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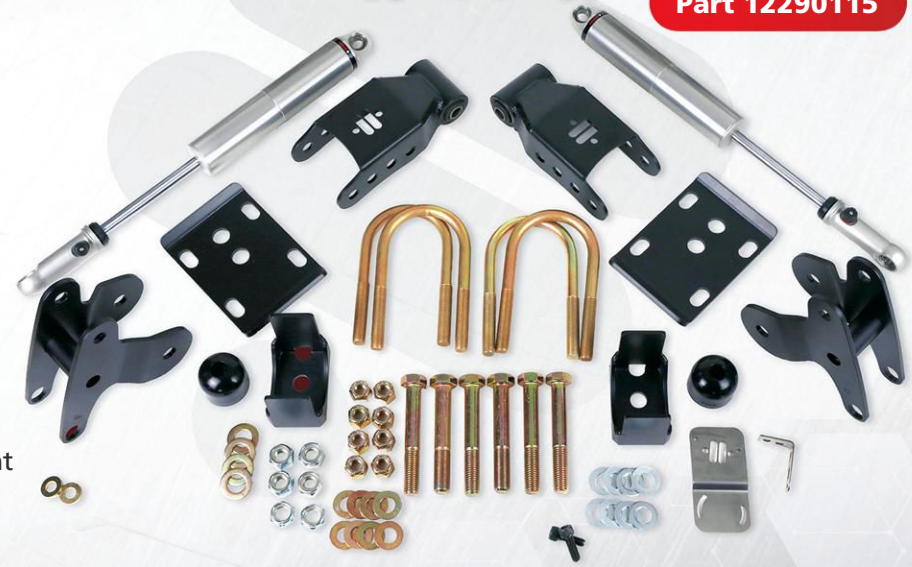
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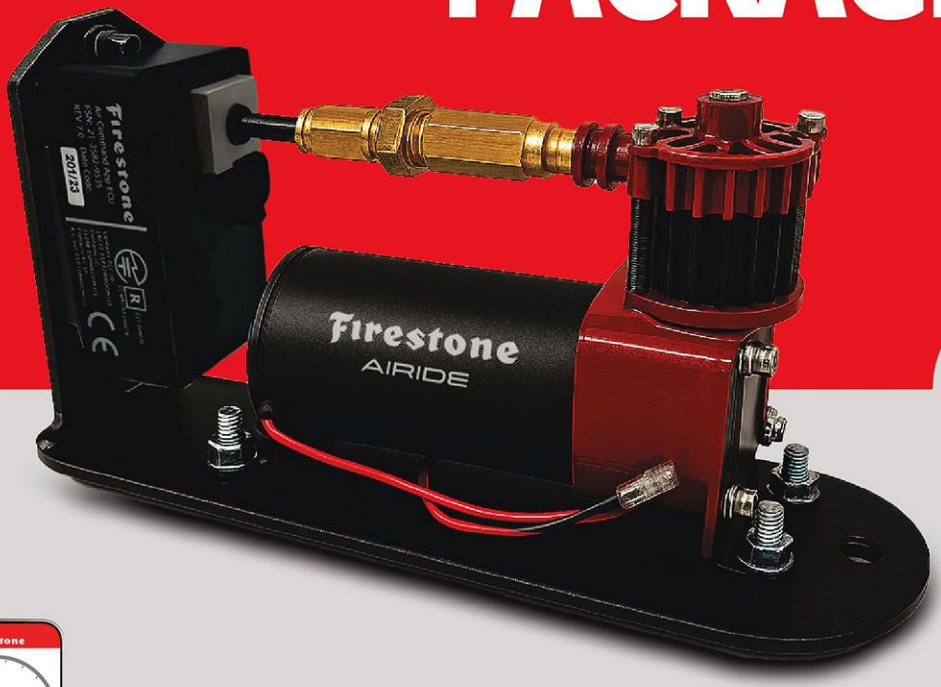


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Jef White
Editor in Chief
theshopmag.com

Dealerships Changed Hands at a Record Rate Last Year

The automotive dealership buy/sell market set a new annual record last year with 458 transactions, representing 688 franchises sold—a 5% increase compared to 2024. Ongoing buyer demand, strong earnings and continuing consolidation drove 2025 buy/sell activity, resulting in elevated blue sky values, according to the 2025 Blue Sky Report by Kerrigan Advisors.

