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Planning, Automation Top List of WD Priorities for 2026

Warehouse distributors are reacting to greater competition and economic volatility by holding more stock. Largely driven by the need to retain customers, the trend shows a reevaluation of traditional inventory management systems—at least for now—in response to tariffs and supply chain delays.

The findings come from Phocas, a business intelligence and financial planning and analysis (BI and FP&A) platform for distributors in the middle market, which recently released its 2026 Inventory Trends in Wholesale Distribution Report. Derived from a global survey of more than 100 wholesale distributors, the report highlights current strategies being used by WDs to cope in a rapidly evolving trading environment.

While fundamentals like demand and lead time remain constant, the swift disruption of external market conditions requires a flexible approach to inventory management, the findings show. Inventory management is now a core strategic lever across the industry, identified as a tactical way to optimize cash flow, enhance supplier relationships and steer sustainable growth.

"Inventory management can be siloed in a distribution company. To do it well, the purchasing team needs to work closely with sales and finance so they can move with the market," says Myles Glashier, CEO and co-founder of Phocas.

Drilling down to WDs serving the automotive aftermarket specifically, Glashier identifies increasing competition as a key challenge for vehicle parts distributors.

"As a result, many in the industry were early adopters of data-driven inventory management to retain customers," he says. "A notable trend for the auto aftermarket parts industry is the growing practice of sharing data with suppliers. Distributors that do this are experiencing measurable performance improvements, including more accurate supplier lead times, higher on-time delivery rates and reduced rework."

When asked what capabilities they want to enhance or add this year, wholesalers identified demand planning and more data and warehouse automation, alongside customer and product segmentation. These adjustments mirror the increasing complexity of the wholesale sector and the need for data-driven decision-making.

"Demand planning is a core need for distributors, yet the industry faces an accuracy gap due to limited access to the right data. Distributors that can keep their planning up to date with current sales are lowering the cost of inventory and improving service levels," adds Glashier.

Other key report insights include:

- Competitive pressure is increasing supply chain complexity
- Stock availability is being prioritized over cash flow
- Demand planning is the No. 1 performance differentiator
- Trusted data is resulting in better supplier performance

Find the full 2026 Inventory Trends in Wholesale Distribution report under the Resources tab at phocassoftware.com. ***TS***

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P.O. Box 530067
Birmingham, AL 35253

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THE SHOP (ISSN 2380-7415) is published monthly by Cahaba Media Group, P.O. Box 530067, Birmingham, AL 35253. Periodicals postage paid at Birmingham, AL and additional mailing offices. Free to qualified recipients within the United States and U.S. Possessions. Publisher reserves the right to determine qualifications. Annual Subscription Prices: U.S. – one year, $45; two years, $80; three years, $108. Canada – one year, $76; two years, $142, three years, $201 (U.S. Funds); All other countries – one year $98, two years $186, three years, $267 (U.S. funds). Customer Service, call 800-256-2785. POSTMASTER: Please send address changes to THE SHOP, PO Box 271, Lincolnshire, IL 60069-9835.
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A WORKERS' COMPENSATION INSURANCE REVIEW

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Diligent employers can maintain positive trends & protect against new factors that are increasing costs. ..... **By Phillip M. Perry**



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

Employers, take a bow. Your efforts to reduce workplace injuries have paid off big time.

"The number of reported accidents under the workers' compensation system has been falling steadily in recent years," says James J. Moore, president of J&L Risk Management Consultants. "The reason has been largely due to successful safety programs."

The healthier workplace environment has attracted a good number of insurance companies to the workers' compensation market, putting downward pressure on prices.

"In general, insurance companies find workers' compensation to be a profitable line of business," says Randy Sieberg, president of Workers Compensation Consultants. "As losses have been trending downward, the end result is a really decent claim experience."

DANGER AHEAD

Despite a mostly sunny workers' compensation environment, employers should be wary of possible dark clouds gathering on the horizon. Foremost among them is an increase in expensive catastrophic claims, driven largely by advances in medical technology.

"While there's been a soft insurance market for several years, those days might be numbered," says Matt Morris, principal at World Insurance Associates. "The increasing incidence of million-dollar claims is going to start catching up with carriers."

The mega claims are coming at the same time that more states are adjusting their fee schedules to reflect higher costs.

"We're seeing many states increase workers' compensation benefits across the board, adjusting for inflation, higher medical expenses and a rising cost of living," says Morris. "And ever since COVID, we're seeing carriers covering a lot more mental health conditions and PTSD."



Yet another danger emanates from Washington. While workers' compensation is primarily a state-driven phenomenon, that doesn't mean actions at the federal level can't affect employer costs.

"We're concerned about the possible negative effects of U.S. trade policy," says Dennis Tierney, director of workers' compensation claims at Marsh, a global insurance broker. "Employers who get impacted by tariffs may start cutting expenses, and that often means getting rid of employees. And reductions in force typically lead to an increase in workers' compensation claims."

Such increases can often be fed by desperation, notes Tierney. People who lose their jobs often look for another source of income—and may find it in the form of back pain or similar conditions that developed over the years and that could be deemed an occupational injury.

This temptation to assign workplace culpability comes while many states are passing laws reflecting a more liberal presumption—a term referring to the automatic determination that certain injuries are work-related and thus compensable by the workers' compensation system. It is up to the employer to prove otherwise.

Security cameras can help provide a defense against some of these instances.

"Having everything monitored is a best practice and a good way to avoid frivolous claims," says Morris. "Many times,

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QUIZ: ARE YOU REDUCING THE RISK OF COSTLY CLAIMS?



Are you doing enough to reduce the risk of costly workers' compensation claims? Find out by taking this quiz. Give yourself 10 points for each "yes" answer to the questions below. Then total your points.

- ☐ Have you enlisted input from employees when designing your workplace safety program?
- ☐ Have you installed cameras to monitor high-risk work areas?
- ☐ Do you take special care to train younger workers on safe work practices?
- ☐ Do you make an effort to help workers find affordable health insurance?
- ☐ Do you have effective workplace policies when it comes to the use of recreational marijuana?
- ☐ Do you address workplace stress in an empathic way?
- ☐ Do you handle mental health claims immediately and manage them closely?
- ☐ Do you have an attorney on call to ensure claims are handled efficiently?
- ☐ Have you enlisted telemedicine as a way to manage claims and reduce medical costs?
- ☐ Have you taken measures to improve workplace ergonomics?

What's your score? Over 80: Congratulations! Your company has gone a long way toward mitigating workers' compensation claims. Between 60 and 80: Additional work is needed. Below 60: Take steps now to avoid an increase in compensable injuries.

employees will be joking around and not doing the right things on a worksite and then claim a work-related injury when the video shows something else happening."

Meanwhile, tariffs may lead to cost hikes for other reasons—escalating drug prices among them.

"Raw materials for drugs are a big part of medical spend," says Tierney. "Duties on imported ingredients may result in bigger bills for end users."

Tariffs can also have a deleterious effect on labor costs. A manufacturing reboot in the U.S.—the ultimate goal of the Trump administration's tariff policy—may increase the demand for workers, putting upward pressure on wages.

"The administration's restrictions on immigration could lead to the loss of cheaper labor and thus affect workers' compensation rates, which are figured off wages," says Moore.

Finally, trade policy can lead to more hiring of younger workers to fill the ranks of reshored employers. The replacement of retiring baby boomers poses a particular risk.

"In five years, we figure that some 25% of employees are going to be Gen Zers," says Rachel Shaw, a human resources consultant. "We are concerned that we may see more injuries as a result, since there is a question mark as to whether they are coming into the workforce with the same skills, training and experience."

These upward payroll pressures are coming at a time when the federal government is deregulating workplace safety standards and reducing the number of workplace inspectors, notes Shaw.

"Some companies love the idea of deregulation because it can reduce immediate costs, but an increase in injuries might well raise costs over the longer term."

The difficulty younger workers face in obtaining affordable health care may add fuel to the fire.

"We may see an increase in claims as people struggle with obtaining and maintaining medical care," says Shaw. "We have in the past seen people use the workers' comp system for either personal medical needs or as wage extension."



MORE MENTAL STRESS

The influx of younger workers can increase costs for two other reasons. First, younger workers have a more liberal attitude toward the use of recreational marijuana.

"The younger generations see marijuana as more like beer or alcohol," says Shaw. "We anticipate that as more states legalize recreational marijuana, we're going to continue to see some impact, especially in industries that require workers have balance and focus to do their job well and to be safe and not have catastrophic injuries."

The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) found that workers testing positive for marijuana were involved in 55% more industrial accidents, sustained 85% more injuries and experienced 75% more absenteeism.

Additionally, mental health issues have much less stigma among members of the younger generations, who are more comfortable than boomers discussing and claiming work-related stress. They also expect mental health support from their employers.

"Mental health claims seem to be the fastest growing segment of the workers' compensation picture," observes Sieberg. "While they currently don't add up to a large percentage of overall claims, they can cost from two- to five-times the amount of traditional claims, and run two- to five-times as long."

Mental health claims are also more likely to be litigated, further escalating costs.

Many states are introducing regulations that help fuel the growth of mental health claims. For example, there is an increasing presumption of a work-related nature for reported psychological and stress-related injuries. Furthermore, many states are no longer requiring that mental health claims be preceded by physical injuries.

It used to be that a worker claiming work-related depression would have to show that a preceding event such as a back injury caused mental stress by keeping them from carrying out their normal daily routines.

"Today, employees might claim they were abused in the workplace by a co-worker or a manager, or they witnessed an event that caused psychological damage," says Tierney.

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The number of reported accidents under the workers' compensation system has been falling steadily in recent years. (Image credit: RIKO - stock.adobe.com)

REDUCING COSTS



Employers are not powerless navigating the more challenging workers' compensation landscape. Indeed, the No. 1 defense is to establish the very workplace safety programs that have helped control costs to date.

"The claim that doesn't happen is the least expensive claim," says Sieberg. "Employers need to be proactive in creating programs that train employees on how to perform their work safely. That can include everything from making sure they're wearing the right shoes and other protective equipment, to ensuring they're lifting correctly and taking appropriate breaks."

Quick claims processing can also help cap expenses.

"When an injury occurs, employers need to promptly report the matter to the carrier, then conduct an investigation into how the injury occurred and how the company can obviate similar incidents in the future," Sieberg says. "When discussing the accident with employees, remember that the investigation is not about blame, but about learning how to eliminate future risks."



Employers can also reduce costs by establishing effective claims management programs. The first step of such programs is empathic communication with injured workers.

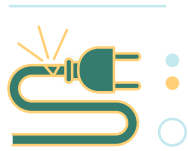
"One of the most expensive parts of workers' compensation is litigation," says Shaw. "Bear in mind that employees usually don't sue employers because of injuries but because they feel disbelieved, ostracized and unsupported. It's an emotional reaction. And so, I always encourage employers, especially smaller ones where lawsuits can threaten their livelihoods, to treat injured employees with concern. Employees should understand that you take their injuries seriously and you will stay on top of their treatment until they can return to work."

PROMPT ACTION

Prompt action is especially cost effective for claims of psychological stress.

"The temptation by insurance companies is to delay mental health claims, especially during the first couple of months after a report," says Shaw. "But what we know is that if we can get those people prompt behavioral support, even if we do not accept workplace responsibility, we can get them back to work more quickly and reduce claim cost and duration by up to 70%."

Employers would also be wise to have a workers' compensation attorney on call for shepherding injury cases, even if litigation is not anticipated.







"Bear in mind that insurance companies often have a self-interest in managing claims slowly, while it can be better for employers to get the workers back to work without delay," says Shaw. "It can be cost effective to have an attorney on retainer for a couple of hours a month to push claims forward."

While the business environment is becoming more sympathetic to the claims of injured workers, employers can take steps to mitigate the dangers.

"The financial health of the workers' compensation system follows from businesses being in control of safety programs and managing claims effectively," Sieberg concludes. "But employers have to be diligent. They have to stay on top of things." **TS**

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Heat & Sound p. 20 / Products p. 28

Things That Go Bump on the Trail

Aftermarket bumpers help transform mild-mannered trucks & SUVs into fully equipped adventure platforms.

BY JEF WHITE



Off-road bumpers help define what an off-road vehicle can be. (Photo courtesy CYC Engineering)



Paired with recovery gear, lighting and suspension improvements, aftermarket bumpers become the foundation of a fully equipped off-road build. (Photo courtesy CYC Engineering)

Despite their size and sometimes aggressive appearance, there's nothing to be afraid of when it comes to aftermarket off-road bumpers. Delivering appearance and utility upgrades, they are extremely shop-friendly and can serve as entryways into additional customization projects.

Today's quality bumper offerings are designed to fit seamlessly on modern high-tech vehicles, accommodating cameras and sensors while providing mounting points for LEDs, winches and more. But don't let their good looks fool you—they are also rugged enough to take on trail obstacles and debris without breaking a sweat.

For shops that may still be apprehensive, suppliers are ready to calm any fears with inside information on market trends, sales strategies and hot new products that make a great first (and last) impression on off-roaders and overlanders.

DUAL THREATS

Once considered an afterthought, aftermarket bumpers have now taken their place as integral components in comprehensive 4x4 and overland builds.

"They're no longer just about protection or recovery points," says Jason Bukolt, director of marketing and creative for Fab Fours. "Today's bumpers are part of a complete vehicle build. They integrate lighting, recovery gear, winches, and even camera and sensor technology. That evolution has made them a cornerstone product in the overland and off-road segments. Customers now see bumpers as both a functional upgrade and a major visual statement for their vehicles."

The products help define what an off-roader can be, says Jesse Brown, vice president of operations for CYC Engineering.

"Originally designed for protection, modern bumpers evolved into mounting platforms for winches, lights, recovery points and expedition gear. As overlanding gained traction, these components allowed drivers to build vehicles capable of self-recovery and long distance exploration," he says. "What started as simple steel replacements

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ELEVATION



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Adventure travelers are helping grow the market. (Photos courtesy aFe POWER)

for factory bumpers eventually became essential pieces of equipment that define the look and capability of modern off-road builds. Today, they serve as the foundation for fully outfitted rigs designed to handle remote terrain and extended travel."

Aftermarket bumpers have played a major role in shaping the modern off-road and overlanding market by transforming trucks from basic trail vehicles into fully equipped adventure platforms, says Tony Savasta, vice president of marketing for Westin Automotive Products.

"Today's designs emphasize modularity, lighter materials and integrated functionality," he reveals. "Our bumpers include winch mounts, recovery points, sensor compatibility and provisions for LED lighting and camera systems. This allows overlanders to build vehicles that support recovery, navigation and extended travel without excessive weight. Improved approach angles, making vehicles more capable on technical trails, have also been a big factor."



Customers now expect strength, compatibility and styling in one solution, says Rick Sanchez, director of sales and marketing for Steelcraft Automotive.

"Aftermarket bumpers have shifted from being purely protective components to becoming core upgrade platforms. In today's market, they serve as the foundation for additional accessories like lighting, recovery gear and winches, while also supporting OEM technology integration," he says. "This evolution has allowed shops to offer more complete, functional builds that meet both recreational and professional demands."

The components are 4x4 and overlanding favorites, partly because they upgrade the vehicles in several ways.

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aFe POWER
John Gray
VP Exhaust & Exterior Products

■ **HOT PRODUCT:**
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■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
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Bodyguard Bumpers
Chris Wiman
Vice President

■ **HOT PRODUCTS:**
Magnum RT Toyota Front Bumpers
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Built for maximum clearance with a high-clearance skid plate to improve approach angles and front-end protection; constructed from 1/8-inch steel with 1/4-inch support braces; integrated winch plate for up to a 12K winch; sensor-compatible RT bar.

CYC Engineering Inc.
Jesse Brown
VP of Operations





HOT PRODUCT:
Matrix Series Front Bumper
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Delivers aggressive styling and durability; maintains a clean, modern look; built from heavy-duty U.S. steel; designed to be both functional and visually distinctive; hits the sweet spot between hardcore off-road capability and everyday usability.

Fab Fours
Jason Bukolt
Director of Marketing & Creative

HOT PRODUCT:
Steelcraft HD Replacement Front Bumper
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Vehicle-specific design; heavy-duty, one-piece steel construction; high-quality powder-coat and e-coat finish; retains compatibility with OEM sensors, cameras, tow hooks and safety features; winch-ready options on select models; true bolt-on installation.

Steelcraft Automotive
Rick Sanchez
Director of Sales and Marketing

HOT PRODUCT:
Bandit Bumper
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Designed for maximum front-end protection for heavy-duty trucks; attractive appearance; compatible with factory sensors and cameras; can use either the OE or aftermarket bumper lights; winch mount modular design accommodates 18,000-pound winches.

Westin Automotive Products
Tony Savasta
Vice President of Marketing

HOT PRODUCTS:
FXS Bumper Series
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Modular three-piece steel construction; easy installation; paintable panels deliver a clean, OEM-style finish.

Rough Country
AJ Tate
Sales Representative

Quality offerings are designed to precisely fit today's trucks and SUVs.
(Photos courtesy Rough Country)

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When a customer considers a bumper, it's a good time to also discuss upgrades like winches, LED lighting and recovery gear. (Photos courtesy Westin Automotive Products)



"Aftermarket bumpers have become aesthetically pleasing while implementing prominent improvements in the vehicle's overall capabilities in various scenarios while operating off-road, on the farm or at the jobsite," says Chris Wiman, vice president of Bodyguard Bumpers.

Adventure travelers in particular are helping grow the market.

"Aftermarket bumpers have always been popular for off-roading, but overlanding has taken off and with that many customers are opting for bumpers for protection and extra light capabilities," says John Gray, vice president, exhaust and exterior products for aFe POWER. "We are developing bull bars and some bumper guards that do not require any vehicle modifications. Installation and removal are much easier than bumper replacements."

