are expanding the market.

“PPF provides meaningful benefits to a wide range of automobiles, boats and other assets, as owners increasingly seek long-term protection, preservation of resale value and avoidance of potential lease-return penalties,” says Sikorski. “Another concern arises when the advantages of PPF are overstated—the material is neither indestructible nor completely invisible, and it is important to acknowledge that film removal may pose a risk of paint damage, particularly on vehicles that have undergone repainting.”

Once introduced, knowledgeable consumers recognize the value of a quality product, says De Silva.

“While customers often begin their research focused on price or general features, the reality is that PPF varies significantly in terms of durability, clarity, warranty strength, installation consistency and long-term performance. These differences become especially visible after installation—when quality truly matters,” he says. “Brand recognition also plays a much larger role than some shops initially assume. PPF buyers, especially those protecting higher value vehicles, place real weight on the trust and credibility behind the film being installed. When shops align their services with a recognized, reputable brand, they gain more than a product—they gain a differentiator that helps convert inquiries into sales and reinforces the overall customer experience.”

Proud vehicle owners understand the product offers real benefits.

“PPF delivers value for daily-driven vehicles, protecting existing paint, hiding minor imperfections and reducing future repair costs,” says Childress. “Many clients assume PPF is too expensive for older cars. But targeted

PAINT PROTECTION FILM

■ HOT PRODUCT:

3M Paint Protection Film Series 100

■ FEATURES & BENEFITS:

Engineered for efficient installation, long-term clarity and reliable self-healing performance; designed to handle predictably during stretching, alignment and squeegeeing, helping reduce install time and variability between technicians; optical clarity.

3M

Kevin De Silva

Customer Experience & Merchandising Marketer

■ HOT PRODUCTS:

LLumar Platinum Bond & Suntek Ultra Tack

■ FEATURES & BENEFITS:

Easier to install after recent formulation updates enhanced stretch and tack; material conforms more easily to complex curves and holds position better during application, allowing technicians to work faster and make fewer adjustments.

Eastman Performance Films

Julie Childress

Channel Marketing Manager

■ HOT PRODUCT:

Supreme Defense Gloss Paint Protection Film

■ FEATURES & BENEFITS:

Our flagship clear film, trusted by installers for its balance of ease of use and long-term durability; delivers performance driven by science with an advanced self-healing topcoat and superior hydrophobicity; backed by a 10-year limited warranty.

Avery Dennison Graphics Solutions

Brittany Folino

Senior Product Manager, Automotive

■ HOT PRODUCT: Clear PPF

■ FEATURES & BENEFITS: Engineered for superior workability, offering robust edge adhesion and reliable performance across demanding curves while maintaining optical clarity; suitable for use within the yacht and small-vessel sectors; 10-year warranty.

Premium Tech Coating Inc.

Alex Sikorski

CEO

■ HOT PRODUCT:

CLEARSHIELD Pro ACTIV PPF

■ FEATURES & BENEFITS:

Twelve-year warranty; instant self-healing capability that activates when a scratch occurs; installer-friendly adhesive; experienced sales and technical service team; related products including Gloss Black and Matte PPF options and windshield protection film.

Solar Gard Saint-Gobain

Bradley View

Auto Market Manager – NAM



Consumer familiarity and a reputation for performing as advertised are boosting the PPF market. (Photos courtesy Premium Tech Coating Inc.)

applications (hood, fenders, mirrors) provide cost-effective protection and offer strong ROI for buyers who plan to keep their vehicle or want to maximize resale value.”

MAKE IT A DOUBLE

A targeted, organized approach supported by suppliers can help businesses quickly become the local paint protection film expert.

“One of the most effective ways for shops to increase their PPF-related sales is to strengthen the overall customer experience from the moment a client walks in or reaches out online. Clear communication, professional presentation and visible credibility contribute to higher conversion rates,” says De Silva, highlighting the 3M Pro Shop program as an example.

The program, he says, is designed to support shops not only with advanced products, such as 3M Paint Protection Film Series 100, but also with structured business resources that help shops grow more efficiently, including lead generation support; product quality, trust and recognition; and available training programs that give customers confidence they are working with technicians who meet defined quality standards.

When seeking increased sales, professionals can leverage the versatility of dual-purpose films to capture the high-margin color-change market, says Folino from Avery Dennison.