Over the last five years, more than 3,500 dealership transactions occurred in the U.S.—an estimated 15% turnover rate that nearly doubled the pace of the five years preceding the pandemic.

"While buy/sell activity was strong in 2025, the valuation environment is increasingly bifurcated, with high-performing franchises continuing to command price premiums while lower-performing or smaller-scale dealerships face more limited buyer interest," says Erin Kerrigan, founder and managing director of Kerrigan Advisors. "The leading consolidators are also becoming more precise and strategic with their capital deployment, prioritizing scale within existing markets and targeting high-volume dealerships to drive operational efficiencies."

For auto aftermarket shops that work with local dealers, the strength of the 2025 buy/sell market was rooted in improving dealership sales and normalized, yet structurally higher, profitability, according to the report. U.S. retail new vehicle sales reached 14.5 million units in 2025, driving total industry revenue to a new high.

According to the report, acquisition opportunities are becoming more limited, however, as the most sought-after franchises and markets become increasingly concentrated among top dealership groups, resulting in a widening supply/demand imbalance. This has resulted in a K-shaped valuation environment where demand and pricing for the strongest franchises—particularly Toyota, Lexus and select luxury European imports—continues to intensify, while weaker brands with elevated inventory levels, lower sales per franchise and inconsistent profitability face declining buyer interest and weak valuations.

In the fastest-growing metro areas, the Top 150 dealership groups now control a majority of premier franchises, further limiting supply of the highest-quality assets, resulting in steep price premiums for the few top franchises still available to acquire, the report states.

Other highlights include:

- 458 buy/sell transactions were completed in 2025, a new annual record.
- Multi-dealership transactions represented 22% of 2025's buy/sell market but reached 100 in the absolute number of deals, the third highest on record.
- The Kerrigan Blue Sky Index closed out 2025 at 176, up from 170 in 2024 and 76% above 2019 levels, highlighting sustained franchise valuation strength.
- 30% of import luxury franchises and 29% of import non-luxury franchises changed hands over the last decade, compared to just 22% of domestic franchises, underscoring the market's stronger buyer demand for imports.
- Average public dealership pretax profits rose 89% to $4.07 million in 2025, above the pre-pandemic average of $2.18 million (2015-19).
- The U.S. public dealer groups' blended average blue sky multiple ranged from 6.0x to 6.4x throughout 2025, ending the year at 6.3x.
- Capital allocation to acquisitions of U.S. dealerships rose to 48% in 2025, compared to 29% in stock buybacks, 17% for capital expenditures, 5% for dividends and 1% for international and other acquisitions.

Learn more about the 2025 Blue Sky Report by Kerrigan Advisors at: kerriganadvisors.com/our-reports/kerrigan-index. ***TS***

THE SHOP

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A new generation of AI-first vehicle management systems is putting advanced capabilities into the hands of small shops. (Photo credit: valeo5 - stock.adobe.com)

Closing the Technology Gap

How accessible AI is future-proofing independent shops.

BY DAVID PRUSINSKI



David Prusinski is the CEO of VMS.AI, an AI-based uptime management company. He is a 30-year technology veteran with 15 years dedicated to pioneering connected vehicle solutions. He most recently served as the global CRO for Integrated Services at Ford Motor Company, scaling connected services for both the fleet and retail sectors.

For decades, independent shops have built their reputations on trust, skill and personal relationships with drivers. Yet, today, even the most experienced technicians face a growing challenge: vehicles are becoming rolling computers.