The newest products give trucks a distinct appearance while adding real function for off-road and overlanding use, notes AJ Tate, sales representative for Rough Country. "They offer a more aggressive look, yet OE style, and some are winch-capable for deep overlanding sites."

BORN TO PERFORM

The best products noticeably improve off-road travel without affecting on-road performance.

"Many customers believe that there is a dramatic drivability change when installing a front-end replacement bumper," says Wiman. "Bodyguard Bumpers uses high-grade materials along with in-depth research and development to provide protection without sacrificing anything from a vehicle performance standpoint. In most cases it improves the overall function of the truck, Jeep or Bronco."

Customers often come for the appearance and stay for the features.

"The aggressive look sells bumpers, but their real purpose is protection and recovery," says Brown. "When you're stuck on a trail and need a winch or solid recovery point, that's when you realize why a quality bumper matters."

Reliable offerings are designed to precisely fit today's trucks and SUVs.

"A common misconception with aftermarket bumpers is that you will have to make major modifications to the vehicle for them to fit," says Lyle Willis, sales representative for Rough Country. "While that may have been true in the past, our newest bumper requires very little work."

They are also "built to work seamlessly with modern vehicle technology," says Sanchez.

Regardless of design, it's important that the latest offerings don't adversely affect the safety and utility functions found on modern vehicles.

"Fitment can vary widely by vehicle platform, requiring attention to frame mounting points, airbag sensor positioning, accessory integration and, in the case of mid-width applications, some trimming of the stock fascia," notes Savasta. "It's not difficult, but there is a fair amount of disassembly to do, then you set up the new brackets, align the new bumper and hook up all the electronics and lighting and test. And because many bumpers are designed for winches, there is the winch installation to factor in as well."

Thankfully, different options actually help widen the potential customer base.

"Be aware of all the products available in the marketplace," Gray advises. "Many shops and installers do not know that aFe POWER offers products like bull bars and bumper guards for SUVs, cars and trucks."

Quality suppliers are continually improving applications to seamlessly blend with vehicle aesthetics while taking advantage of OEM mounting points.

"A common misconception is that aftermarket bumpers are a nightmare to install or that they'll interfere with all the modern

technology on today's trucks. Years ago, that might've been more of a concern, but the industry—and our engineering—has come a long way," says Bukolt, noting Fab Fours designs bumpers to work with factory mounting points and vehicle electronics. "Another misconception is that aftermarket bumpers are only for hardcore rock crawlers. The reality is a lot of customers just want a tougher look, better protection or a solid place to mount a winch and lights for weekend trail runs or overland trips—the off-road community has grown way beyond extreme wheeling and bumpers have evolved right along with it."



Drivers often expect strength, compatibility and styling in one solution. (Photo courtesy Steelcraft Automotive)

POINTS OF ENTRY

Sales strategies can start with viewing aftermarket bumpers as a key component of any off-road project.

"Present bumpers as part of a complete vehicle solution rather than a standalone product," suggests Bukolt. "Pairing a bumper with a winch, lighting package or suspension upgrade not only improves the vehicle's capability but also increases the overall ticket size. Display vehicles, social media builds and in-shop examples are also extremely effective—customers are far more likely to invest in a bumper when they can see how it transforms the look and functionality of a truck, Jeep or SUV."

Brown from CYC engineering stresses the importance of shifting the conversation from a single accessory sale to a complete upgrade project.

"When paired with recovery gear, lighting and suspension improvements, aftermarket



SEMA SHOW ADDS DEDICATED POWERSPORTS SECTION

The Specialty Equipment Market Association (SEMA) is expanding the SEMA Show's ATV/UTV presence by launching a dedicated Powersports/SxS/Lifestyle section.

The initiative is a direct response to clear demand and the evolving habits of the modern enthusiast, SEMA officials noted in a press release announcing the new section. SEMA research confirms growing crossover opportunities between the automotive and powersports markets.

"This expansion is a bold step forward in SEMA's mission to serve the entire enthusiast ecosystem," says Tom Gattuso, SEMA vice president of events. "Powersports has always been an integral part of SEMA's DNA, and we are now providing this community with the dedicated platform it deserves. By integrating powersports and related lifestyle products into our show floor, we are creating a more powerful, unified resource for the aftermarket. This move celebrates the natural synergy between automotive and outdoor recreation, ensuring our members have the advocacy, resources and product discovery platform they need to thrive in a modern, evolving market."

The new section will be anchored in the West Hall, utilizing a layout designed for long-term growth. The location also offers access to adjacent parking lots for dynamic outdoor activations and vehicle demonstrations.

The show floor will undergo an evolution to group Trucks, Off-Road and Powersports sections together, reflecting the "total package" approach enthusiasts take toward their adventure builds, the release added. The section will highlight a diverse range of categories, including:

- Motorcycles & Dirt Bikes
- Side-by-Sides
- Trailers & Tow Vehicles
- Related Adventure Lifestyle Gear & Accessories

"Attendees can expect an immersive and highly interactive experience that mirrors how they actually live and work," says Andy Tompkins, SEMA trade show director. "By grouping powersports and lifestyle gear alongside our world-class truck and off-road sections, we are providing an unmatched opportunity to see the latest in the adventure market."

The 2026 SEMA Show is set for Nov. 3-6 in Las Vegas.



The SEMA Show is introducing a dedicated Powersports/SxS/Lifestyle section in the West Hall at this year's event. (Photo courtesy SEMA).

bumpers become the foundation of a fully equipped off-road build," he says.

Steelcraft's Sanchez calls them "bundled installs."

"Pairing a bumper with lighting, winches or side steps not only improves margins but also enhances the overall customer experience," he explains. "Additionally, shops that actively showcase installs through social media and in-store displays tend to convert more customers. Educating buyers on protection, functionality and long-term value is key to driving consistent sales."

And don't forget that most vehicles have two bumpers, says Savasta.

"The first no-brainer is if you are talking about a front bumper to a customer, be sure to insist on the rear as a related sale and visa-versa," he says. "When a customer considers a bumper, it's the perfect time to discuss upgrades like winches, LED lighting and recovery gear. Ask your Westin rep about creating a simple showroom display or demo truck that will drive sales by helping customers visualize the upgrade. When customers see how a bumper integrates with a winch, lights and recovery points, it becomes easier to understand the value and they're



The best products noticeably improve off-road travel without affecting on-road performance. (Photo courtesy Bodyguard Bumpers)



Aftermarket bumpers are integral components in comprehensive off-road and overland builds. (Photo courtesy Fab Fours)

far more likely to purchase the full setup rather than just the bumper."

Some customers may be interested to know there are bumpers that are off-road-ready, without being too off-road.

"Many shops simply do not realize that aftermarket front-end replacement bumpers do not have to be massive and bulky," says Wiman from Bodyguard Bumpers. "Ours provide a very precise fit and finish while also improving the overall strength and capability of the vehicle. They not only look the part, but they also act the part."

Seeing the bumpers in action can help answer questions from new customers.

"Anyone looking to increase their sales on units of this type should upfit a shop truck with one and let the product speak for itself," says Willis.

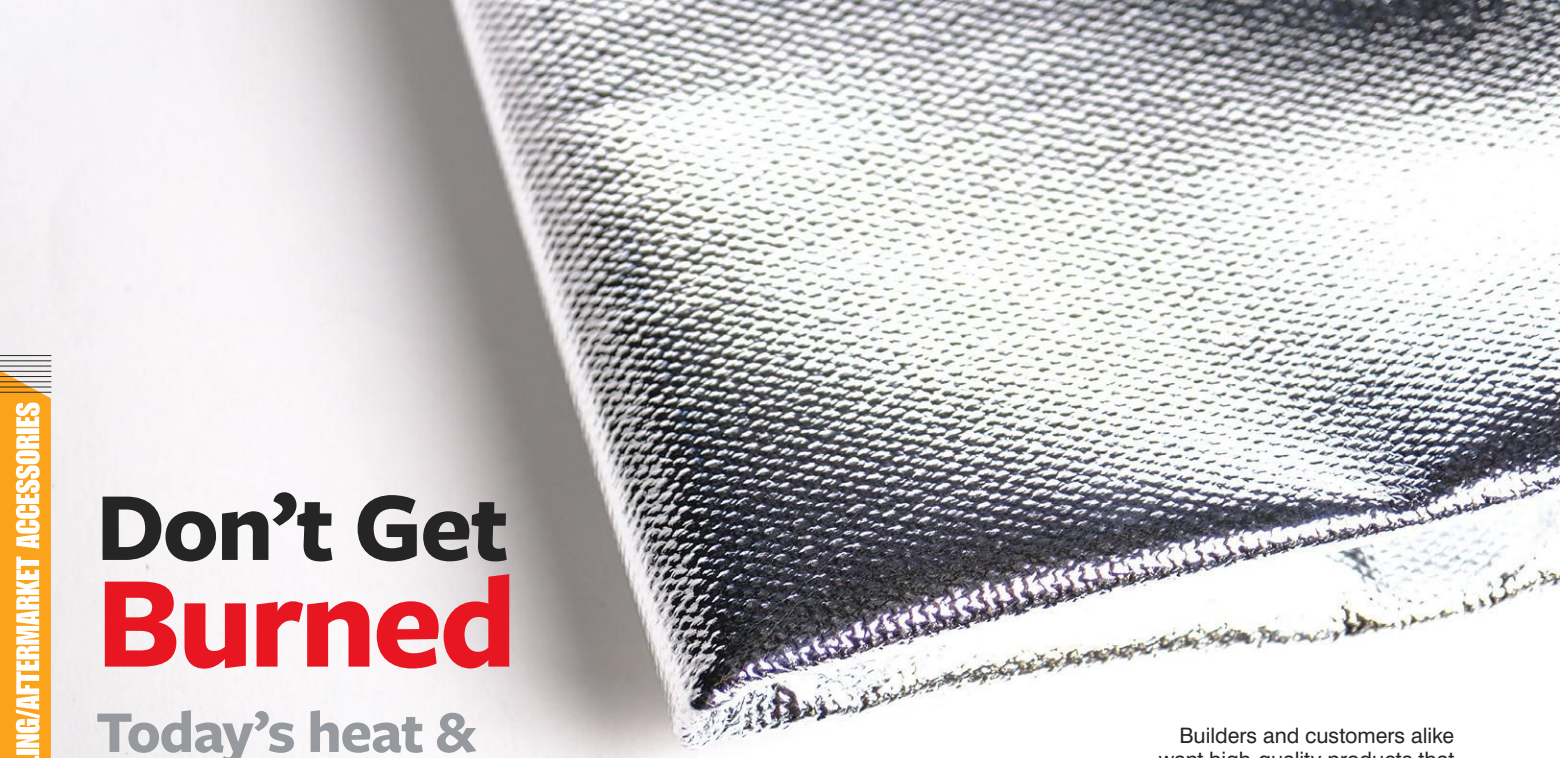
Finally, meeting enthusiasts where they gather can help introduce new product categories they soon decide they can't live without.

"The overland, light off-road market is growing rapidly and you may be missing out on new customers," says Gray. "Attend a local overland event or meet-up to get educated by enthusiasts and help them become more aware of the products available in different market segments." **TS**



Don't Get Burned

Today's heat & sound control products keep everything comfy cozy.



Builders and customers alike want high-quality products that perform and are easy to use. (Photo courtesy Thermo-Tec Automotive Products)

BY JOHN CAROLLO

When searching for add-on sales opportunities in vehicle projects big and small, it pays to stay calm, cool and collected. Today's heat and sound control products deliver component protection while creating a peaceful environment that allows drivers to sit back and enjoy the ride.

Available in a wide array of shapes and sizes, heat and sound control offerings include everything from the latest heat shields and engine component protectors to insulation barriers and material sheets that can be cut and fit to size. Attachment methods range from innovative adhesives to secure straps, inviting installer creativity while delivering solutions for those little annoyances that can become big headaches.

For shops new to heat and sound control, suppliers offer thoughts on market trends, sales strategies and hot new products designed to make everyone's motoring experience a little bit more comfortable.

THE PROTECTORS

Longtime shop folks may remember when heat and sound control materials weren't much more than mildly modified house building insulation, often added to cars as somewhat of an afterthought. These days, however, this unique market features plenty of high-tech, application-specific solutions.

"Just like a lot of things, the technology has advanced greatly," says Steve Garrett, marketing director at Design Engineering Inc. "Materials have become more robust and reflective barriers have become lighter and more effective. The challenges of keeping bigger motors and electric vehicle battery systems cool and quiet require a new level of innovation and product design."

Tim McCarthy, founder/CEO of HushMat and ZyCoat, notes that heat and sound con-

Heat and sound control products help vehicles reach their maximum potential. (Photo courtesy Thermo-Tec Automotive Products)



trol solutions are now a primary category in the automotive aftermarket.

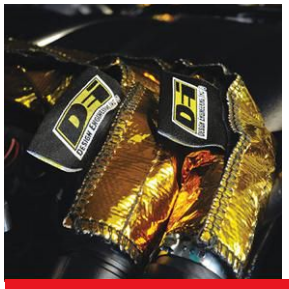
"Hot rod/street rod builders, upholsterers, car audio install centers and collision repair shops that install these materials as part of their bill of material of work set themselves apart," he says. "Consumers get in these vehicles after installation and feel like the quality of their vehicle is improved. Hush-Mat's American-manufactured materials, proven in automotive OEM and aftermarket applications for over 37 years, add value to that consumer."

As the category grows, the products become an important part of many different projects.

"The market remains consistent," says Jeremy White, general manager at Thermo-Tec Automotive Products. "Builders and customers alike want high-quality products that perform and are easy to use. When you can deliver that with competitive prices and products made in the USA, like Thermo-Tec's, you have a winning formula."

William Schwartz, digital engagement strategist for Heatshield Products Inc., calls heat and sound mitigation a "baseline necessity" these days.







The heat and sound control market features plenty of product innovation and technological advancements. (Photos courtesy Design Engineering Inc. – DEI)

"No matter the application, customers are always looking to bring down heat, noise and vibration. We get calls about this for everything from street performance builds to off-road and overland vehicles, where managing heat and sound has become a bigger part of the overall build process," he notes. "For shops, this means more customers are more likely to come in with concerns about cabin heat, loud interiors or protecting components from high temperatures. With so many different options available, shops are also looking for solutions that are effective, lightweight and not overly intrusive to install to solve these problems quickly while adding value to the work they're already doing."



HEAT & SOUND CONTROL

HOT PRODUCT: Dynamat Xtreme
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Top-performing automotive aftermarket sound deadener; American made and owned; backed by science developed over 37 years.

Dynamat LLC
Scott Monnin
Owner

HOT PRODUCT: Tri-Fusion
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Provides sound deadening, thermal insulation and sound absorption performance all in one 4-square-foot sheet; offers HushMat Ultra Sound deadening and Silencer 1/4-inch sound-absorbing and insulating foam all in one product.

HushMat
Tim McCarthy
Founder/CEO

HOT PRODUCT:
Adapt-A-Shield XT
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Lightweight, flexible, formable heat shield that can be easily wrapped around sensors, lines, hoses and components; versatile and reuseable; conforms to odd shapes; offers high heat capacity; made with aluminum and a poly-glass cloth backing.

Design Engineering Inc. (DEI)
Steve Garrett
Marketing Director

HOT PRODUCT: Muffler Armor
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Reduces radiant heat from the muffler and lowers interior temperatures; easy add-on during exhaust work without major modifications; wraps directly around the muffler and secures with stainless steel locking ties; fourth generation, family-owned business.

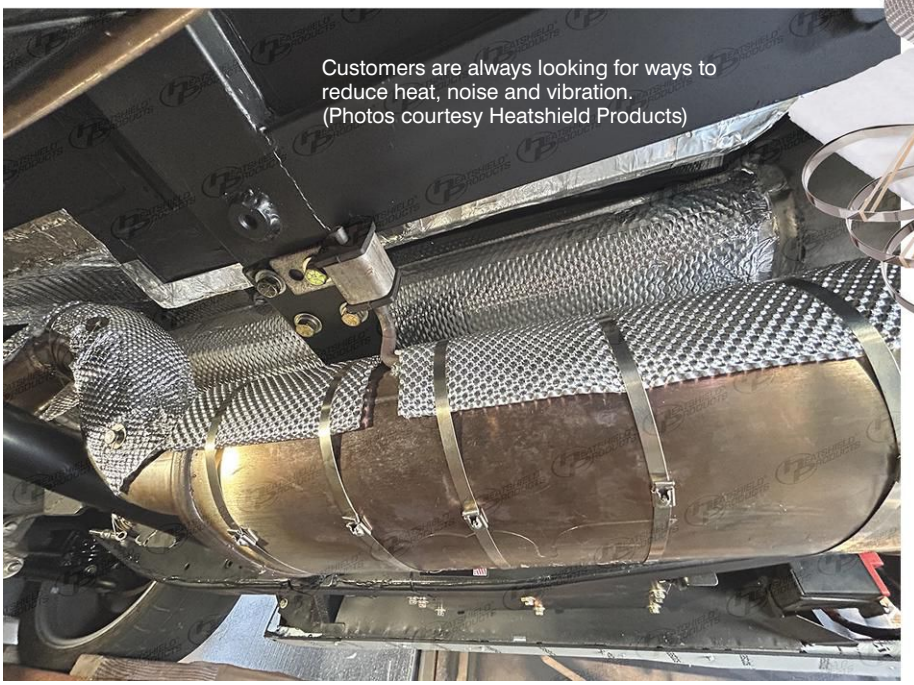
Heatshield Products
William Schwartz
Digital Engagement Strategist

HOT PRODUCT:
Heatmaster Exhaust Shield
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
A high-temperature exhaust shield made of 0.003 stainless steel with 2,500-degree ceramic cotton insulation sandwiched inside to stop heat and prevent burns; can be made in any size; grommets allow attachment with stainless tie straps or stainless wire.