“Shops should proactively market colored PPF as the ultimate two-in-one package. Pitch it to clients who are considering a wrap

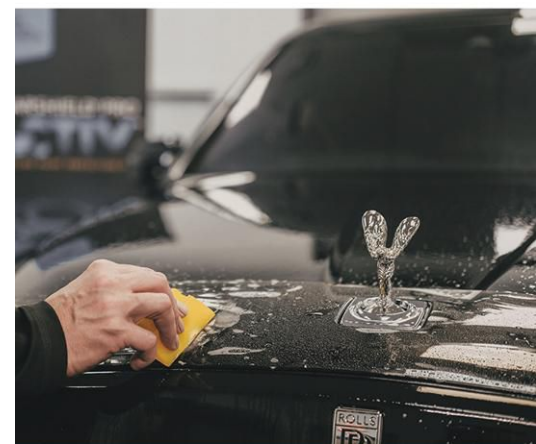
for a new aesthetic or clients who simply want protection but are open to a unique look,” she explains. “By offering a dynamic color, like our Neo Matte Black, that simultaneously provides extended durability, self-healing and rock chip defense, the shop immediately justifies a higher price point than a standard clear PPF job. This moves the service from a functional purchase to an aspirational, premium upgrade, attracting a new, higher-spending segment of the market.”

When it's time to connect with customers, View suggests starting online.

“The overarching theme is to invest in your digital presence,” he says. “Two key actions are to adopt a CRM to manage leads and reviews effectively and then showcase your work on social media by posting new projects regularly. When customers research installers, they look for reviews, examples of past work and how popular a shop is. They want to know if they should make this investment through you.”

He also highlights Solar Gard Wiz, the Tint Wiz platform customized for Solar Gard partners that offers several canned proposals and Solar Gard content to help dealers get started, with tools that streamline operations, enhance professionalism during the sales process and automate tasks like review follow-ups.

Once aware of the product and its benefits, many consumers are immediately interested in paint protection film offerings, says Childress from Eastman Performance Films, so it's up to shops to create



Drivers expect the film to protect the underlying surface and also withstand everything the environment throws at it. (Photo courtesy Solar Gard Saint-Gobain)

an enticing visual package that properly introduces the product.

“If your current customers haven't tried paint protection film yet, start by bundling simple, entry-level options like door edge guards or cups with another service. It's a low-risk way to showcase PPF's advantages and get them comfortable with the product,” she says. “Use social media and targeted online marketing to reach a new audience by showing—not just telling—what your shop can do. Focus on posts with before-and-after photos, short installation time-lapses or behind-the-scenes clips that highlight your technician's skill. If you have a customer with a real-world protection example, ask to share it. We had a great story not long ago of a driver who hit a deer, and when the shop peeled the film off, the paint underneath was perfect. Those are great examples that build proof points and drive bookings.”

Once established, you can then look to outside markets to increase business, says Sikorski from Premium Tech Coating Inc.

“Broaden your market reach by extending PPF installation beyond automotive applications. There is growing demand for paint protection films in residential and commercial settings, with homeowners increasingly requesting PPF for countertops, outdoor barbecue areas, boats and various types of equipment,” he says. “Expanding your advertising efforts to encompass these sectors can significantly enhance business opportunities.” **TS**

Targeted applications can include hoods, fenders and mirrors. (Photo courtesy Eastman Performance Films)





Protection Wrap Film

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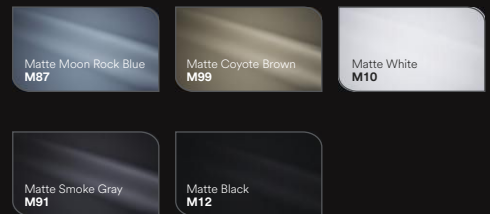
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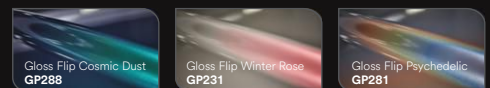
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Matte



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Off-Road Winch

Borne Off-Road, Garnet Valley, Pennsylvania, presents its Borne Off-Road Winch. Engineered for pulling power, control and reliability, the complete recovery setup includes a high-capacity 10K or 12K winch, wireless remote, heavy-duty fairlead, forged alloy steel hook and 85-foot synthetic rope. A pure copper motor and 3-stage planetary gear system deliver high torque and smooth operation. Smart features include the RFID-linked remote, automatic shut-off and recessed buttons for extra protection during recovery.