Each new model year brings more sensors, advanced driver-assistance systems (ADAS) and software-driven diagnostics. While major dealership networks and national chains invest heavily in technology to keep up, independent shops often find themselves constrained by time, costs, legacy processes and a lack of access to connected systems that enable scalable growth without adding more staff.

The result? A widening technology gap. Independent shops spend too much time manually diagnosing problems, waiting for parts or navigating complex service bulletins, which create "bay hogs" that tie up needed shop time.

Owners and technicians are also often bogged down managing tedious and time-consuming customer communications, scheduling and follow-ups—all of which further drain productivity. Each delay means lost billable hours and frustrated customers—not because technicians lack skill, but because they're burdened with systems that haven't evolved fast enough.

Fortunately, that gap is beginning to close. A new generation of AI-first vehicle management systems is putting advanced capabilities into the hands of specialty and repair shops, redefining what "competitive advantage" means in completing automotive projects.

GUESSWORK & DOWNTIME

Every independent shop owner knows the story: A vehicle's check-engine light comes on, and the diagnostic process begins. Even with a scan tool and online databases, it can take hours to isolate the true cause of a fault. Sometimes the first repair doesn't fix it, requiring a second round of diagnostics and another visit from the customer.

These "second fixes" are costly. They slow down bays, eat into profitability and erode customer trust. At the same time, waiting for parts, often ordered only after an issue is discovered, compounds the delay.

Large dealership groups have traditionally had the advantage because they can invest in proprietary software, data integrations and OEM-backed systems that automate parts of this workflow. Independent shops, on the other hand, often must rely on experience, intuition and manual lookups. But, as vehicles become more complex, even decades of expertise can't compete with a constantly learning machine.

AI: THE GREAT EQUALIZER

Artificial intelligence (AI) has become a buzzword in every industry, but for independent shops, its value is tangible and immediate. Unlike the intimidating enterprise tools of the past, today's AI-driven systems are designed to be accessible, affordable and plug and play.

An AI-first vehicle management system doesn't replace the technician; it amplifies their expertise. By continuously analyzing diagnostic codes, service histories, environmental factors and repair outcomes across thousands of vehicles, the system can prescribe likely fixes within seconds.

Imagine scanning a vehicle and having an AI tool generate a ranked list of probable causes and repair steps, complete with verified parts availability and labor estimates.

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As vehicles become more complex, even decades of expertise can't compete with a constantly learning machine. Photo credit: BLKstudio - stock.adobe.com

Instead of sifting through pages of error codes, the technician moves straight to confirmation and repair.

The result is a higher first-time-fix rate—meaning any arising issues can be resolved quicker, customers leave satisfied and shops can take on more business without adding staff.

TURNING DATA INTO DECISIONS

The real power of AI in the repair environment lies in pattern recognition. Vehicles across different makes and models often share components or exhibit similar failure trends. AI can connect those dots instantly, recognizing a systemic issue long before it becomes obvious to a human.

For example, if hundreds of similar vehicles across the network start showing related transmission faults after a certain mileage, the system can flag that insight for every connected shop. When the same issue appears in your bay, you will know which fix has proven most successful elsewhere.

This type of networked intelligence was once limited to OEM service centers or national chains with integrated data systems. Today, independent shops can tap into that same collective knowledge without the heavy investment or IT burden.

FROM REACTIVE TO PREDICTIVE

Beyond fixing vehicles faster, AI helps shops transition from reactive repair to proactive maintenance. By analyzing telematics and historical service data, it can predict upcoming issues based on usage patterns or component wear. This opens new revenue streams for independents, offering customers preventive service reminders or subscription-based maintenance programs that compete directly with dealership offerings and can supplement accessorization or modification projects.

Predictive insights also help shop owners better manage their own operations, scheduling staff and ordering inventory in anticipation of likely demand.