Koolmat Insulation
Pat Hill
Owner

HOT PRODUCT:
Adhesive-Backed Heat Barrier
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Installer friendly; peel-and-stick backing makes applications quick and easy; durable makeup helps the product stand the test of time; can be used in all areas of the underbody to shield panels and parts from damaging heat.

Thermo-Tec Automotive Products
Jeremy White
General Manager





Customers are always looking for ways to reduce heat, noise and vibration. (Photos courtesy Heatshield Products)

Over the years, the segment's popularity had attracted a wider range of suppliers, requiring shops to do their homework to identify the quality brands they want to work with.

"There has been a large increase in inferior products throughout the space in the interest of cheap internet pricing," says Scott Monnin, owner of Dynamat. Many newcomers, he adds, "have no experience with the true science of sound mitigation or thermal dynamics. The overall lack of technical expertise has really caused a lot of confusion in the market."

MULTIPLE USES

Heat and sound control product installation often brings out the creative side of technicians, who are continually finding new uses for the materials.

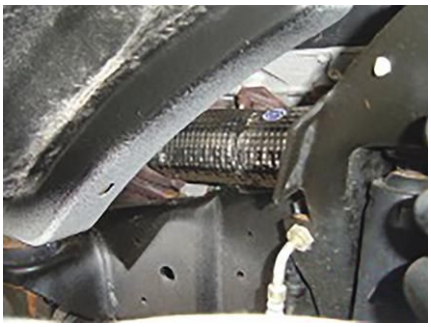
"Builders and car enthusiasts alike have gotten extremely knowledgeable about what our products do, but they often overlook the performance increases that can be associated with doing things like wrapping their headers or using heat-shielding material on their intake," says White. "You're not only looking to protect components from heat, but make your ride perform to its maximum potential."

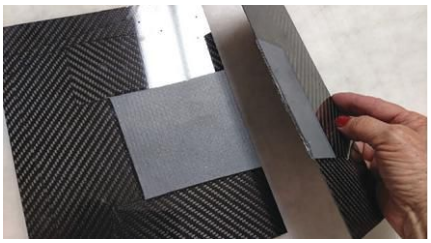
There are many components on a vehicle that need protecting, says Pat Hill, owner of D&H Heat Technology, dba Koolmat Insulation.

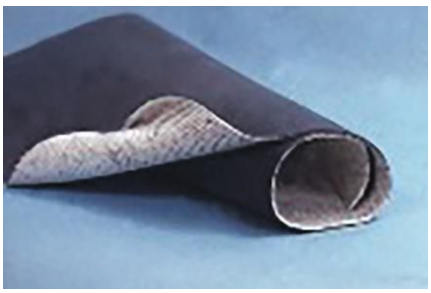
"Plastic products need insulation to keep from melting," she notes.

Sometimes, it's about things working better more than just cooler or quieter.

"An often-overlooked use of heat man-









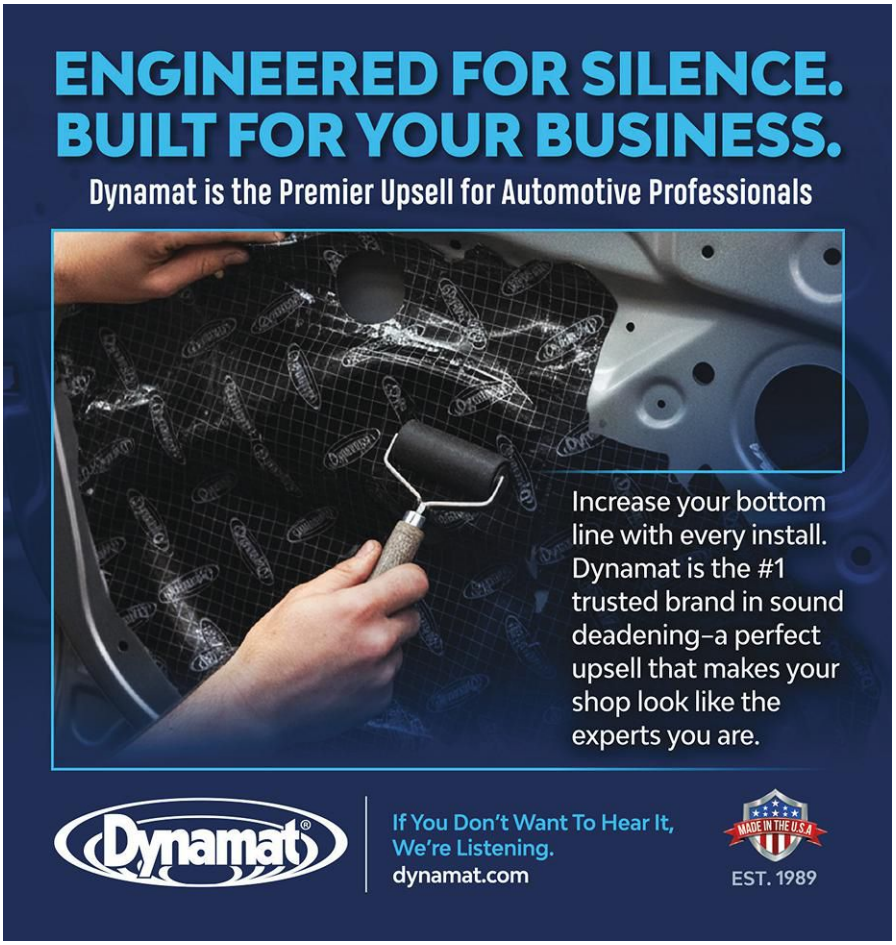
A wide range of uses make today's heat and sound control products an easy add-on to almost any project. (Photos courtesy Koolmat Insulation)

agement components is increasing the efficiency of systems onboard a vehicle," says Schwartz. "For example, from a performance perspective, insulating exhaust heat not only protects surrounding components but also increases the performance of the vehicle. The hotter the pipe, the better the flow, but that heat can damage nearby parts. When a shop installs exhaust insulation or turbo shields, it helps keep that heat inside the exhaust where it improves flow, while also protecting surrounding components."

He's also seen an increased presence of heat and sound control products in overland and camping builds, such as Sprinter vans or other off-road projects with added electrical systems and accessories.

"Many of these vehicles have onboard fridges, battery systems and other





ACELA TRUCK COMPANY UNVEILS JEEP-BASED WORK TRUCK

Acela Truck Company used this spring's NTEA Work Truck Week as an opportunity to debut its Acela Dispatcher, a Jeep-based 4x4 work truck. Engineered for demanding environments, the Dispatcher combines drivability and off-road capability with a 2,600-pound payload.

Built on a highly modified Jeep Gladiator chassis, Acela transforms the platform into a two-door extended cab paired with a custom flatbed featuring folding and removable sides and tailgate for added versatility. The Dispatcher is also available as a cab-chassis with a bed-delete option for full customization.

The patent-pending design delivers a comfortable, easy-to-drive truck with a compact footprint and tight turning radius. Combined with Jeep's on- and off-road capabilities, the Dispatcher is aimed at municipalities, mining operations, tradespeople, campuses, construction sites and utilities operating in access-challenged environments, according to a press release.

"Fleet managers are being asked to do more with less, especially when access, maneuverability, payload and uptime matter," says David Ronsen, Acela president. "The Dispatcher delivers higher payload and superior maneuverability compared to half- ton pickup trucks, all on a compact chassis at a significantly lower price point—even lower than some worksite UTVs. It gives Acela a powerful platform to support our customers' critical missions."

Highlights include a V-6 engine, 9-speed automatic transmission, selectable four-wheel drive, modern safety systems, ergonomic cab design and available advanced driver-assistance features. A 240-amp alternator and robust payload capacity allow fleets to easily power and support vocational equipment.



The Acela Dispatcher is a Jeep-based 4x4 work truck designed as a nimble worksite vehicle with increased versatility. (Photo courtesy Acela Truck Company)







Heat and sound control solutions are now a primary category in the automotive aftermarket. (Photos courtesy HushMat)

components that benefit from additional insulation and heat protection," Schwartz continues. "Helping to manage the heat around these systems can improve efficiency and reliability, especially for vehicles being used on long trips or in harsh environments."

The "feel good" factor these products bring is a very real thing, Monnin believes.

"Shops sometimes overlook the value sound and thermal products add to the overall feel and performance of the vehicle," he explains. "Whether it is a restoration or a sound package, treating the vehicle (with these components) provides a finished product that customers will not find by shopping on the internet. We are always working with dealers to help them build a better relationship with their customers."

The versatility of today's heat and sound control products create new upsell opportunities.

"A lot of heat management is focused on headers and turbo heat, but fuel rails, injectors and fuel lines are extremely vulnerable to heat soak," Garrett observes. "Protective line sleeving and abrasion protection for fuel and fluid lines (fuel, brake, transmission) can be critical to performance and stable fluid delivery. Protection for fluid hoses prevents vapor lock and helps keep fluid pressures stable."

These solutions sometimes work best in areas customers don't always see.

"Many shops overlook the underside of the transmission tunnel or under the floor pan directly above the exhaust as primary treatment areas," says McCarthy. "Excessive heat transfers through these areas and enters the vehicle interior. We designed our hoodliner material to treat these high-heat and highly exposed areas."

CALM & COOL

If there's one thing that unites drivers of all types of customs, classics and specialty vehicles, it's that they want to be cool.

"The key is bringing awareness to just how much of a problem heat can be," says Schwartz from Heatshield Products. "It's usually not a situation of if something might break but when, unless the proper steps are taken to protect

THE **RIGHT LIGHT** FOR **EVERY RIDE**

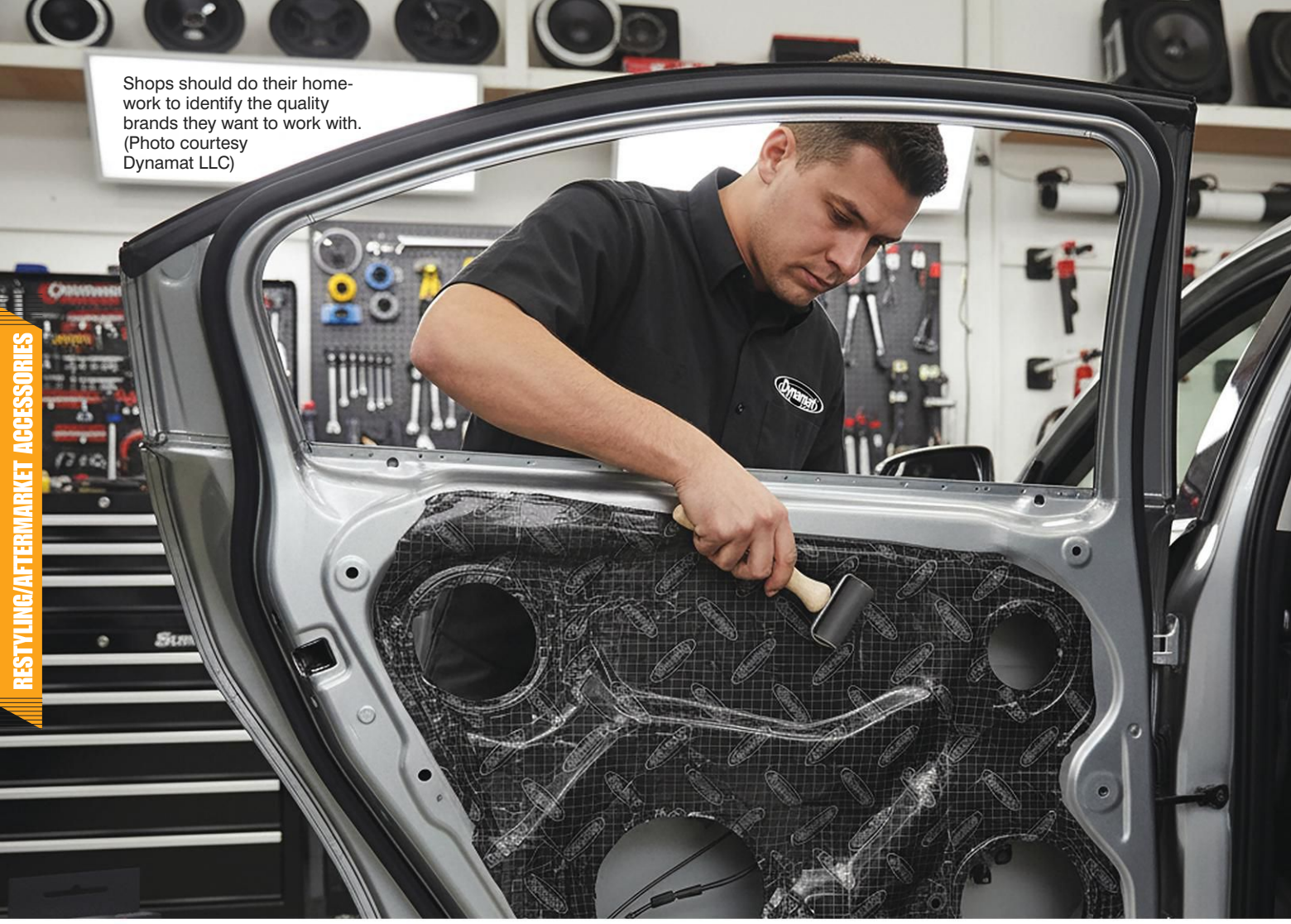


From bumper-mounted cubes to roof bars and auxiliary lighting upgrades, our LED lineup gives off-road customers the options they want to customize any build. Available in multiple sizes, shapes, and beam patterns, these lights deliver higher effective lumens to fully illuminate the trail while drawing less power, reducing strain on the alternator and helping extend battery life. Built with powder-coated die-cast aluminum housings and dual IP67 and IP69K protection, they're engineered to handle dust, water, pressure washdowns, and whatever the terrain throws their way. With up to 50,000+ working hours and a comprehensive limited lifetime warranty, there is a dependable solution offered for every adventure and every ride.



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Shops should do their homework to identify the quality brands they want to work with. (Photo courtesy Dynamat LLC)

components that are exposed to damaging levels of heat."

Heat damage is often a silent problem that customers don't think about until something fails, he adds.

"When shops take the time to point out these potential issues and recommend installing heat shielding, it helps prevent future headaches that will likely cost far more than the heat protection itself," says Schwartz. "It also helps shops protect the work they've already done by keeping wiring, hoses, electronics and nearby components from being damaged by excessive heat, while also giving the engine bay or build a cleaner, more finished look. This helps avoid downtime from repairs and, in some cases, being stranded when something heat-related fails unexpectedly, since the damage often isn't visible until the problem has already occurred."

Drivers will appreciate this next-level commitment to quality.

"Adding heat and sound control products to builds, modifications or sound packages is a great way to create a better relationship with customers," says Dynamat's Monnin. "It shows thought leadership, it reflects experience and it is a detail to discuss that shows you have a solid understanding of all aspects of the project."

A knowledgeable staff and installation team is the first step toward making heat and sound control a vital part of each project, notes McCarthy.

"Spend time educating your sales team on these products," he recommends. "Take an hour and focus on one product and do a review prior to the shop opening. This is especially critical to do as a refresher for new salespeople or if you experience a declining trend of attachment of these materials."

Suppliers such as HushMat are available for educational sessions or to answer product questions, he adds.

If customers are hesitant to embrace heat and sound control upgrades, explain how heat solutions can extend the life of their favorite ride.

"Sell the important point of component and vehicle longevity," says Garrett from Design Engineering/DEI. "The better a vehicle and its systems are protected from heat, typically the longer they last, and the more money a customer can save in the long run by not having to make preventable, expensive repairs. With vehicles staying on the road longer, small improvements in heat and sound protection can pay off greatly in the long run. And because most heat management products are a low price point for the customer, products can be an easy addition for increased sales."

Koolmat's Hill offers just a partial list of products and uses shops may want to consider, including exhaust heat shields for performance and RV applications, foil heat blockers for transmissions, high-heat composites for floorboards that fit underneath the carpet, and high-temp fiberglass sleeves that protect wires and spark plug boots.

Overall, heat and sound control products deliver an enticing return on investment, concludes Thermo-Tec's White.

"Our products aren't the most noticeable parts, like a new set of wheels or any of the countless aftermarket accessories you can install, but they are keeping things like your starter from getting cooked or preventing vapor lock that can strand you on the side of the road." ***TS***

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Overland Awning

Yakima Products, Lake Oswego, Oregon, presents its OverNOut 270 XL Awning. Built with strength and ease of use in mind, the freestanding awning protects overlanders from the elements with 132 square feet of coverage. Installation is quick and easy with integrated T-slot attachments that connect to popular platforms and crossbars.

Colored Paint Protection Film



XPEL Inc., San Antonio, presents its COLOR Paint Protection Film product line, combining PPF with a palette of 16 colors for vehicle personalization. Designed to deliver a long-lasting, factory-quality finish with the self-healing protective strength of the company's traditional clear PPF, the COLOR line draws inspiration from iconic automotive finishes including Molten Orange, Moss Green and Monza Red, enabling drivers to refresh their vehicle's appearance or create a completely custom look. Applications range from accent pieces to full-vehicle wraps.



Police Truck Package

Leitner Designs, Corona, California, presents its Police Package for law enforcement pickup trucks. Codeveloped with the Placentia, California, police department, the pursuit-rated modular cargo system is designed to withstand the rigors of law enforcement duty. The package includes an Active Cargo System (ACS) FORGED bed rack, a standard GearPOD, an extra-large GearPOD XL, a HydroPOD that holds 4.8 gallons of pressurized water and a HeadBANGER headache rack that prevents in-bed loads from colliding with the rear cab glass.