Grenadier Suspension Kit

MetalCloak, Rancho Cordova, California, presents its RockSport Black Edition (SKU 8228) 2.5-inch Game-Changer Suspension Kit, engineered specifically for Ineos Grenadier models. The kit combines signature True Dual-Rate coil technology with high-end RockSport Black remote reservoir adjustable shocks to deliver a balance of rugged off-road capability and refined

on-road comfort. Key features include True Dual-Rate coil springs, front and rear adjustable Duroflex control arms and adjustable Durotrak track bars.

GM Bed-Mounted Factory Subwoofer

KICKER Performance Audio, Stillwater, Oklahoma, presents its new BedSide Mounted Factory Subwoofer (BSS). Designed as a companion to KICKER's GM MultiPro and MultiFlex Tailgate Audio Systems, the subwoofer mounts on the passenger side of the truck bed on GMC Sierra and Chevy Silverado models. The weather-resistant enclosure includes an 8-inch dual-voice-coil (DVC) woofer, an 8-inch passive radiator and a crossover system that integrates with the existing tailgate audio setup. The design adds bass response without increasing current draw.



Aluminum Running Boards

CYC Engineering, Phoenix, presents its Raptor Series 5-Inch Sport Step Aluminum Running Board. Featuring a slim design that offers higher clearance and an aggressive look with punched holes for drainage, the boards are constructed of anti-corrosion aircraft-grade aluminum with a black textured finish. The accompanying Slide Track system offers position adjustment to the customer's preferred fit, allowing for an easy, no-drill installation. All kits have a recommended weight rating of 400 pounds per side.



Modular Storage System

Yakima, Lake Oswego, Oregon, presents its MOD efficient, safe and secure modular vehicle storage system. With MicroTotes for added drawer organization, the modular system scales to the user's needs. Accessories including a stretch net to secure loose items and a fridge slide mounting kit increase versatility. Explore sizing, components and accessories to customize each project.



Specialty Trailer Tire

Ironman Tires, Huntersville, North Carolina, presents its first trailer tire, the Ironman All Steel HD. A purpose-built specialty trailer tire delivering added toughness and reliability, the All Steel HD features reinforced super-high-tensile steel belts and deep, 7/16-inch treads with an enhanced footprint and biting edges for improved grip and durability in demanding conditions.

Super Duty Radius Arm Upgrades

ICON Vehicle

Dynamics, Riverside, California, introduces upgraded Front Radius Arms for 2023-up Ford Super Duty 4WD trucks.

The rugged, precision fabricated arms allow improved articulation, castor correction for 2- to 6-inch lifts and increased clearance for larger tires. Updated dual-rate front coil springs as well as coil-over conversion kits are also offered to take advantage of the wider range of lift heights enabled by the use of the arms. Preconfigured complete suspension system Stage Kits are available as well.



Tri-Fold Tonneau Covers

Bestop, Broomfield, Colorado, presents its EZFold Tri-Fold Soft Tonneau Covers. Offering fast installation and removal, the covers deliver three-panel folding action for easy access and a low-profile appearance. Features include a built-in boxed aluminum frame for strength; OEM-quality, heavy-duty adjustable clamps that secure or release with one hand; durable leather-grain textured vinyl that resists stretching and shrinking; reinforced corner construction; and integrated buckle straps.



Live Valve Aftermarket Kits

FOX, Duluth, Georgia, presents its Live Valve Aftermarket Kits. The advanced semi-active suspension setups for trucks and Jeeps sense terrain and driver input hundreds of times a second and adapt the vehicle's suspension instantly for greater comfort, control and confidence. Based on the company's proven factory race internal bypass suspension, Live Valve Kits include electronic solenoids, computing hardware and software that adjusts damping when needed. The FOX Connect App extends the driving experience.