While some technicians worry that AI could replace hands-on expertise, that's simply not the reality. The most effective systems are collaborative, not competitive. They do the heavy lifting of data analysis, freeing technicians to focus on what they do best—customizing, restyling, upfitting, repairing and building relationships.

Think of AI as the new "shop assistant" that never sleeps. It helps prioritize work, avoid missteps and reduce mental fatigue from information overload. In an era where technician shortages are a real concern, that efficiency boost can make the difference between thriving and merely surviving.

FUTURE-PROOFING SHOPS

Independent shops are at an inflection point. Vehicles will only grow more software-defined. The shops that embrace accessible AI now will not only compete; they'll also lead.

Just as computerized diagnostics once separated modern shops from those left behind, AI-first systems are the next frontier. The technology is no longer reserved for large fleet operators or OEM-backed service centers. It's being built with independent shops in mind, so it's easy to adopt, cloud-based and continually improving.

For shop owners, the question is no longer whether to adopt AI, but when. Those who move early will capture the benefits of faster turnaround times, smarter resource use and stronger customer loyalty.

The goal isn't to replace the art of the automotive technician; it's to remove the unnecessary friction that prevents skilled technicians from performing at their best.

In a business where every hour and every project counts, AI is not just a tool; it's a competitive equalizer. It levels the playing field and ensures that the independent shop, long in the heart of the automotive community, remains vital and profitable well into the next generation of mobility. ***TS***

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Operating Parameters

Dial in your desired ride with the latest tuners & programmers.

BY JOHN CAROLLO

In one sense, today's vehicles can be viewed as rolling computers, housing electronics that help with everything from engine management to speedometer readings. The secret is that certain factory settings hide added capabilities and efficiencies that can be unlocked with aftermarket tuners and programmers.

From improved drivability and towing performance to switching off unwanted OEM features, today's tuners and programmers offer attractive, legal adjustments that can make a real difference in driver enjoyment.

For shops looking to add these services, suppliers offer information on market trends, customer patterns and hot new products to help them dial in the desired ride for clients looking to adjust their operating parameters.

EVOLVING MARKET

Adjusting a vehicle's electronic controls may seem intimidating, but the knowledge shops need to do it safely, legally and effectively is available from quality suppliers.

"Customer demand is not slowing down; it's evolving," says Jacob White, brand manager for Edge Products. "Today's trucks are more software-driven than ever, and that plays directly into the hands of shops. Modern diesel trucks rely heavily on ECU-controlled systems, which means total vehicle feature control and performance gains are all unlocked through aftermarket calibration tools. High-dollar vehicles with warranties require a shift toward inline modules, where Edge has always had leading product lines."

Various offerings allow installers the opportunity to meet consumer demands while working with factory controls and within the parameters set by state and federal regulations.

"With increasingly closed-off access to ECU reprogramming due to manufacturers' restrictions, the aftermarket sector has seen an uptick in plug-and-play power modules," says Loc Nguyen, application engineer – electronic products at aFe POWER. "These modules allow for quick installations and easy gains, coupled with faster turnover rates for shops, making them a no-brainer."

The use and installation of handheld tuners represent an opportunity for high-margin revenue in shops, says Kirstin Backes, sales and marketing director, COBB Trucks, for COBB Tuning.

"Beyond that, most tuning products are versatile—whether you specialize in off-road and overlanding rigs, drag cars, sport compacts or even the high-end luxury market, there's a straightforward tuning solution on the market for your needs," she says.