Universal Rubber Off-Road Bump Stops



RubberShox, Garden Grove, California, presents its UB12-OFFROAD Universal Natural Rubber Bump Stops for medium and large truck applications including Toyota Tacoma and Tundra, GMC Canyon, Chevrolet Colorado and Nissan Titan. The patented modular suspension enhancement is designed to equalize loads and support the OE suspension for more stability and increased ground clearance.



Versatile Wrap Film

3M, St. Paul, Minnesota, presents its new 3M Protection Wrap Film, designed to be applied via wet, dry or hybrid processes. For wet applications the film feels instantly familiar, allowing for precise alignment and smooth gliding. Meanwhile, dry installs can be completed faster with reduced cleanup time while maintaining strong adhesion with easy slide and reposition control. The film is particularly suited for color-change wrap installers expanding into protection film, delivering professional results with fewer workflow interruptions.



Truck Wheels

Mayhem Wheels, Ontario, California, presents its Mayhem Vector wheels. Featuring a bold design tailored for stock and leveled trucks, the wheels include a simulated beadlock lip and removable hardware, balancing rugged styling with daily drivability. Models are available in both 6-lug (6-spoke) and 8-lug (8-spoke) configurations, delivering strength and street appeal for off-road, show and towing applications.



4Runner Sway Bar Link Kits

ICON Vehicle Dynamics, Riverside, California, presents Front and Rear Sway Bar Link Kits for 2003-24 Toyota 4Runner models and associated Toyota platforms. Engineered to match the stock sway bar link length, the new components feature a more robust construction and maintenance-free ball joints to ensure smooth, consistent movement through the entire range of suspension travel. The results are improved on-road handling and more predictable off-road performance.

Ceramic Coating Kit



Perfect Carbon, Cedarburg, Wisconsin, presents its Perfect Carbon Ceramic Coating Kit. Designed to deliver a deep gloss, extreme slickness and increased water beading, the kit provides professional-grade results without a complicated application. The formula is easy to apply and has an instant visual impact, leaving a super-glossy, glass-like finish that lasts. Each kit includes a bottle of product, an applicator and four microfiber pads.



Ford Bronco LED Lighting

Vision X Off-Road, Auburn, Washington, offers complete Lighting Solutions, including Driving Lights and Fog Lights, for new-gen Ford Bronco models. Available components include the universal 40-inch Unite roof light bar, an A-pillar/ditch light kit, modular front bumper kit, fog light kit and a reverse/spare tire light kit. Kits include custom brackets, plug-and-play wiring and the company's high-performance technology.



All-Terrain Tire

Yokohama Tire, Santa Ana, California, presents its all-terrain GEOLANDAR A/T4 G018 tire engineered for light trucks, SUVs and CUVs. Now available in 100 sizes, including 33 newly added Euro-metric and P-metric sizes to go along with the 67 LT-metric sizes, the go-anywhere A/T4 is offered in sizes ranging from 15- to 22-inch wheel diameters. The tire's GEO-SHIELD technology delivers extra strength for on- and off-road use by providing multiple sidewall plies, a full nylon cap and a high turn-up carcass.

UCA Component Replacement Kit



Tuff Country EZ-Ride Suspension, West Jordan, Utah, presents its Upper Control Arm Component Replacement Kit for Toyota vehicles. Available for 2005-23 Tacoma, 2003-24 4Runner and 2007-14 FJ Cruiser models, the kit is designed specifically for the company's upper control arm kits. The full package includes high-quality ball joints, bushings and sleeves to restore handling, alignment and comfort.



Cargo Carrier Hitch

GEN-Y Hitch, Nappanee, Indiana, presents its VOYAGER Cargo Carrier Hitch featuring TORSION-FLEX technology that works behind the scenes to dramatically reduce movement between the cargo carrier and hitch receiver. Capable of hauling coolers, bikes or camping gear, or towing a small trailer, the system is made in the USA with durable, high-quality materials and designed for added stability on uneven roads and trails. ***TS***

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SPRING 2026: PROJECT VEHICLE SKETCHBOOK

STAYING AHEAD OF THE GAME.



Sometimes, it's serious business having a little fun.

Vehicle builders know this intimately. They spend countless hours focusing on the smallest details and anticipating countless potential challenges, all so drivers can look forward to 100% enjoyment behind the wheel—whether on the street, track or trail.

This blend of thoughtful, intentional development combined with genuine excitement and love for the industry drives aftermarket suppliers just as much as it does enthusiasts. Companies like Red Line Oil are on the frontlines, watching as their quality products enhance the enjoyment of passionate consumers.

"I've always believed we have the best seat in the house, witnessing the dedication tuners, racers and builders bring, and we never take that for granted," says Mark Beatty, brand director for Red Line Oil. "We are performance people ourselves, so we know firsthand the importance of protecting engines and components."

Whether it's a vehicle project or an aftermarket part, Beatty says engineering new products starts with a simple rule: always begin with the highest-quality components.

"This philosophy also guides us as we watch customers not only enjoy exciting experiences, but doing so feeling confident their investments are protected," he says. "We did a campaign a while back: 'You dream it, you build it, we'll protect it.'"

THE SHOP's biannual Project Vehicle Sketchbook offers a sampling of project vehicles, special editions and concepts that capture the precision and passion of the auto aftermarket while highlighting its next steps.

"Whether a person has grown up in this industry or is new to the scene, innovation is what drives us all," Beatty says. "It's embedded into our very core. We see the advances being made by builders and manufacturers as opportunities. We love growth, we love challenges and we love the creativity it takes to not just keep up but to stay ahead of the game."

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ICON THRIFTMASTER

ICON 4x4 recently rolled out its 30th **Thriftmaster** build. Reimagined for the modern age with sports car handling and performance, the **Chevrolet** pickup debuts in ICON's eye-catching Old School edition style with a brilliant green livery.

Complete with a four-wheel independent suspension chassis by **Art Morrison Enterprises**, **Brembo** brakes and a rich, handstitched saloon with leather interior, details are carefully rendered befitting one of America's most celebrated classic trucks.

Power is provided by a **GM** E-ROD LS3 6.2L V-8 engine producing 440 hp. The **IDIDIT** steering column features a tilt pivot that is crisp and sharp, thanks to a collapsible shaft in the engine bay with **Borgeson** joints for enhanced safety, operating in concert with rack-and-pinion steering and an automatic transmission with overdrive to greatly increase reliability and decrease long-term vehicle wear.

The truck's front features a GT sport independent suspension and a tunable sway bar with a **Strange** Dana 60 nodular third member in the rear. The combination gives the Thriftmaster the power of a modern sports car alongside the capacity to haul light loads.



Highlights include 18-inch forged aluminum wheels, **Michelin** tires, an aerospace-grade electrical system, period-correct dash with 3D printed inserts to better direct the airflow to the cabin, **Dakota Digital** gauges contoured with LED backlights, Bluetooth audio system with period-correct milled knobs, power door locks and windows, chocolate brown **Alcantara** headliner, White Oak bedliner with stainless steel rails, CNC cargo anchor tie-downs, and a tailgate featuring polished stainless steel arms that delete the factory tailgate chains and a center drop handle with bear claws that secure the door firmly with no rattles.





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RUF RODEO OFF-ROAD SPORTS CAR





Supercar manufacturer **RUF Automobile** presented its first-ever customer-ordered **RODEO** at **The Quail, a Motorsports Gathering** during **Monterey Car Week last year**. The company says the off-road sports car is the world's only all-terrain production vehicle constructed on a carbon fiber monocoque chassis.

Presented in a deep shade of Jordan Black with white centerlock forged wheels, the car's dark, chiseled design is accented with white-finish roof rails, quad-stacked exhaust tips integrated into the rear bumper and white model designations. The front and rear bumpers feature integrated bash bars, with wide fender flares supporting a 41mm (1.6-inch) wider front and 142mm (5.6-inch) wider rear track width compared to other RUF models. Bi-LED headlights are complemented by full LED taillights.

A fully adjustable all-wheel drive system allows variable torque distribution from front to rear, while a specialized double-wishbone suspension system featuring pushrod-actuated horizontal dampers raises RODEO 242mm (9.5 inches). Highlights include ceramic brakes with 6-piston monobloc brake calipers mated to 350mm (13.8-inch) ceramic discs at all four corners; a 3.6L turbocharged, horizontally opposed six-cylinder engine offering 610 hp; and a 6-speed manual transmission.

1948 CUSTOM CAB OVER

The Custom Shop in Illinois provides info on a recent **1948 Custom Cab Over** project. It starts with a full custom-built chassis powered by an LT1 engine and 6L80E transmission and adds a hydraulic flip-forward cab and motorized hood.

Highlights include a narrowed rear end with 14-inch-wide rear custom **Schott Wheels**, **Apex Leather** on custom seats, smoked **Auto City Classic** glass, **Carworx** products, **TCP Global** Candy Red paint, **CTEK** charger on an **ODYSSEY Batteries** battery, **Sony** audio system, **Dakota Digital** gauges in a custom dash, **Holley** EFI, dual **K&N** split air filter system, stainless steel **Pypes Performance Exhaust** with an oval cut coming out the rear fenders, **Painless Performance** wiring harness, **Scosche** audio accessories, **Vintage Air** system hidden under the tilt-forward cab design and **XKGLOW** LEDs.





MOPAR DUDE RAM 1500 CONCEPT

Debuted at the **2025 SEMA Show, Mopar's Dude Ram 1500** concept embodies the sport truck persona of the Ram brand by combining a design theme inspired by a popular sport trim package from the early 1970s with a performance-oriented and aggressively lowered stance for the street.

The original Dude "tough truck" design was first used by **Dodge** as an answer to the rising trend of sporty trucks, which blended utility with unique style. Based on a **Ram 1500 Big Horn**, the concept features a Sublime Green exterior with vintage "Dude" C-stripes in contrasting satin black running the full length of the vehicle.

The lowered Dude concept rides on satin black 22-by-10-inch wheels. A custom front splitter and side sills accent the lowered stance. Adding to the performance look, side-exit exhausts with black tips empty out in front of the rear wheels on both sides.

Power comes from a 5.7L Hemi V-8 with upgraded Mopar cold-air intake that produces 395 hp. Inside the cabin are **Alea** leather seats featuring bright green stitching surrounded by dark door trim pieces, a custom instrument panel badge featuring "The Dude" logo in bright green, an in-console safe, a multi-accessory instrument panel rail and all-weather floor mats.









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1985 TOYOTA TURBO TRAIL CRUISER





Introduced at the **2025 SEMA Show**, the Toyota Turbo Trail Cruiser is a performance-inspired build that blends the timeless appeal of a **1985 Land Cruiser FJ60** with the cutting-edge power of Toyota's modern i-FORCE twin-turbo V-6 engine. Officials say the project was an exercise in seamlessly retrofitting contemporary engineering into a heritage platform—part restomod, part hot rod and all Toyota.

Producing 389 hp and 479 pound-feet of torque, the refined, modern engine brings quieter operation, reduced emissions and better fuel efficiency—along with instant spool-up and the steep-yet-linear torque curve of twin turbochargers. Every component was developed to fit without cutting into the firewall, relocating mount points or altering the FJ60's structural integrity.

The **Toyota Motorsports Garage** team engineered new motor mounts and machined an adapter plate to mate the i-engine to the bellhousing of the factory 5-speed transmission. The engine oil pan was redesigned to work with the Land Cruiser's chassis layout, while a bespoke exhaust system provides an aggressive exhaust note. A new heat exchanger was fitted to original mounting points to provide added cooling capacity, while a custom wiring harness ensures factory-quality drivability.

The FJ received a modest 1.5-inch lift, 35-inch tires, front shackle reversal and period-correct colors and graphics finished in a PPG reproduction of Toyota's original 1986 Silver 147. Inside, a modern JBL stereo system subtly enhances the vintage cabin experience.

INFINITI QX65 MONOGRAPH SPORTBACK SUV



INFINITI introduces the **QX65 Monograph**, a sportback SUV concept immediately identifiable by its fastback roofline that expands the brand's Artistry in Motion design language into the two-row, midsize segment.

"It's sculpted with an underlying sense of speed and elegance, blended with very muscular and strong proportions—all headlined by the expectation-defying fastback roof silhouette," says **Alfonso Albaisa**, INFINITI senior vice president for Global Design.

The sleek, seamless upper body contrasts with the robust lower body. The 22-inch wheels are pushed to the corners of the vehicle and the fenders emphasized, giving QX65 Monograph a confident, purposeful and dynamic stance. Designers crafted the vehicle's shape around horizontal theme lines, contributing to its broad posture and contrasting with the more vertical orientation of other INFINITI vehicles.

The SUV is finished in a color-shifting satin paint called Twilight that contrasts with gloss black details on the roof rails and wheels, as well as artfully chosen bronze accents for the "spear" that outlines the dramatic arch of the roofline and grille.

INFINITI QX80 R-SPEC BUILD

INFINITI turned its flagship luxury SUV into an unexpectedly raw performance machine with the **QX80 R-Spec** build. Having debuted at the **2025 SEMA Show**, it's powered by a **Nissan GT-R** twin-turbo engine with custom turbochargers, intercoolers, exhaust manifolds and an upgraded fuel system making it capable of 1,000 hp.

QX80 R-Spec harnesses the additional horsepower with Nissan GT-R carbon ceramic brakes featuring bespoke modifications.

A custom coil-over suspension optimizes handling, and the vehicle wears bronze 24-inch wheels designed to resemble those found on original GT-Rs, with a 12-inch width accommodating 315 section-width tires.

Aesthetics come courtesy of a custom body kit that is wider, lower and aerodynamically enhanced over its OEM base. All of its visual enhancements are directly inspired by the **GT-R T-Spec Takumi Edition**, starting with a color-shifting wrap that pays homage to the Midnight Purple colors made famous on the R34 and R35 GT-R generations. The R-Spec also has restyled exhaust finishers, diffusers, fog lights, badges and other performance design cues.





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LAND ROVER SIII PROJECT



ECD Automotive Design introduces **Project Inizio**, a **Land Rover SIII** build that's an example of how Classic Series vehicles can be transformed for today's drivers while honoring the original spirit that made them icons. The design preserves the elemental character that Series enthusiasts love—upright windscreen, compact wheelbase, galvanized detailing and modular soft-top/hard-top flexibility—but beneath the nostalgic exterior lies a thoroughly updated foundation designed to bring the vehicle into the modern era without compromising its identity.

A **GM** 6.2L LS3 V-8 engine paired with a GM Auto Sport 6-speed automatic delivers smooth, dependable power. Upgraded heavy-duty axles, **EBC** FAST brakes and a **Borla** stainless steel exhaust improve drivability, safety and road confidence while maintaining the minimalist character of a vintage truck.

Highlights include 16-inch OEM solid steel wheels, **BFGoodrich** All-Terrain tires, fold-down side steps, **Puma** dash wrapped in approved tan leather, OEM low-back bucket seats, **Dakota Digital** gauges, **Pioneer** subwoofer and speakers, back-up camera, and remote lock, alarm and remote start system.

TOYOTA CAMRY GT-S CONCEPT



A modern sedan can still serve as a hot project build, as showcased by the **Toyota Camry GT-S Concept** at the **2025 SEMA Show**. Built on the foundation of the **2025 Camry XSE AWD Hybrid**, the special vehicle is a bold design study in what's possible when performance-inspired styling, functional upgrades and showroom-ready sensibility meet.

Designed to feel as if it could roll straight off a dealership floor and into a customer's garage, the GT-S stays rooted in reality with its 232-hp stock 2.5L four-cylinder hybrid system. Toyota's **CALTY Design Research** in Ann Arbor, Michigan, led the styling effort, engineering the rear fascia and bumper to integrate seamlessly with a performance exhaust, while the sides and front feature newly sculpted aerodynamic components that amplify Camry's athletic profile.

A custom Inferno Flare exterior finish complements the pronounced GT-S bodylines. At each corner, adjustable coil-overs lower the chassis by 1.5 inches, while a high-performance brake upgrade includes 8-piston calipers squeezing 365mm front rotors with 6-piston calipers matched with 356mm rear rotors. To enhance mechanical grip, 20-inch performance wheels mounted with 245/35R20 tires fill the wheel wells.

1990S-ERA CUSTOM PORSCHE



ECD Automotive Design's first Porsche build is **Project Gravette**, an innovation of the venerated 1990s-era **Porsche 911 (993)**. The coupe thoughtfully blends timeless Porsche heritage with modern performance, technology and hallmark craftsmanship.

At its heart is an air-cooled Porsche turbocharged M64 engine, delivering an estimated 500 hp, paired with a heavily upgraded 6-speed manual transmission and sport exhaust. Finished in a sleek Icy White gloss exterior with Agate Gray metallic accents, Project Gravette sits on 18-inch RS-style wheels wrapped in **Michelin** performance tires paired with **Brembo brakes** and a **Bilstein** sport suspension setup.

The 993 custom includes LED headlights and taillights, **Recaro** Cross Sportster CS front seats wrapped in premium **Hydes** black leather complemented by matching OEM-style rear seats, a black suede headliner, billet silver hardware and OEM-inspired white gauges with an original shifter.



A floating touchscreen stereo powered by **Focal** premium audio, Bluetooth connectivity, a digital rearview mirror, heated seats, automatic headlights and a full suite of power conveniences bring amenities up to the latest modern specs.

NISSAN DUNE PATROL

Debuted at the **2025 SEMA Show**, the **Nissan Dune Patrol** was conceptualized as the ultimate ultra-comfortable support vehicle for the most extreme off-road events. Paying homage to the Nissan Patrol's desert racing history, the special build takes the rugged capability of the brand's **PRO-4X** package to the next level with a custom long-travel racing suspension, widened fenders and prototype **NISMO** 18-inch AXIS beadlock wheels wrapped in 37-inch **Yokohama** GEOLANDAR M/T G003 tires.