Universal Modular Coil Spring Buffer

RubberShox, Garden Grove, California, presents its UCSB Series Front-Rear Automobile Modular Coil Spring Buffer/Spacer. The shock-absorbing lift kit provides a tighter, more resilient suspension, with a modular design that can fit most of the coil spring without measuring the gap. The UCSB series absorbs and dissipates the shock from rough road conditions for greater driving stability while extending the life of coil springs and the suspension system, and is suitable for use on electric vehicles (EVs) with heavier gross weights. **TS**

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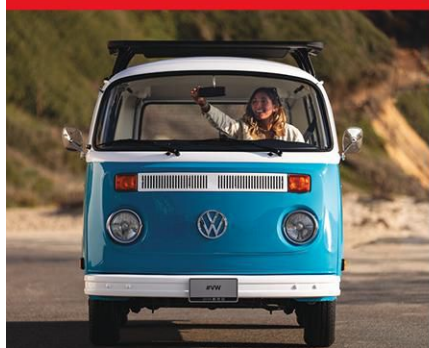
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Fire-Surviving Microbus Gets a VW Makeover



The T2 earned global attention after an Associated Press photo showed it sitting in a Malibu neighborhood left devastated by fire.

Megan Weinraub's white-over-blue 1977 Volkswagen T2 microbus named "Azul" became a symbol of hope after surviving the 2025 Palisades Fire in California mostly intact. (Photos courtesy Volkswagen of America)

Volkswagen of America unveiled a restored white-over-blue 1977 T2 microbus at the 2025 Los Angeles Auto Show that has become an unexpected symbol of resilience after surviving the January 2025 Palisades Fire in Southern California.

The T2, referred to by many as the "magic bus," first earned global attention through an Associated Press photograph showing it seemingly unscathed amid a Malibu neighborhood left devastated by fire.

With help from the VW enthusiast community, Volkswagen of America connected with the T2's owner, Megan Weinraub, to assess the safety and condition of her vehicle. After receiving necessary approvals to enter the Malibu neighborhood where the vehicle was parked, Volkswagen transported the

bus—affectionately referred to by Weinraub as "Azul"—to the Volkswagen Group of America's Oxnard Facility, which is home to Volkswagen of America's collection of historic vehicles.

The restoration "marks the next chapter in the rich legacy of the microbus through the restoration of a vehicle that caught the attention of people around the world," says Rachael Zaluzec, senior vice president of brand marketing and customer experience, VW Brand NAR. "We recognize that, for Megan, 'Azul' isn't just a 1977 T2, but a part of her family. For us, this passionate restoration project has served as a symbol of resiliency, making 'Azul' a part of the Volkswagen family as well."

After a thorough inspection, Volkswagen determined Azul required significant mechanical repairs and bodywork to be roadworthy. The vehicle team inspected, repaired or replaced every interior and exterior component while paying homage to T2s from the late 1970s.

As a complement to the restoration work completed by Volkswagen, bodywork was led by the team at GE Kundensport, renowned for its historic Porsche vehicle restorations. Specialized partners supported additional engine refurbishment details and powder-coating.

"From the moment we first saw 'Azul,' our goal was to ensure the story of the vehicle wasn't erased by the fires but brought back to life by restoring it, reuniting it with its owner and returning it to the road," says Gunnar Wynarski, vehicle technician at Volkswagen Group of America's Oxnard Facility. "While this special restoration project was a technical challenge, what mattered most was keeping the soul of the vehicle intact."

To commemorate the project, Volkswagen collaborated with Candylab to create a limited-edition, wooden collectible version of the bus, highlighted by the custom white-over-blue color.

"When the photo of 'Azul' went viral, I felt like the entire world experienced a piece of my heart. And when Volkswagen reached out to see if 'Azul' really survived, I was touched and couldn't believe it. Seeing it now, I feel it's even more of a symbol of hope than it was before," says Weinraub.

Volkswagen continued to support ongoing fire recovery efforts through a recent monetary donation to the California Fire Foundation.

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

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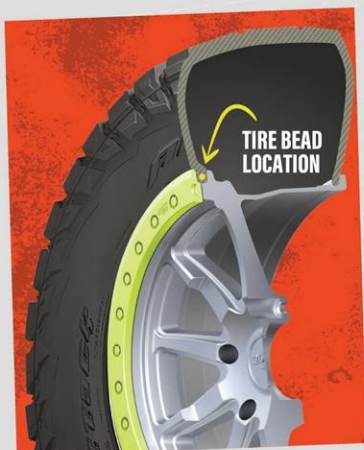
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