The modules allow for quick installations and easy gains, coupled with faster turnover rates for shops. (Photos courtesy aFe POWER)

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Drivers are looking for ways to safely unlock performance, improve drivability and optimize fuel economy. (Photos courtesy Derive Systems)

TUNERS & PROGRAMMERS

HOT PRODUCT: Module 77-86005 for New-Gen Toyota Tundra 3.4L
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Adds 93 hp and 154 pound-feet of torque; developed for everyday spirited driving or towing large trailers; delivers gains without compromising reliability or longevity; 20-minute installation; part 77-42018 for new Cummins engine also available.

aFe POWER
Loc Nguyen
Application Engineer – Electronic Products

HOT PRODUCT:
COBB Accessport
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Top-selling handheld tuner adds power and performance with off-the-shelf tunes, particularly when used as part of a Stage Power Package; includes tunes specifically for mods we offer such as intakes, intercoolers and exhaust at no extra cost.

COBB Tuning
Kirstin Backes
Sales & Marketing Director, COBB Trucks

HOT PRODUCT:
SCT BDX Performance Programmer
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Strikes the right balance between performance, ease of use and modern connectivity; supports a wide range of Ford, GM, Dodge and Toyota vehicles; Wi-Fi-enabled, cloud-based tuning ecosystem; real-time data monitoring, datalogging and diagnostics.

Derive Systems
Lance Zumwalt
Chief Revenue Officer

HOT PRODUCT:
Evolution CTS3 Tuner
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Combines tuning, monitoring and diagnostics into one platform; offers a full color touchscreen; plug-and-play with preloaded tunes for towing, economy and performance; delivers real time data and Wi-Fi update capability.

Edge Products (a Holley brand)
Jacob White
Brand Manager

HOT PRODUCT:
All-new Superchips Flashcal+
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Covers 2007-26 JK, JL and JT models; app-based device allows quick, easy access to Jeep-specific features; built-in tire size wizard; live crawl screen; off-road functions include lighting configurations, TPMS adjustment, speedometer calibration and more.

Superchips (a Holley brand)
Mike Litsch
Brand Manager

HOT PRODUCT:
Pedal Commander PC18 Throttle Response Controller
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Single part number fits every Ford and Lincoln vehicle since 2012; controlled through mobile app or dashboard panel; three increase, three decrease and ECO Mode settings; Anti-Theft Mode disables the accelerator pedal or drive by wire.

Pedal Commander
Bob Shymkiw
Commercial Lead – B2B & B2C/Marketplaces

"You also open a door for repeat customers, because a good handheld tuner means they can upgrade as they go. On the first visit, they might get a tune and go home happy. A few months later, they're back to add an intake and re-tune, and they're going home even happier—and the list goes on from there. You have the ability to stairstep your customers' mods in a way that's digestible and leads to return business."

Certain markets are fueling industry growth, including those beyond the street or racetrack.

"The Jeep and off-road markets are always hot, and owners are upgrading everything from wheels and tires to engine swaps, all of which require a tuning solution," says Mike Litsch, brand manager at Superchips and DiabloSport, both Holley Performance Brands.

Once viewed as a performance product, today's tuners and programmers focus on the total driver experience.

"With increasing vehicle complexity and tighter emissions and efficiency standards, customers are actively looking for ways to safely unlock performance, improve drivability and optimize fuel economy," says Lance Zumwalt, chief revenue officer for Derive Systems. "At the same time, modern tuning platforms like the SCT BDX have become more user-friendly, cloud-connected and VIN-specific, reducing the barrier to entry for both shops and consumers. This creates an opportunity for shops to offer high-margin, value-added services that enhance customer satisfaction and differentiate them from competitors."



New markets are fueling industry growth, including those beyond the street or racetrack. (Photo courtesy DiabloSport)

DRIVER CONTROL

The "custom" in vehicle customization doesn't always have to come in the form of performance or aesthetic upgrades. A personalized driving experience is a strong selling point for many consumers.

"Demand for tuning products and services is as strong as ever, with more and more late-model vehicles implementing features that users want to disable (Dynamic Fuel Management, Multi-Displacement System, Engine Start-Stop, etc.) while older cars and trucks are still being modified and upgraded at a strong pace," says Litsch. "Tuning can be a great first mod that delivers real-world results and takes the users down a performance upgrade journey."