An array of custom and prototype NISMO Off Road parts improve durability against hazards while supporting off-road racers. Highlights include high-clearance bumpers with a swing-out spare tire and traction board mount, frame-mounted rock sliders, skid plates, off-road lighting, a roof rack and a cat-back exhaust system.

For long adventures away from resupply points, the Dune Patrol also features storage and mounting solutions both inside and out for all essential gear, such as roof-mounted storage cases, MOLLE panels for fuel and water canisters, an on-board air compressor system and long-range radio antenna.



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MERCEDES WRAPS





Sean Oldaker, manager and lead installer for **OZK Wraps**, has a passion for wrapping vehicles. Situated in the foothills of the Ozark Mountains, Oldaker's business in Springdale, Arkansas, wraps some of the fastest and most impressive vehicles around.

The shop has a sweet spot for **Mercedes-Benz** vehicles, including two recent projects that received full vehicle wrap custom finishes. The **Mercedes-Benz CL300 AMG Line** convertible features **Avery Dennison** Supreme Wrapping Film in Matte Blue Metallic. The sleek matte finish gives this vehicle an icy look that's especially hot in today's restyling marketplace.

Oldaker also took special care of a classic **1976 Mercedes-Benz 300D**, giving both his client's car and accompanying **2013 BMW S1000RR** motorcycle Dark Pearl Green full wrap treatments with Avery Dennison Supreme Wrapping Film.

1969 CAMARO HYBRID HYPERCAR

Orange County, California-based hot rod shop **Blazin Rodz** brought an example of its limited-production hybrid hypercar based on a **1969 Chevrolet Camaro** to the **2025 SEMA Show**. The ground-up reimagining pairs a sculpted carbon fiber body with a state-of-the-art chassis built entirely from bespoke, precision-machined components engineered to hypercar standards.

Being prepared for limited production, the hypercar project includes a partnership with **HP Additive Manufacturing** and an exterior design penned by **Sean Smith**. The goal is 1,600 combined hp from the twin-turbo R07 V-8 engine and axial flux electric motor, and a top speed of 210 mph.

Highlights include launch control, traction control, regenerative braking and in-house hybrid control firmware.

The Blazin Rodz Camaro hypercar project will also receive a patent-pending suspension system combining torsion bars with pneumatic air springs and hydraulic pushrods packaged in a variable-rate design that will continuously adapt stiffness and ride height in real time.





MOPARIZED DODGE SIXPACK CHARGER

Mopar designers and engineers set out to build upon the **2026 Dodge Charger** modern muscle car by adding a wide array of exterior performance and interior upgrades to create the **Moparized Dodge SIXPACK Charger** concept. The vivid Stryker Purple exterior is complemented with satin carbon fiber accents and lightweight carbon fiber components—including the hood, front splitter and rear decklid spoiler—that enhance airflow and downforce for real-world performance gains.

Vented fenders add to the improved aero performance by releasing air pressure from inside the wheel wells, while satin black Mopar "strobe"-style bodyside graphics run from the doors to the rear quarter panels. Mopar provides a performance suspension spring kit to lower the ride height 1 inch and reduce the center of gravity for enhanced road feel, sharper cornering and improved high-speed stability.



Custom five-spoke, 21-by-11-inch **Brass Monkey** wheels and custom orange **Brembo** brake calipers, front and rear, add a distinct visual design element, while a 550-hp, 3.0L twin-turbo SIXPACK HO engine powers the Dodge SIXPACK Charger concept. Performance upgrades include a custom Mopar cold-air intake and stainless-steel dual exhaust system.



The interior features **Katzkin** premium leather seats with contrasting Tuscany Ink and Palomino surfaces, along with orange and purple stitching. Mopar pedal covers improve the look and feel for the driver, while all-weather floor mats and a rear cargo mat from Mopar protect the floor surfaces.

HYDROGEN FUEL CELL TOYOTA TACOMA H2-OVERLANDER

Like any responsible camper, the **Toyota Tacoma H2-Overlander Concept** can venture deep into the great outdoors, tread lightly and leave no trace, thanks to its hydrogen fuel cell electric (FCEV) and battery electric (BEV) technologies built into the proven TNGA-F truck platform that deliver only water as the tailpipe emissions.

Engineered and built by the **Toyota Racing Development (TRD)** engineering teams in California and North Carolina, the Tacoma achieves 547 hp from two electric motors. It integrates a second-generation **Toyota Mirai** fuel cell stack and three hydrogen tanks housed within its frame rails. The powertrain is augmented by a 24.9kWh lithium-ion battery pack.

Chassis and suspension upgrades reinforce the concept's overlanding mission. Inside the wheel wells, a TRD billet long-travel kit with heavy-duty, high-performance **FOX** 2.5 Performance Elite Series shocks—adapted from Toyota Tundra suspension development—ensures increased articulation and shock absorption over rough terrain. Improved stopping performance comes courtesy of a Tundra front brake upgrade, while custom 17x8.5-inch wheels mounted with aggressive, 35x12.5R17, off-road tires provide traction.







Finally, a patent-pending TRD exhaust water recovery system captures water for camping and outdoor use. The water is essentially distilled, containing no minerals, making it suitable for washing and showering.



LUXURY V-12 ITALIAN OFF-ROADER





Special Operations by GlasWerks DMV, a group of craftsmen and artisans behind bespoke off-road luxury cars, debuted **Elevato**, an all-wheel-drive, V-12 four-seater, in the **STEK USA** booth at the **2025 SEMA Show**. Elevato, built on decades of knowledge from off-road and endurance racing, is designed to be the ultimate off-road supercar.

Each build begins with a **GTC4 Lusso**, which is disassembled and reimagined as a luxury off-road vehicle. More than 30% of the vehicle's parts are reengineered or replaced to meet endurance off-road expectations.

The suspension receives a complete redesign, featuring billet aluminum upper and lower control arms, strengthened axles, CV joints, and upgraded sway-bar end links and tie rods, which help to offer twice the original ground clearance and 9 inches of wheel travel. The team also integrates a full-onboard air system to adjust tire pressure.

Alongside the suspension upgrades, the GlasWerks team works with customers to select from a variety of spring rates and setups, roof-rack systems, billet-machined switchgear, lighting equipment, Inconel exhausts, a configurable gauge cluster, rock guards, custom headlights and customized badging throughout.

All Elevatos feature STEK's paint protection films, while mud-flaps and replaceable body cladding offer further protection while channeling airflow.

AEV FORD SUPER DUTY FXL

American Expedition Vehicles (AEV), a Tier 1 OEM supplier, has announced the **Ford Super Duty FXL** program. The FXL brings proven system-level engineering, advanced manufacturing and validation to the Ford F-250 and F-350 Super Duty platforms.

Developed from the ground up as a fully integrated vehicle system, the FXL program offers two complementary paths. Customers can choose turnkey AEV Super Duty trucks that are fully built and sold through authorized AEV dealerships, or AEV engineered components for those who prefer to build their truck over time.

Full compatibility with Advanced Driver-Assistance Systems (ADAS) is maintained through radar components integrated directly into the AEV front bumper, ensuring all electronic safety and driver-assistance features remain fully functional. Component offerings include the AEV 4-inch DualSport Suspension with AEV-turned **Bilstein** shocks, custom rate coil springs and optimized geometry.

The lineup also includes an AEV stamped steel front bumper with standard winch mount, AEV Highmark fender flares and 18-inch AEV Katmai DualSport wheels and 40-inch **BFGoodrich** HD Terrain tires.



2026 TOYOTA COROLLA CROSS NASU EDITION

Toyota explored the adventurous side of its lineup at the **2025 SEMA Show** with the debut of the **2026 Corolla Cross Hybrid Nasu Edition**, a bespoke concept that reimagines the compact crossover as a bold, mountain-ready machine. Inspired by Japan's scenic Mt. Nasu—a destination known for hiking, hot springs and outdoor adventure—the Nasu Edition blends off-road capability, distinctive styling and lifestyle-focused accessories.

The concept, designed and built by **Toyota's Service Parts and Accessories Development (SPAD)** team, retains the hybrid powertrain of the 2026 Corolla Cross—a 2.0L Atkinson-cycle four-cylinder engine that integrates with three electric motors to produce a combined output of 196 hp. The all-wheel driveline puts the power to the ground by way of custom Toyota truck wheels wrapped with Toyo Open Country A/T III all-terrain tires.

To give the concept added clearance and presence, a custom-made suspension lift complements the wheel and tire package with an adventure-ready stance. Modified Toyota lightbars and fog lamps illuminate the drive path, while custom illuminated door sills, puddle lamps and cargo sills light up the interior and your campsite.



Exterior and accessory upgrades include a one-off body kit with a modified hood scoop, custom color-change purple wrap and overlanding equipment including rock sliders, a cargo basket, an articulating roof rack, a custom drawer system and a refrigerator mounted on a sliding tray.

1956 CONTINENTAL







Automotive design icon **Chip Foose** unveiled his custom **1956 Continental** at the **2025 SEMA Show**, showcasing both timeless elegance and modern engineering. The bespoke build debuted in the **BluePrint Engines** booth.

A reinterpretation of mid-century American luxury, Foose removed the Continental's top and transformed the classic coupe into an open-air design that emphasizes proportion and flow. A custom-fit rear seat from a **1964 Ford Thunderbird** adds balance and comfort, while reshaped door openings, a revised body side line and subtle fender modifications refine the car's silhouette.

Up front, the headlights were pulled back and dropped, and the hood reshaped with smoothed openings and a deleted emblem. On the sides, 1956 Ford truck door handles have been incorporated for a cleaner aesthetic. Both front and rear bumpers were reshaped to follow the new body contours, and the rear deck lid opening was redesigned, with the spare tire hump lowered 3 inches to achieve Foose's signature stance and flow. Performance comes courtesy of a BluePrint Engines LS-Compatible 376-ci Pro Series engine producing 530 hp.

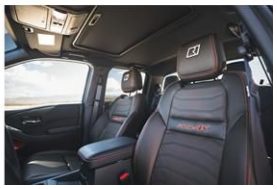
Highlights include a **MagnaFlow** all-stainless-steel exhaust system, a **Master Power Brakes** four-wheel disc system, custom wheels wrapped in custom white-striped tires by **Wheel Pros**, **BASF** paint mixed by **Steve DeMan** at **Foose Design** and a custom cabin by **Bill Dunn Interiors**.





2026 NISSAN FRONTIER PRO-4X R





Roush Performance and **Nissan** partnered on the **2026 Nissan Frontier PRO-4X R** by **Roush**. The all-new package includes an upgraded suspension for better handling, titanium-painted exterior accents, exclusive off-road wheels and tires built to tackle tough terrain, and distinctive interior upgrades designed for drivers who want more style and capability from their midsize truck.

At the core of the PRO-4X R package is the all-new Roush Performance x **Ohlins** 2.0 Off-Road Suspension System that levels and lifts the vehicle 2 inches. The system also includes new upper control arms designed and engineered by Roush, as well as 2-inch-diameter coil-over shocks with external reservoirs.

The truck's stance is elevated with a set of 265/70R17 **Hankook** Dynapro AT2 Xtreme tires wrapped around 17-inch off-road wheels with "R" center caps, black lug nuts and a titanium finish. The Frontier also features all-new PRO-4X R titanium badging on the grille and tailgate, as well as new "R" badging on the front fenders. A titanium-painted skid plate provides protection on the trail, while titanium-painted front grille inserts and a lower front fascia are complemented by Lava Red tow hooks.

ICONIC AUTO SPORTS SP40 RESTOMOD



Argentina's **Iconic Auto Sports** introduces the brand-new **SP40 Restomod Speedster**, a modern masterpiece handcrafted in tribute to the legendary **1934 Model 40** for the modern era. From its carbon fiber body and striking aluminum accents to its Ford Coyote V-8 engine and thoughtfully engineered modern chassis, the SP40 honors the relentless spirit that defined **Edsel Ford**'s timeless design and groundbreaking automotive vision.

Crafted entirely by hand, the SP40 Restomod is a modern reinterpretation of the Art Deco design ethos. Modern carbon fiber bodywork replaces the original aircraft-grade hand rolled aluminum, preserving the striking vintage silhouette while also allowing for improved lightness and strength. A tubular spaceframe chassis holds power from the 480-hp engine paired with a **TREMEC** 5-speed manual transmission, with Brembo braking, an independent double-wishbone suspension, fully adjustable coil-overs and forged aluminum wheels delivering sharp, balanced dynamics.

Inside, each SP40 is tailored to the client's vision, with a choice of rich leathers, walnut trim, hand-machined aluminum and carbon fiber details. The purposeful analog instrument cluster and minimalist controls recall the tactile purity of a bygone era, while concealed modern amenities such as climate control and wireless charging blend seamlessly into the cockpit's vintage geometry.

PORSCHE SLANTNOSE





Porsche-reimagining company **Gunther Werks** unveiled its first Slantnose-inspired build last summer at **The Quail, A Motorsports Gathering**. Designed to revolutionize the Turbo platform to deliver 1,000 hp, **Project F-26** gets its name from the aerodynamic shape of a fighter jet and its limited production of just 26 units.

Visually, F-26 takes inspiration from the iconic **Porsche 935 Slantnose** and the **Porsche Slantnose** road car, combining timeless design with an innovative carbon fiber process and a focus on performance. Coated in custom metallic paint, the project includes a carbon fiber high-downforce wing, new rear panels with an aggressive side intake design and a squared rear fender, all punctuated by a dramatic slantnose front end that recalls one of Porsche's boldest design experiments.

Power is supplied by a twin-turbocharged, air-cooled 4.0L flat-six engine, co-developed by **Rothsport Racing**. Additional upgrades include a carbon fiber airbox, redesigned intercooler plenum, integrated blowoff valves within the intake system, monobloc wheels wrapped in **Continental** ExtremeContact Force tires, adaptive **JRZ** dampers, motorsport-grade ABS and advanced traction control. The rear wheelbase has been extended 30mm (1.18 inches) to the rear, creating a longer wheelbase and improving the engine's center of gravity.

EMC 620GE MERCEDES G-WAGEN



Expedition Motor Company (EMC), a restorer and custom builder of classically styled G-Wagens, has announced that commissions for its 6.2L LS3 V-8-powered **Mercedes-Benz 620GE** are now open.

Each vintage cabrio G-Wagen goes through an exclusive in-house build process that incorporates more than 2,500 hours into each project.

The 430-hp engine option delivers torque and responsiveness through a 6-speed automatic transmission, supported by an **AMG** braking system. EMC engineers have improved braking power by 48% at the front and 30% at the rear through enlarged calipers and ventilated rotors.

An enhanced cooling system and double-cardan driveline support the drivetrain, along with proprietary components manufactured by EMC. The powertrain is complemented by features found in all EMC "V6" builds including premium **Harman** sound, wireless Apple Carplay, air conditioning and heated seats.

TRICK RIDES SHELBY GT350TR



Premier muscle car restoration company **Trick Rides** has reimagined the **Shelby GT350TR** with a build that seamlessly blends classic Shelby heritage with modern engineering to create a track-focused performance car that honors the spirit of the original GT350. At its core is a supercharged, 700-hp Coyote V-8 engine that delivers power through a **TREMEC** T-56 6-speed manual transmission. Spent gases exit through a custom exhaust system utilizing **Ultimate Headers** and **MagnaFlow** mufflers.

For those seeking a different style of power delivery, an optional naturally aspirated 427-ci stroker motor is also available.

The reimagined Shelby is built on a **Roaster Shop** chassis, providing a modern foundation that enhances ride quality and overall performance. An independent front suspension paired with **FOX** coil-over shocks allows for precise tuning and better handling across a variety of driving conditions. In the rear, a parallel four-bar rear suspension system is matched with a 9-inch rear axle upgrade, and Roaster Shop oversized sway bars at both ends ensure dynamic handling and stability.

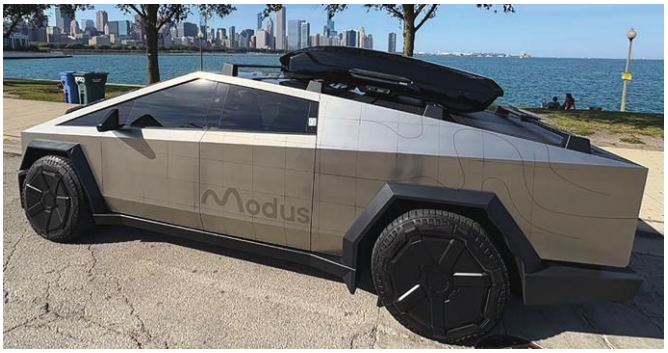
The GT350TR meets the road on lightweight, three-piece **Forgeline** wheels wrapped in **Continental** Z-rated tires, providing added grip and road-holding capabilities. **Baer Brakes** 6-piston front and 4-piston rear calipers supply stopping power to match the vehicle's performance.

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MODUS 2024 TESLA CYBERTRUCK





Modus took its **2024 Tesla Cybertruck** build to various **2025 Electrify Expos** to showcase how high-end, powerful audio systems can be integrated into today's complex electric vehicles. EVs offer silent cabins paired with abundant electrical power, creating opportunities for truly immersive, audiophile-grade sound systems.

The Modus Cybertruck installation achieved several industry firsts, showcasing the company's PREAC current-averaging technology operating directly on Tesla's 48V DC electrical system. The integration is capable of delivering 6,000W (RMS) of audio power without requiring voltage inverters or additional batteries.

"Consumers are often wary of adding or altering audio components in Teslas and other EVs because of their sophisticated electrical systems, but we are educating them that the technology is available today to do so safely and effectively," says **Jason Digos**, Modus senior sales trainer.

TOYOTA ALL-ELECTRIC BZ TIME ATTACK AWD CONCEPT

Pushing the limits of electric vehicle performance, **Toyota** has unleashed its first-ever battery-electric concept build—the **bZ Time Attack Concept**. Unveiled at the **2025 SEMA Show**, the purpose-built BEV machine is engineered to take on both Time Attack circuits and hill climbs.

Featuring competition aerodynamics, motorsports-grade suspension and engineering and a significant increase in all-electric horsepower over stock, the concept begins with the **26MY AWD bZ**, which already delivers 338 hp and a 0-60-mph time of just 4.9 seconds in showroom form. Toyota designers balanced battery performance with weight distribution and added an aggressive widebody and aero package suited for motorsports, and lowered the car a full 6 inches.

The bodywork is finished in a custom **PPG** pearl/metallic white, metallic black and red tri-color scheme.



BRAWLEY GTS EV OFF-ROADER

Vanderhall Motor Works introduces the **Brawley GTS** all-electric off-road platform. The GTS—the most capable, refined and technologically advanced Brawley yet—sets the benchmark for electric UTV performance with significantly more horsepower; a fully enclosed, climate-controlled cabin; and increased range.

Features that set it apart in the off-road EV market include regenerative braking and intelligent energy management. Its quad-motor system delivers up to 404 hp for instant torque and acceleration, greater control in technical terrain and the ability to tackle steep climbs, deep sand or high-speed desert runs without sacrificing precision or drivability.

Powered by a 40kWh lithium-ion battery pack, the Brawley GTS offers up to 140 miles of range, while the vehicle's zero-emission powertrain ensures a cleaner, quieter outdoor experience with seating for four adults.



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MITSUBISHI ELEVANCE CONCEPT



Mitsubishi Motors Corp. unveiled the **Mitsubishi Elevance**, an electrified crossover SUV concept, at the **Japan Mobility Show 2025**. Designed to integrate the best of the brand's electrification and all-wheel control technologies, the project's goal was to elevate the quality of time spent inside the unique vehicle.

Featuring smooth, seamless styling and a quad-motor 4WD system utilizing Mitsubishi's signature Super-All Wheel Control (S-AWC) technology, Elevance was built for confident, comfortable driving across diverse driving scenarios, from urban streets to off-road adventures. Its plug-in hybrid electric vehicle (PHEV) system, featuring an engine compatible with carbon-neutral fuel, delivers clean performance, while the large-capacity traction battery provides ample power.

The capsule-style cabin is enveloped by a robust body structure inspired by the rib-bone frame concept for exceptional rigidity. The front end showcases an evolved interpretation of Mitsubishi Motors' Dynamic Shield design identity. Combined with a honeycomb-structured front grille, it evokes both sophistication and power.

The concept also introduces AI Co-Driver, which encourages exploration into the unknown by suggesting destinations tailored to each driver's lifestyle.

VINFAST ELECTRIC ARMORED SUV



Global armored vehicle manufacturer **INKAS** collaborated with **VinFast**, Vietnam's pioneering EV automaker, on the creation of the **Lạc Hồng 900 LX**, a fully electric armored SUV engineered to meet international standards for ballistic and blast protection.

The project combines VinFast's advanced electric mobility platform with INKAS' decades of armoring expertise to deliver a dependable and secure vehicle. It underwent rigorous third-party ballistic and blast testing to ensure maximum occupant safety, having passed Vietnam's VPAM VR7 certification, one of the most stringent international standards for armored vehicles.

Designed for heads of state, corporate leaders, diplomatic fleets and high-security clients, the vehicle combines sustainability, innovation and certified protection in a single platform. ***TS***

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PERFORMANCE

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Diesel Performance

Modification opportunities abound as these versatile workhorses build on their passionate, loyal following.

BY JEF WHITE

The diesel performance market knows what it wants and is prepared to go get it. Offering a wide range of modification opportunities and build directions, these big-power vehicles are all about strength and durability.

A fluid regulatory landscape is changing the market, even as diesel ownership expands beyond the farm or jobsite to include everything from daily drivers to motorsport-specific racers and pullers. It all means more chances for performance shops to become local diesel experts, offering the advice and system knowledge serious enthusiasts crave.

Turning loyal diesel fans into repeat customers requires education and experience. Parts suppliers offer suggestions and advice, targeting industry trends, sales strategies and hot new products to consider.

DIESEL DIRECTION

You can't talk about diesel performance upgrades without understanding emissions regulations related to U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and California Air Resources Board (CARB) rules.

"This gets tricky, as there is currently uncertainty about changing and future standards," notes Jamie Prochnow, director – retail and commercial for AMSOIL. "Behavior has changed as consumers find interest in pre-emissions trucks or other compliant performance solutions. For example, a consumer may move from looking strictly at raw horsepower improvements to reliability-focused upgrades."

The need for components to maintain emissions compliance directly affects what aftermarket companies can legally sell and is shifting the industry toward EPA-compliant performance parts, says Cary Redman, vice president of sales for PRW Power Inc.

"Government policy changes can rapidly expand or restrict the diesel performance market," he says. "Even changes in how laws are enforced can dramatically affect diesel aftermarket activity."

Clear, compliant solutions improve performance within regulatory guidelines. (Photo courtesy Edge Products)

A less aggressive approach toward diesel emissions enforcement by the EPA is currently influencing the market, says Ben O'Connor, vice president of sales and marketing for Total Seal Piston Rings.

"This has led to an increase in aftermarket product development and a shop's desire to make modifications that they would be cautious of doing prior," he notes. "And while that varies state to state, it gives the consumer more opportunities for modification."

Still, top shops will want to ensure complete compliance with any project that's destined for street use.

"More aggressive enforcement of emissions laws has drastically changed the diesel performance landscape in the last decade. 'Chip, intake and exhaust,' once the holy

trinity for diesel shops, are now the products that can put them out of business," warns Justin Norris, sales and marketing director for S&S Diesel Motorsport. "Manufacturers and dealers have had to pivot toward emissions-friendly products in order to avoid crushing fines and potential incarceration. Emissions-on tuning and CARB-compliant products now dominate the top-seller list for many shops."

Bridney Jordan, propriety brands product and marketing manager for Rolling Big Power Tires, predicts the upcoming EPA 2027 GHG (Phase 3) and Low-NOx emissions standards will bring more change to the market, even as customer profiles are already evolving.

"Consumer demand is reshaping the diesel market," she says. "Diesel trucks are no longer used only by commercial fleets or contractors. Many drivers—including an increasing number of women—buy them for their power, towing capability and bold styling, but also expect premium comfort and technology."



It can be enjoyable providing the horsepower gains and flashy accessories diesel owners are seeking for their favorite vehicles. (Photo courtesy AMSOIL)

One of the effects of offering compliant diesel performance upgrades is a more deliberate approach to project planning, says Jacob White, brand manager for Edge Products.

"The market has clearly shifted toward emissions-compliant solutions, powertrain optimization within legal boundaries and products that enhance monitoring, drivability and reliability rather than simply peak horsepower," he says. "The uncertainty around future regulations has made customers more deliberate in their purchasing decisions. They want products from established brands that are committed to compliance, long-term platform support and ongoing software updates, even as truck owners are keeping their vehicles longer. Overall, while regulation has introduced challenges, it has also pushed the diesel performance segment toward more sophisticated, data-driven and durability-focused upgrades, which ultimately supports professional shops that prioritize quality installations and long-term customer relationships."

With so much data floating around, it may be comforting to know that many of the players in the diesel performance market are looking to cooperate and collaborate.

"Companies across different specialties are often willing to work together to push



DIESEL PERFORMANCE PRODUCTS

HOT PRODUCT:
AMSOIL Signature Series 100% Synthetic Max-Duty Diesel Oil
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Six times more wear protection; provides up to 76% less oil consumption; provides twice the rust protection and 60% better turbo cleanliness; resists oxidation and the thickening effects of soot contamination.

AMSOIL
Ryan Radzak
Product Marketing Manager – Commercial

HOT PRODUCT:
CTS3 Tuner
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Delivers versatility, strong margin opportunity and broad vehicle coverage in a scalable platform; 5-inch, high-resolution capacitive touchscreen; customizable gauge layouts; data logging; connects via OBD-II; built-in alerts for critical parameters.

Edge Products
Jacob White
Brand Manager

HOT PRODUCT:
Adrenaline Outlaw R100+ Diesel Racing Fuel
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Formulated for serious diesel competitors and performance enthusiasts; helps engines spool quicker, make peak horsepower and torque, and deliver consistent results; provides safe, repeatable and dependable power.

Hot Shot's Secret
Kyle Fischer
Director of Field Marketing & Partnerships

HOT PRODUCTS:
Flexplates
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Available for replacement and performance upgrade applications; Pro Series is SFI-rated at 29.1 or 1,500 hp; Elite Series is SFI-rated at 29.3 or 3,500 hp; engineered for today's extreme cylinder pressures, torque loads and durability requirements.

PRW Power Inc.
Cary Redman
VP Sales

HOT PRODUCT:
Repulsor A/T Plateau Premium All-Terrain Tire
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Built for the power and weight of diesel trucks with higher load indexes; bold, aggressive sidewall design; maximum traction for off-road builds; balanced on-road performance; true all-season capability (3PMSF certified) with sawtooth groove edges.

Rolling Big Power Tires
Bridney Jordan
Propriety Brands Product & Marketing Manager

HOT PRODUCT:
Ford 6.7L DCR Pump Conversion
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Durable replacement for the problematic CP4 high-pressure fuel pump; eccentric drive design with pressure-lubricated bushings; plug-and-play solution that can save Ford truck owners thousands in repairs.

S&S Diesel Motorsport
Justin Norris
Sales & Marketing Director

HOT PRODUCTS:
Gapless Diesel Rings
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Manufactured of martensitic iron, the toughest iron available; patented gapless second ring allows for increased power and reliability while greatly reducing blow-by.

Total Seal Piston Rings
Ben O'Connor
VP, Sales & Marketing

HOT PRODUCT:
Dualoy Duramax 5LP Piston
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
The Dualoy line features a special ring pack with a PVD top steel ring and a ductile iron second ring; tensions and gaps remain the same, but with premium materials and coatings; price-friendly; steel pistons for Ford 6.7L Power Stroke are also popular.

UEM Pistons/Dualoy Diesel Pistons
Pim van den Bergh
Director, Sales & Marketing



the category forward. At Hot Shot's Secret, we work closely with many of the diesel performance industry leaders, from engine and transmission manufacturers to turbo, injector and tuning companies," says Kyle Fischer, director of field marketing and partnerships. "There is a strong culture of sharing knowledge and advancing technology together, and that teamwork is helping the entire segment evolve faster. It leads to better products, better testing and better results for both racers and everyday diesel owners. In many ways, the continued growth of diesel performance is being driven by companies that understand we all move the industry forward when we work together."

Drivers keeping their trucks longer often leads to more demand for upgrades and modifications.

"With the cost of vehicles in general, car ownership has increased from an average of 6-7 years to now 9-10 years," says Pim van den Bergh, director, sales and marketing, for UEM Pistons/Dualoy Diesel Pistons. "Resale value is very high, and this market holds onto its vehicles. Many diesel owners repair and upgrade to get better/more power."

POWER PLUS

For aftermarket shops, the best diesel projects are often about more than simple performance numbers.

"While power gains can be a benefit, many upgrades improve overall engine efficiency," O'Connor explains. "For example, our gap-



Shops shouldn't shy away from suggesting important repairs or involved projects, as needed. (Photos courtesy UEM Pistons/Dualoy Diesel Pistons)



Successful diesel builds focus on longevity and return on investment. (Photos courtesy PRW Power Inc.)

less diesel rings provide a better ring seal, reducing blow-by and improving combustion efficiency. That can increase power, but it can also improve fuel economy, extend oil change intervals and ultimately save the customer money."

Jordan sees knowledgeable customers looking for systematic solutions and not just horsepower increases.

"Many upgrades focus on improving durability, efficiency and safety, especially as modern diesel trucks continue to evolve with advanced technologies," she says. "For example, newer trucks now feature smart towing technologies like Ford's Pro Trailer Hitch Assist and Pro Trailer Backup Assist, which help drivers safely maneuver trailers by assisting with steering and alignment. Performance components today often need to support these systems while also handling the increased torque and towing demands of modern diesel trucks."

Professionals should go about building the right combinations and understanding the data behind them, says Fischer.

"That is why education is so important. Customers look to their local shop not just for installation but for guidance, and that makes product knowledge a huge part of the value a shop brings to the table. We take the same approach with our shop relationships, because the better educated the people in the shop are, the better they can educate the customer. That creates smarter buying decisions, better outcomes and stronger long-term customer relationships. In today's market, the best shops are not just installers—they are trusted advisors."

There's no doubt diesel vehicles work hard, meaning upgrade products need to be durable. Quality aftermarket parts are more than up to the challenge, says Prochnow.

"A big misconception is aftermarket performance parts are not as good as OEM parts and could void warranties. Actually, many aftermarket parts will meet and can exceed OEM specifications," he says. "There is also protection against voided warranties written into the Magnuson-Moss Warranty Act. It's important to educate your customers on the differences between a certified OEM part and its aftermarket equivalent."

Norris observes that just about any diesel vehicle is a prime candidate for upgrades.

"While the aftermarket may have a reputation for focusing on power gains rather than durability some companies take an OEM approach to product development," he says. "It comes naturally to S&S, since we were founded and are owned by former OEM engineers. We sell thoroughly tested



The best diesel projects are often about more than simple performance numbers. (Photo courtesy Total Seal Piston Rings)



There's a strong culture in the diesel performance market of sharing knowledge and advancing technology together. (Photo courtesy Hot Shot's Secret)



In today's market, the best shops serve as trusted advisors and not just installers. (Photos courtesy Hot Shot's Secret)

solutions, whether that's making more power or gaining more durability."

Shops should not shy away from suggesting important repairs or involved projects as needed, says van den Bergh.

"This is a great market to make your own and carve out a presence for yourself. The segment that owns these vehicles often drives them for professional and private use and they need a go-to truck they can rely on."

Redman believes the most successful diesel builds focus on longevity and return on investment.

"Diesel owners often invest significant money into performance upgrades such as tuners, turbochargers and fuel system enhancements. As power levels increase, the supporting components in the engine must also be upgraded to handle the additional stress. Smart shops guide customers toward improvements that strengthen the engine's foundation and help protect that investment," he says. "For diesel enthusiasts and truck owners, performance upgrades represent a major investment. Customers expect those upgrades to deliver not only more power but also reliability. The goal is to ensure the vehicle performs at a higher level while maintaining—or exceeding—OEM-level durability and service life, even with the added stress of performance tuning."

Often, says White, the first step is educating customers about the potential upgrades that can enhance their diesel experience.

"Customers may assume all diesel upgrades operate in a gray area when, in reality, there are clear, compliant solutions that improve performance within regulatory guidelines," he says. "Modern platforms are far more streamlined than many customers (and even some shops) assume. With our plug-and-play inline modules and OBD-II connectivity, integrated safety features, app-based updates and built-in diagnostics, products like our EZX modules are designed to simplify installation while enhancing vehicle performance without dealer or warranty implications."

SPEAK THEIR LANGUAGE

Sharing the passion diesel enthusiasts have for their vehicles is a good first step toward establishing lasting relationships.

"Educate customers on the real-world benefits of diesel performance products. It's



Shops will want to ensure complete compliance with any project that's destined for street use. (Photo courtesy S&S Diesel Motorsport)

fun to dive into the flashy horsepower and fun accessories that can be added to customers' vehicles," says AMSOIL's Prochnow. "Most of the time, the customer is already seeking those out. While you can right-sell them a better option for what they're already looking for, use the opportunity to talk about additional products that will support that performance or drive other tangible benefits. Educate them on the products that help with fuel efficiency, engine longevity and reliability. Let them know there are products for all their vehicles—personal, work or hobby."

That may require having a staff with deep diesel knowledge, which also lends credibility and builds trust with customers.

"In addition to simply marketing that you install diesel performance components, having the ability to explain the benefits of installing those components is key to making the sale and ensuring customer satisfaction," says O'Connor from Total Seal.

"Take advantage of manufacturers' videos, technical staff and seminars to grow your knowledge base and become a diesel performance expert."

Becoming that local diesel expert, however, requires an all-in approach.

"Educate yourself and your staff and make sure you advertise that knowledge. Send your mechanics out for training to make sure they are comfortable with these vehicles. Create a feeling and environment that makes your customer feel secure and willing to pay for your knowledge, your parts and your repairs," advises van den Bergh from UEM Pistons/Dualoy Diesel Pistons. "Finally, don't be afraid to charge for what you do.



Modern platforms are far more streamlined, requiring thoughtful upgrades that match vehicle use. (Photo courtesy Edge Products)

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Shops that educate themselves on the developments occurring in the diesel market will be better positioned to recommend products that support the vehicles' performance and durability needs. (Photos courtesy Rolling Big Power Tires)

Too many shops make the mistake of not charging enough."

One of the best ways shops can increase diesel performance-related sales is to get involved in their local diesel enthusiast community, and specifically diesel motorsports, says Fischer.

"For Hot Shot's Secret, our involvement in drag racing and sled pulling has been far more than branding. It has given us a real-world proving ground where products are tested at the highest level, and that feedback goes straight back into our R&D process to help us build better products for everyday diesel owners. That same mindset can help shops grow. A shop does not need an expensive race truck to participate. Even bringing a daily-driven diesel to an NHRDA or ODSS event and competing in an ET class can create credibility. It shows customers that you are not just selling diesel performance—you are living it. That builds trust, strengthens your reputation and puts you directly in front of the exact audience most likely to buy from you."

By carrying products designed to handle the additional torque of today's diesels while closely following the market's evolving regulatory requirements, shops can provide real value to their customers, says Jordan from Rolling Big Power.

"Just as importantly, be prepared to educate consumers," she says. "Many diesel truck owners want to maintain performance and enjoy driving while staying compliant with new regulations. Helping them understand the right equipment and upgrades to meet these needs can build trust and ultimately increase diesel performance-related sales."