A common misconception, says Zumwalt, is that tuners are only for high-performance or racing applications.

"Many customers use devices like the SCT BDX for everyday benefits such as improved throttle response, towing performance and fuel efficiency," he notes. "Another misconception is that tuning is overly complex or risky, when modern devices are designed with safeguards, preloaded calibrations and cloud-based updates that make the process straightforward and reliable."



The products positively impact customers' driving experiences. (Photo courtesy COBB Tuning)

Their somewhat technical nature can sometimes give installers pause.

"Shops that are not familiar with how plug-and-play modules work may have the misconception that these products are hard to install," says Nguyen. "Most do not take more than 20 minutes from start to finish. A quick glance at the installation instructions included or even online on our website reveals how simple the installation can be. Removing the module and restoring the vehicle back to stock form is just as simple."

Shops may find themselves facing the mindset of "all tuning is illegal."

"It's simply not true," says Backes. "At



THROTTLE RESPONSE CONTROLLERS

The tuning and programming market continues to diversify, and nowhere is that more apparent than with the recent popularity of throttle response controllers. The smart units offer drive-by-wire signal speed adjustments for a customized ride, whether on the street, trail or even ice.

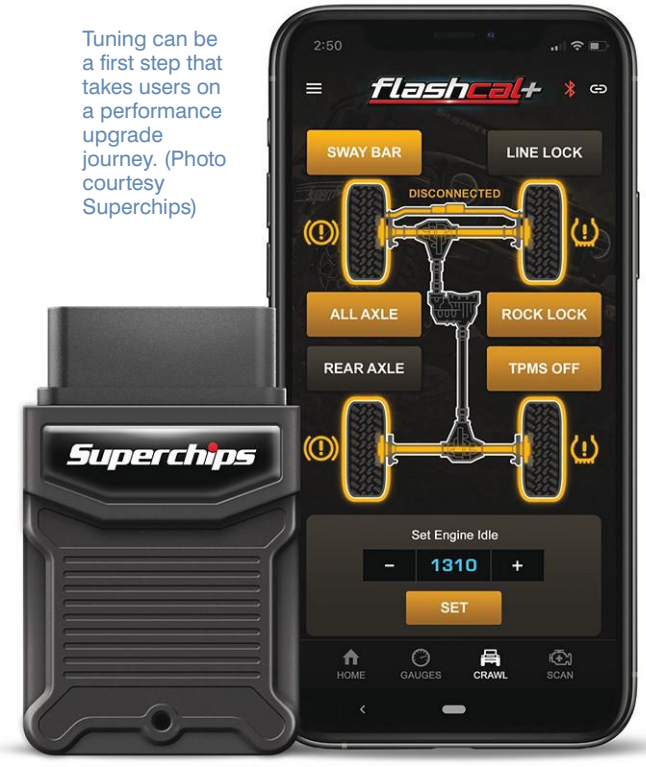
"As vehicles and emissions rules both get more sophisticated and expensive, our line of throttle response controllers is a plug-and-play solution to tuning or programming," says Bob Shymkiw, commercial lead – B2B and B2C/marketplaces for Pedal Commander. "There are 36 preset settings of throttle curves that increase or even decrease the drive-by-wire signal speed from the ECU. It converts driver input into voltage signals to precisely control throttle position."

Popular with consumers and even new car dealers, the products can help alleviate performance issues caused by adding oversized wheels and tires and allow restoration back or closer to the factory OEM settings if desired.

"Consider throttle response controllers as a cheaper, simple, legal tuning/programming alternative," Shymkiw says. "They quickly compensate for any factory throttle lag, or especially on wheel and tire upgrades that make the vehicle sluggish with less power when you try to accelerate. We even have a Ford dealer who substitutes Pedal Commanders for wealthy customers that want a supercharged model upgrade but who he knows don't really need it."