Meanwhile, accurately defining planned vehicle usage is a strong starting point for new diesel clients.

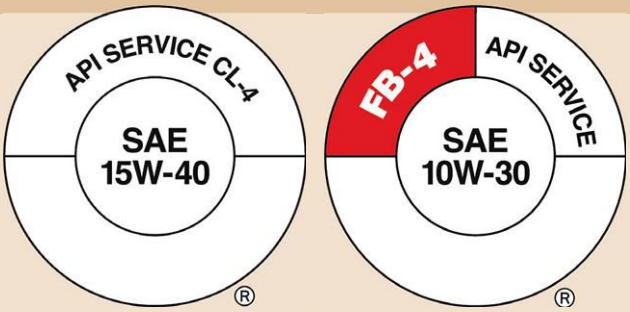
"Today's diesel customer isn't always walking in asking for more horsepower. Many are towing heavy loads, running service bodies, going overlanding or simply trying to make a high-mileage truck last longer. Shops that take the time to ask how the vehicle is used and then recommend options that are versatile and fill those needs tend to see higher close rates and stronger ticket averages," says White from Edge Products. "The opportunity lies in shifting the conversation from 'How much power does it make?' to 'How does this improve how you use your truck every day?' In today's market, the shops that win are the ones that position themselves as

API RELEASES SERVICE SYMBOLS FOR NEW DIESEL ENGINE OIL SPECIFICATION

The new American Petroleum Institute (API) Proposed Category 12 (PC-12) heavy-duty engine oil specification has been formally approved and will be incorporated into API 1509, the Engine Oil Licensing and Certification System (EOLCS) document.

With this milestone, the API Service Category CL-4 and API FB-4 "Donut" certification marks are now available. Oil marketers can begin finalizing formulations and preparing product packaging to meet the new specifications ahead of the first licensing date, set for Jan. 1, 2027.

"To support the next generation of heavy-duty engine technology and emissions standards, PC-12 establishes a strong technical foundation for performance, durability and environmental protection," says Bill O'Ryan, director-EOLCS/DEF with API. "Making the CL-4 and FB-4 service symbols available now allows oil marketers to prepare for a smooth transition as we approach the 2027 model year."



To further support industry readiness, the API licensee portal will open on June 1. This early-access period will allow licensees to proactively enter new API CL-4 and API FB-4 products into the system.

The new engine oil specifications are designed to prepare the heavy-duty engine oil marketplace for next-generation performance standards, including improved oxidation resistance, enhanced wear protection, expanded elastomer compatibility, improved aftertreatment system protection and support for lower viscosity grades aimed at improving fuel economy.

API1509

API 1509, Engine Oil Licensing and Certification System, describes the voluntary API EOLCS program, the process for developing new engine oil performance standards and the requirements for licensing and proper use of the API Marks. The document also outlines aftermarket audit and enforcement procedures to help ensure that products licensed as meeting API standards continue to satisfy those requirements in the marketplace.

For more information about PC-12 and API's Engine Oil Licensing and Certification System, visit api.org/eolcs.

diesel advisors and not just parts installers."

If those projects are planned for street use, start with approved upgrades that make a real difference in overall vehicle performance.

"In an effort to adapt to the changing market, many of our dealers have pivoted to selling CARB-compliant products that improve durability," says Norris from S&S Diesel Motorsport. "A great example of that is the DCR pump conversion. The Ford truck market has been a huge part of our business growth, and I strongly suggest shops cater to that market if they want a bigger piece of the pie."

Viewing each upgrade as a comprehensive project can help avoid one-and-done purchases while increasing driver satisfaction, says Redman from PRW Power.

"Focus on complete performance solutions rather than individual parts," he recommends. "Many diesel owners come in asking for a specific upgrade—such as a tuner or turbocharger—but may not realize that increasing power also places additional stress on other engine components. Shops that take the time to explain the supporting upgrades needed for reliability can both protect the customer's investment and increase the overall value of the sale." **TS**





Online Auction Growth Shows Market Interest Remains High

Bring a Trailer surpassed $1 billion in sales for the fourth consecutive year, adding more than 255,000 registered users.

IMAGES COURTESY BRING A TRAILER

Automotive auction platform and enthusiast community Bring a Trailer (BaT) set a new high-water mark in 2025, surpassing previous years with more than $1.7 billion in sales—the fourth consecutive year in which sales exceeded $1 billion.

BaT also saw its highest volume of listings, with 49,486 total auctions split between cars, trucks, motorcycles, memorabilia and parts, at an 81% sell-through rate. On average, the site hosted 951 auction listings per week, with a high of more than 1,200.

The growth shows market interest in classic, collectible and unique vehicles remains strong.

"The numbers are great, but we chase more than numbers at Bring a Trailer. Our ethos is transparency, depth of presentation and an open microphone for people to comment freely with their expertise, experience and opinions," says Randy Nonnenberg, the company's co-founder and president. "We hit 50,000 listings in 2021 after seven years in the auction business. In 2025, we did that number in a single year. The goal for 2026 is to continue bringing our unique mix of trustworthy, visible buying and selling experiences to as many people as possible around the world."

The BaT community also continued to grow, with an 11% increase in registered users to a total of 1.65 million. The platform also saw a spike in vehicles sold for over $1 million, with 48 cars surpassing the seven-figure mark. And the growth was not limited to online, as BaT hosted 13 events at locations around the world with thousands of attendees.

Here are some of the most noteworthy highlights identified by Bring a Trailer officials in 2025.



BaT posted 49,486 total auctions in 2025, split between cars, trucks, motorcycles, memorabilia and parts, at an 81% sell-through rate.

THE GRAN TURISMO GENERATION

As more millennial and Gen Z buyers enter the market, the trend toward late-model classics grew again in 2025, with vehicles from the early 2000s dominating auction listings for the third consecutive year. In order of volume, the most listed model years on BaT in 2025 were: 2006, 2004, 2008, 2005 and 2007—essentially a repeat of 2024.

"As the most-listed cars on the site, those from the early part of the millennium continue to indicate an 'end-of-analog' trend among collectors," says Nonnenberg. "Special cars from this era offer relatively modern convenience and drivability, unencumbered by the screens and heavy curb weights we've come to expect from current manufacturers. Our community continues to be vocal and passionate about these accessible classics and their continually rising values. A 4,800-mile 2001 Integra Type R was an outstanding example of that."



Five vehicles sold for $3 million or more on BaT in 2025.

Top five car sales by price in 2025

Hypercars continued to perform well on BaT last year, with two of the top five sales of the year claimed by Bugatti Chirons. A 2014 Ferrari LaFerrari set the second-highest sales price ever on BaT at $4.47 million, while a Porsche 918 Spyder and a 1991 Porsche 911 DLS by Singer rounded out the top five.

1. **2014 Ferrari LaFerrari** – sold for $4,475,000
2. **2022 Bugatti Chiron Super Sport** – sold for $4,000,000
3. **2019 Bugatti Chiron Sport** – sold for $3,185,333
4. **2015 Porsche 918 Spyder Weissach Package** – sold for $3,112,000
5. **1991 Porsche 911 DLS by Singer** – sold for $3,000,000



Unusual and standout vehicles annually top BaT's most popular auctions.

Most popular auctions of 2025

The most popular auctions on BaT in 2025 demonstrated the broad interests of the collector/enthusiast community. Ranked by a combination of views, comments and bids, these listings featured battle tanks, seven-figure restomods and a JDM icon:

- **Leyland FV4201 Chieftain Main Battle Tank**
- **Centurion MK 13 Battle Tank**
- **1991 Porsche 911 DLS by Singer**
- **4,800-Mile 2001 Acura Integra Type R**
- **1989 Porsche 911 DLS by Singer**

Notable motorcycle sales in 2025

Motorcycles maintained strong momentum, with three examples cresting the six-figure mark. A 1920 Ace Four was the top seller of



Motorcycles maintained strong momentum, with three sales last year surpassing the six-figure mark.



Since the company's founding in 2007, Bring a Trailer has provided a knowledgeable and willing audience for just about any oddball car.

the year at a price point of around $1,960 per cubic inch. The top five motorcycles in 2025 were:

1. **1920 Ace Four** – sold for $147,000
2. **1918 Henderson Four Model H** – sold for $141,000
3. **1942 Indian Four** – sold for $108,000
4. **18-Mile 2020 Ducati Panigale V4 Superleggera** – sold for $90,000
5. **1999 Ducati 996 SPS in Factory Crate** – sold for nearly $73,000

Bring a trailer, indeed. Top projects of 2025

Project vehicles continued to see strong performance in 2025 with more than 600 listings, ranging from one-offs to classic Czechoslovakian luxury cars, 1970s motor homes and a home-built roadster featured on the cover of Popular Science:

- **1954 Hudson Italia**
- **1938 Tatra T97**
- **1973 GMC Motor Home**
- **1950 Stammer Roadster**
- **1972 Ferrari 365 GTC/4**


Bring a Trailer has been working to expand its international presence.

International growth

In early 2025, Bring a Trailer announced plans to expand its European presence, working with established U.S. partners and a new network of European companies. BaT will continue to grow in Europe and the UK, officials note, carefully evaluating new partnerships and opportunities to spread the word. The top five sales outside the United States in 2025 were:

1. **1959 BMW 507 Series II** – sold for more than $2 million in Germany
2. **1989 Lamborghini Countach 25th Anniversary** – sold for $536,000 in the UK
3. **1973 Porsche 911 Carrera RS Touring** – sold for $503,000 in France
4. **1969 Iso Grifo 7 Litre Series I** – sold for $475,000 in Germany
5. **1973 Monteverdi High Speed 375L** – sold for $330,000 in Switzerland



Home of the oddballs

Since the company's founding in 2007, Bring a Trailer has provided a knowledgeable and willing audience for just about any oddball car. This trend continued in 2025, as the site listed a number of unique vehicles highlighting forgotten stories from the mechanical past. The oddballs most popular with the BaT community included:

- **Automecca Sports Van "Brubaker Box"**
- **Panther De Ville**
- **National Lampoon "Family Truckster" Station Wagon**
- **Domino's Pizza Tritan A2 Delivery Vehicle**
- **Alfa Romeo TZ3 Stradale Zagato** (one of nine built). ***TS***

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CES 2026 drew more than 148,000 attendees from around the globe visiting 4,100 exhibitors, including some 1,200 startups. (Photo courtesy Consumer Technology Association (CTA)/CES 2026)

Technology Behind the Wheel CES

5 auto market advancements that moved the needle at CES 2026. **By Brett Solomon**

Brett Solomon is a freelance writer based in New York City, specializing in the mobile electronics market.

As an aftermarket professional, you've probably already noticed self-driving Waymo vehicles in real life, or at least on the internet, and wondered about the implications for your business.

Does the future include a market for performance and appearance upgrades for personal vehicles? Will the automotive industry continue to stir passion in drivers hoping to make an individual statement in the years to come?

With self-driving automobiles still a ways off, the specialty aftermarket continues to thrive. That was one of the messages found in the auto-related corners of CES 2026—the annual Consumer Electronics Show that highlights the latest tech, gadgets and trends, including those that are helping shape the driving experience.

At least some of this information should be on every shop's radar, so we can welcome the future and keep finding opportunities to serve the next generation of enthusiasts. As a start, here are five interesting developments that emerged from CES 2026.

1 AFEELA ROLLOUT CLOSES IN

Sony has been teasing its car being built by Honda for the past three years, and the Afeela 1 is finally ready to meet our streets, starting in California.

At launch, the company defined the Afeela 1 as a Level 2+ autonomous vehicle. This means that the vehicle can control both steering and acceleration. On mapped highways the driver can take their hands off the steering wheel but must remain alert.



The Afeela 1 lands in the U.S. as the first auto offering from a partnership between Sony and Honda. (Photo courtesy Sony Honda Mobility)

Through software upgrades, Afeela aims to ultimately achieve Level 4 autonomy, meaning occupants can enjoy entertainment and not have to touch the wheel.

In addition to the Afeela 1, the company also brought an SUV prototype to CES. This was welcome news, as the Afeela looks very cool inside, but the exterior is a little bland. Customizers and wrap shops should take note.

For the interior, Afeela's design ethos asks, "What happens if we design the car as the ultimate listening room from the very start, leveraging the full depth of Sony's audio technology?" As such, Afeela flexes 28 high-performance loudspeakers installed in optimized positions, calculated with precision relative to occupants' ear heights.

By combining this meticulously placed hardware with Sony's advanced software technology, the entire cabin transforms into a comfortable acoustic space. It is no longer just a car—it becomes a moving listening room, or a private theater on wheels.

From speaker grille materials to their shapes, the company says every detail was carefully selected based on extensive listening evaluations. Instead of locating the subwoofers in the trunk, Afeela took a page from the best aftermarket competitive audio systems and mounted the woofers up-front under the center console. This eliminates the time lag in the bass and the iso-baric subwoofer enclosures are designed to not vibrate or resonate.

The brand also offers three playback modes—Immersive Theater Sound for its signature acoustic experience, Hi-Fi Audio to deliver the artist's intent accurately and Zonal Sound for the Rear Entertainment System, allowing different content to be enjoyed freely in the same cabin space.

Immersive Theater Sound truly shows off Afeela's sonic capabilities. Utilizing all 20 cabin speakers (excluding the seat speakers), it creates a sound field with striking presence and spatial immersion, as if you are being bathed in 360 degrees of sound.

Dolby Atmos is available if you have music or movies with the Atmos codecs and information. It can deliver pinpoint accuracy in the controlled car environment. Meanwhile, the speakers mounted in the seats support Zonal Sound, allowing different audio tracks for each rear passenger and the driver.



With MB.Drive Assist Pro, driving assistance and navigation merge to create a completely new and safe driving experience.
(Photos courtesy Mercedes-Benz)



2 ALMOST SELF-DRIVING

You can't hear about the world of AI without hearing about NVIDIA and how the company is primed to be one of the most important players in the space. From its hardware to its software and everything in between, NVIDIA is synonymous with AI tech.

The company has been tied to OEM automotive suppliers for years. The new Mercedes-Benz CLA will be the three-pointed star's first vehicle featuring the MB.OS platform that is powered by NVIDIA. This means the new CLA has what's called Level 2++ autonomous driving capability. Even in dense city traffic, the demo shows the CLA driving itself around—avoiding pedestrians and vehicles that are opening their doors for drivers to get out.

"As the automotive industry embraces physical AI, NVIDIA is the intelligence backbone that makes every vehicle programmable, updatable and perpetually improving through data and software," says Ali Kani, vice president of automotive at NVIDIA. "Starting with Mercedes-Benz and its incredible new CLA, we're celebrating a stunning achievement in safety, design, engineering and AI-powered driving that will turn every car into a living, learning machine."

According to Mercedes, with MB.Drive Assist Pro, driving assistance and navigation merge to create a completely new and safe driving experience.

"At the press of a button, the vehicle can assist the driver when navigating through city streets—from the parking lot to the destination—with advanced SAE-Level 2 assistance," the company states in a press release outlining the new tech. "Thanks to Mercedes-Benz's cooperative steering approach, steering adaptations are possible at any time without deactivating the system."

The systems are very cool to see firsthand—imagine GM's SuperCruise or Ford's BlueCruise operating on difficult-to-navigate city streets. Or Tesla's Full Self Driving subscription, but with extra sensors.

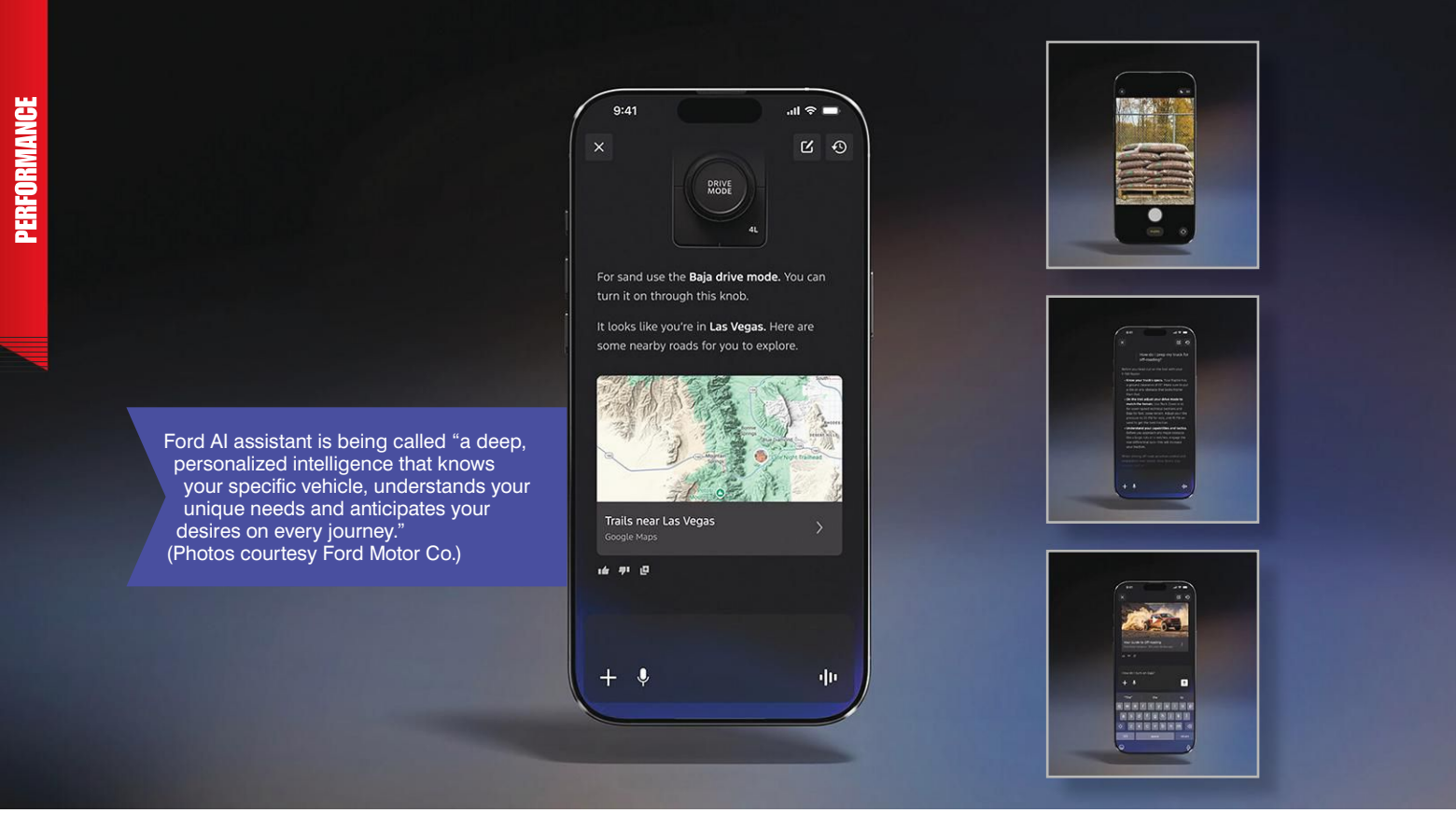
The Mercedes/NVIDIA system will cost $3,950 for three years in the United States. Customers can also choose a monthly or yearly subscription, but no word on those pricing options yet.

3 FORD & AI ENHANCEMENTS

Ford is one of the first automakers to show how AI can help its customers navigate through life easier.

"What if your vehicle actually knew you?" asked Mike Aragon, Ford of president of integrated services, at the brand's press conference. "A truly thoughtful, integrated AI experience shouldn't be a luxury. It should be as expected and seamless as pulling up directions on your phone or streaming a song. So, we asked ourselves, 'What if we could build an assistant that truly understands your specific vehicle, anticipates your needs and becomes an intelligent thread woven throughout your Ford experience?'"

The answer is the Ford AI assistant, which Aragon called "a deep, personalized intelligence that knows your specific vehicle, understands your unique needs and anticipates your desires on every journey."



Ford AI assistant is being called "a deep, personalized intelligence that knows your specific vehicle, understands your unique needs and anticipates your desires on every journey."
(Photos courtesy Ford Motor Co.)

So, what does that look like in real life?

"Imagine you're at the lumber yard staring at a stack of firewood—cords, half-cords, bundles—ready to load up. Instead of guessing or using a tape measure, you snap a photo on your phone and ask: 'How much of this will fit in my truck bed?" he explains. "Within seconds, the assistant analyzes the stack, estimates volume and translates it into real terms—how many bundles or what fraction of a cord—based on your Ford truck's exact bed length and tie-down configuration. It's a seamless experience that blends Ford-specific vehicle knowledge with the job in front of you, even if you're nowhere near the truck."

The technology can also be used to ask questions such as "How do I prep my truck for off-roading?" to help drivers maximize their vehicle's utility and performance.

The Ford AI assistant will arrive within the Ford app later this year. In 2027, the Ford AI assistant will be built into the infotainment screen.

4 VEHICLE CONTROL WITH A FLICK OF THE WRIST

A while back, I got a tour from Bose and Ferrari of new technology that would allow users to adjust a radio's volume by gesturing. BMW took it to the next level, allowing drivers to change volume and radio station through gesturing. Now, Meta has partnered with Garmin to come up with a wristband that allows users to control infotainment without needing to reach for the touchscreen.



Garmin introduces a Meta Neural Band Integration feature that's part of the company's Unified Cabin 2026 program, led by a next-generation AI/LLM-based virtual assistant that is conversational, multi-intent and multilingual.
(Photo courtesy Garmin)



The Meta Neural Band allows passengers to control select vehicle infotainment functions with gestures sensed by the band using the thumb, index and middle fingers.
(Photo courtesy Garmin)

The Meta Neural Band allows passengers to control select vehicle infotainment functions with gestures sensed by the band using the thumb, index and middle fingers. The initial concept sets the stage to introduce new interaction methods for displays and vehicle functions while delivering a true lean-back entertainment experience for multiple passengers.

"Meta Neural Band and its EMG technology could be the best way to control any device," predicts Alex Himel, VP of wearables for Meta. "Once you start using the band regularly, you want it to control more than just your AI glasses. We've already developed prototype experiences for the band to control devices in your home, and it's been great to team up with Garmin to showcase its potential in your car."

The wristband detects small neural signals from your wrist muscles and translates them into digital actions. It's true no one really wants to do anything extra to use technology, but slipping on a wristband can be easier than buckling a seatbelt.

Eventually, sensor technology will become





Chinese auto company Geely Holding Group announced a partnership between its Zeekr vehicle brand and driverless robotaxi company Waymo. In the U.S. the vehicle will be called the Waymo Ojai, giving a subsidiary of Google its own car. (Photos courtesy Waymo)

so good that no wristband will be needed. Once learned, it will be much easier than digging though menus on an infotainment screen.

5 CHINA—LOOK, BUT DON'T TOUCH

The market shouldn't sleep on China's ability to build great electric vehicles. There are some phenomenal EVs offered in China that cannot currently make their way to U.S. shores because of tariffs.

At CES, Geely Holding Group displayed and offered test drives of its Zeekr, Lynk & Co and Geely vehicle lines, including the Zeekr 009 full-electric luxury van and Zeekr 9X plug-in hybrid flagship SUV, which is a rival to Range Rover. Because Geely has the unique advantage of owning Volvo and Polestar, which already have a presence in the United States, reports say a Geely model could be available for sale here in the United States in the next two to three years.

There's also an interesting partnership between Zeekr and Waymo. Zeekr showed a new robotaxi that can replace the aging Jaguar iPace platform. In China, it's known as the Zeekr C1Me and here it will be called the Waymo Ojai—thus giving a subsidiary of Google its own car.

Waymo has not said which cities may see the new van first, but it features 13 cameras, six radar sensors and four lidar sensors. Moreover, as it is designed as a boxy cube, it will offer more interior room to sprawl out and haul luggage. ***TS***

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F-150 Torque Converters

FTI Performance, Deland, Florida, presents its 10R80 Torque Converters for Ford F-150 trucks. The 10-inch billet lockup converter features a computer-designed, CNC-machined billet stator and a billet lockup piston to alleviate premature clutch wear. With custom stator designs and multiple blade angle pumps, stalls are available from 2,800 to 4,400 rpm. Each converter is custom built to exact needs and driving style. Highlights include furnace-brazed, heli-welded fins and a severe-duty sprag.

Sprint Car Fuel Cell Mounting Accessories



Ti22 Performance, Watervliet, Michigan, presents its Sprint Car Fuel Cell Mounting Accessories, including a Fuel Cell Bracket and Clamp-On Fuel Cell Mounts. Made of lightweight, hard-anodized aluminum, both products take the guesswork out of mounting standard fuel cells to a wide range of Sprint Car chassis and meet the World of Outlaws 2026 six-point fuel cell mounting standards. The fuel cell bracket measures 8 inches center-to-center with slotted holes for easy adjustment. The fuel cell mounts are sold in pairs.



K5 Blazer Big Brake Kits

Wilwood, Camarillo, California, presents Braking Solutions for the 1971-91 Chevrolet K5 6-lug 4x4 platform, including two kit configurations designed for the new big Ford 9-inch differential with a 2.50-inch offset. Additional rear OE replacement options allow builders to retain the factory-style internal drum parking brake or upgrade to Wilwood's advanced Electric Parking Brake (EPB) system, which includes a dedicated ECU, wiring harness, remote switch and connectors. Additional fitments include Chevy K10 and GMC K15 and K1500 platforms.

Jeep Clutch Upgrade



McLeod, Anaheim, California, presents its Adventure Series Clutch System, designed to address clutch failures affecting Jeep JL Wrangler and Gladiator models. The system includes a 45-pound billet steel flywheel for improved heat dissipation and drivability, an 11-inch pressure plate and reinforced disc designed to correct OEM misalignment issues, an all-metal release system replacing all plastic components for long-term reliability, and true plug-and-play fitment requiring no modifications or master cylinder changes.



Durango Supercharge System

ProCharger, Lenexa, Kansas, presents a bolt-on Supercharger System for 2018-25 Dodge Durango SRT 6.4L and 5.7L Hemi models. Designed to deliver horsepower, reliability and everyday drivability, the High Output (HO) system provides horsepower gains on 7 psi of pump gas-friendly boost while maintaining factory-like smoothness for towing, cruising or launching off the line. Featuring the P-1SC-1 supercharger, the complete turnkey kits are 100% reversible with no permanent modifications.



Tacoma Cooling Components

Mishimoto, Garnet Valley, Pennsylvania, offers a collection of Cooling Components for fourth-generation Toyota Tacoma models. The all-new collection aims to unlock more usable power and improve component efficiency through direct-fit upgrades including radiator, transmission cooler, intercooler and intake, among others. The durable components handle real-world abuse and are designed to save horsepower through better cooling and improved airflow.



BMW Lowering Springs

Eibach Inc., Corona, California, presents its PRO-KIT Performance Springs that deliver upgraded performance and ride comfort using progressive spring technology to 2021-26 BMW M3 Comp AWD models. By lowering the center of gravity, the kit increases steering response and improves vehicle dynamics for a sportier, more balanced feel. Made in the USA, it reduces ride height to eliminate excessive ground clearance and fender gap for an improved appearance.

Power Stroke Intake Manifold & Turbo Inlet Kit



PPE (Pacific Performance Engineering), North Las Vegas, Nevada, offers its Zilla Intake Manifold and Turbo Inlet for 2015-26 Ford 6.7L Power Stroke applications. Utilizing large 3.25-inch stainless steel tubing combined with hydroformed runners that direct airflow into both cylinder heads through unobstructed flow passages, the system carefully repositions and angles the inlet port to ensure even distribution of fresh air and EGR gases to both banks, thereby maximizing volumetric efficiency. Kits include a redesigned stainless steel EGR pipe and gaskets.



Skyline GT-R Clutch Kit

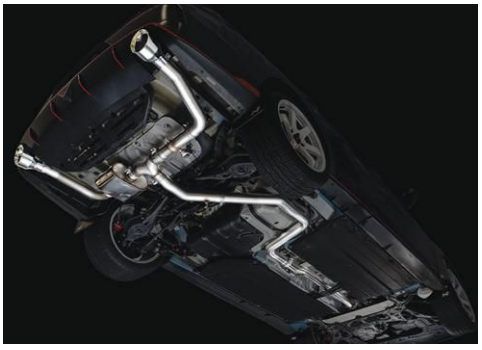
Advanced Clutch Technology (ACT), Lancaster, California, presents its 225mm Mod-Twin Push-Type Clutch Kits, designed specifically for 1989-92 Nissan Skyline GT-R (R32) models. Engineered for performance, the Mod-Twin clutch improves durability and torque capacity with extended service life while eliminating the compromises associated with twin-disc designs. A modular hub system delivers versatility and customization options of spring or solid hubs and Organic Street or 6-Puck race discs. A forged aluminum cover elevates the driving experience.



Street Performance Tire

Mickey Thompson Tires & Wheels, Stow, Ohio, presents its Street Comp GHT next-generation Ultra Ultra High Performance (UUHP) summer tire built for high-horsepower American muscle car applications. Designed for precision, grip and control, the GHT features an all-new advanced resin and silica-blended tread compound for superior wet performance and cornering control and a reinforced internal structure for high-speed stability and consistent handling. Initial sizes are now available.

Elantra N Exhaust Suite



AWE, Horsham, Pennsylvania, presents an Exhaust Suite for 2022-newer Hyundai CN7 Elantra N models. The exhaust is available in two distinct configurations to suit different driving preferences—the valved SwitchPath system retains full factory valve behavior, integrating with the vehicle's drive modes to deliver composure when desired and aggression on demand; while the Track Edition provides a raw, motorsport-inspired tone. The systems are made in the USA from 3- and 2.5-inch CNC mandrel-bent T304L stainless steel with 0.065-inch wall thickness.



GM Truck Bracket Kits

Kwik Performance, Fair Grove, Missouri, presents two new Bracket Kits designed to simplify the addition of hydraulic power steering and a Sanden-style air-conditioning compressor to GM Gen 5 LT truck engines (2014-19 L83 and L86). Bracket system K10742 mounts a Type 2 power steering pump and a Sanden Mini fixed-displacement compressor while retaining most of the factory front drive system with a passenger-side power steering pump location. Part number K10702 features a similar bracket arrangement designed for the larger Sanden HD compressor. ***TS***

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Lowrider Stamps Cruising To a Post Office Near You

The U.S. Postal Service held a first-day-of-issuance ceremony for its new Lowriders stamps in March at the Logan Heights Library in San Diego. With the release, USPS celebrates lowrider car culture, rooted in working-class Mexican American/Chicano communities throughout the American Southwest.

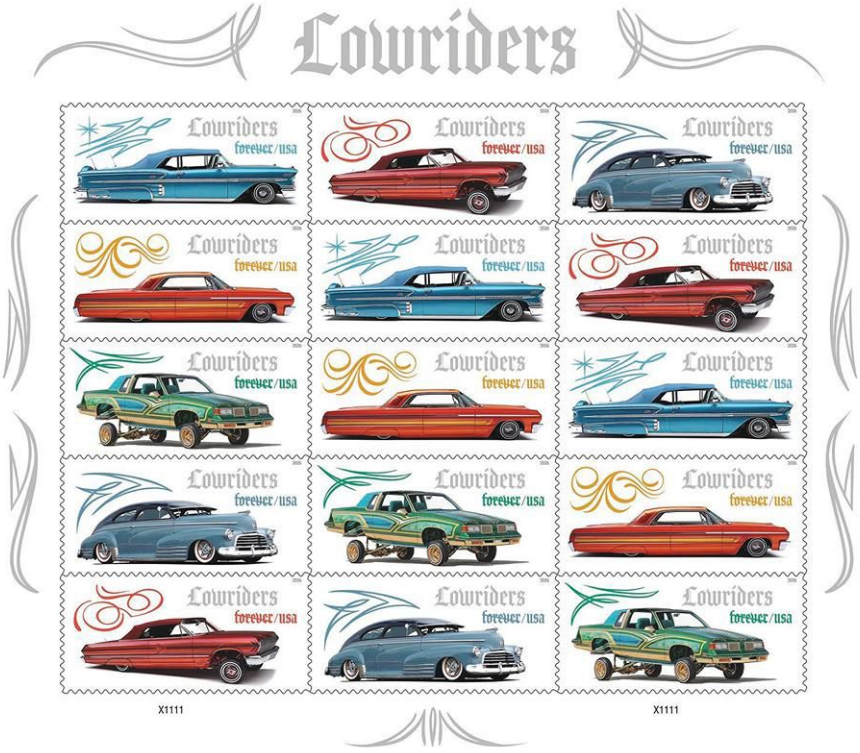
"A lowrider is a masterpiece of engineering and artistry—a rolling canvas of art. They are often painted with murals that tell stories of family, faith and history," says Gary Barksdale, the Postal Service's chief postal inspector, who served as the dedicating official. "The lowrider culture is about creating a space to celebrate pride, a sense of belonging and building a community that is always there for each other."

A press release from the USPS described lowriders as "a customized automobile outfitted with smaller-than-factory wheels—or 'rims,' preferably with wire spokes—that reduce its height. Many include dazzling paint jobs, crushed velvet upholstery and welded-chain steering wheels. In addition, a special hydraulic system allows the driver, at the touch of a button, to raise and lower the chassis or run the vehicle through tricks, such as driving on three wheels or 'hopping' (bouncing)."

Lowriding took off in the 1970s but was born in East Los Angeles and the Southwest borderlands in the 1940s. During the 1960s Chicano Movement, lowrider culture became a small but highly visible display of Chicano pride in the fight for dignity and self-respect, the release states.

Car clubs thrived, each with their own special plaque that members displayed in their car's rear window. Most were male-only organizations, but in the late '70s women started their own clubs and today lowriding is a family tradition. Clubs continue to represent belonging and pride, and club members help raise funds for various causes while showcasing their lowriders in car shows and parades.

Eager to show different lowrider styles, models and colors on the stamps, Antonio Alcalá, an art director for USPS, found that photography was the best way to capture the essence of lowrider culture.



With the release of its new Lowriders stamps, the U.S. Postal Service celebrates lowrider car culture, rooted in working-class Mexican American/Chicano communities throughout the American Southwest. (Photo courtesy USPS)

"Photography helps honor the hard work that goes into the creation of each car," he explains. "Using illustrations would possibly be more about the artist's imagination than about actual lowriders."

The stamps feature photographs by Philip Gordon and Humberto "Beto" Mendoza:

PHILIP GORDON

- "Let the Good Times Roll/Soy Como Soy," a blue 1946 Chevrolet Fleetline
- "Pocket Change," a green 1987 Oldsmobile Cutlass Supreme

HUMBERTO "BETO" MENDOZA

- "Eight Figures," a blue 1958 Chevrolet Impala
- "The Golden Rose," an orange 1964 Chevrolet Impala
- "El Rey," a red 1963 Chevrolet Impala.

To show the cars in as much detail as possible, Alcalá made the stamps 33% wider than the usual commemorative size.

Other design elements pay further tribute to lowrider culture—the Gothic-style typography suggests the shiny chrome lettering found on many cars to show their affiliation with a particular club, while Danny Alvarado's custom pinstriping in the corner of each stamp and on the selvage evokes the detailed decoration on the most celebrated lowriders.

Lowriders stamps will be issued in panes of 15. As Forever stamps, they will always be equal in value to the current First-Class Mail 1-ounce price.

They are available at post offices nationwide and online at usps.com/shopstamps. TS

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