Pedal Commander throttle response controllers are a plug-and-play solution that enhances the driving experience. (Photo courtesy Pedal Commander)



Tuning can be a first step that takes users on a performance upgrade journey. (Photo courtesy Superchips)

COBB, we've pursued CARB EOs to meet the demands of shops and consumers in all 50 states. The tunes are proved not only safe for your customers' cars, but emissions-compliant—there's no better way for your shop to quickly and easily offer your customers power and performance."

White explains the products are attractive because they are designed to be quick, user-friendly and repeatable, "making them one of the easiest, highest-margin services a shop can offer. There's also a belief that tuning is a one-time sale. In reality, it often opens the door to additional upgrades and long-term customer relationships, making it a strong entry point into broader diesel performance work."

A REAL DIFFERENCE

Shops looking to increase sales of tuners and programmers can start by explaining the real differences they make in vehicle performance and driver control.

"Focus on selling the outcome, not just the device," says White from Edge Products. "Most diesel customers aren't walking in asking for a tuner—they're asking for better towing, fuel economy or drivability. When shops position tuning as the solution to those real-world needs, close rates will go up."

Backes explains how the benefits stretch far beyond added horsepower.

"Historically, ECU tuning was for big power, big builds and blank-check customers, but that's not the case anymore. Limiting yourself to 'power' as a sales pitch—especially if you work in a market that's not necessarily known for raw power—is a missed opportunity," she believes. "I like to say we specialize in 'performance,' which goes much further than power numbers on a dyno sheet. Transmission tuning can be to accommodate and make use of power on the track, or it can be for driving comfort on long road trips. Things like dynamic pedal control (throttle enhancement), speedometer calibrations or tow-specific tunes—each one of these adjustments won't add power, but they can level up performance and change your customer's driving experience dramatically."

Litsch from Superchips and DiabloSport recommends shops spend time investigating the different products available and the features they deliver.

"Look at entry-level products from Superchips like the Flashcal that address common needs like tire size/speedometer recalibration, which the user can then upgrade to a tuning product at home anytime they like," he explains. "After they tune the vehicle, they'll come back looking for more upgrades."

Once shops see a pattern, he adds, they can keep fast-movers in stock and ready to go.

"Focus on solutions the customers are seeking. Is the throttle response not what they were hoping for? Tuning can help. Do they hate when it goes into AFM (Active Fuel Management) and drops four cylinders after they installed an aftermarket exhaust? Tuning can solve that. Is their speedometer off after swapping tires? Tuning is the answer. Do they wish their ride had more



Shops can focus on selling the outcome of adding a tuning product, such as drivability and efficiency gains, and not just the device itself. (Photo courtesy Edge Products)

power? Who doesn't? Tuning is the answer."

An educated staff of salespeople and installers help build trust with new clients.

"By familiarizing themselves with how plug-and-play modules add horsepower and torque, and how easy it is to install them, shops can gain more confidence in recommending these products to their customers," says Nguyen from aFe POWER. "By arming themselves with knowledge, confidence is higher when making sales and recommendations to the customer base."

Derive's Zumwalt agrees that education is key.

"Shops that take the time to explain the real-world benefits of tuning—such as better towing capability, smoother shifting or improved mileage—tend to see higher conversion rates," he says. "Bundling tuners with complementary upgrades like cold-air intakes or exhaust systems and offering installation or setup assistance can also increase average ticket value. Demonstrating before-and-after performance or customer testimonials can further build trust and drive sales." ***TS***

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A Unique Blend

Karmann Konnection combines tricks learned from Porsches & VWs to create English customs with LA flair.

BY TONY THACKER



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

Businesses that have thrived for more than 40 years are rare these days in the ever- and fast-changing automotive aftermarket. Most have aged out, been gobbled up by private equity or just disappeared. However, England's Karmann Konnection (KK) is a survivor.

KK was started in 1983 by Richard "Ritchie" King, who was a hands-on and very active part of the UK's custom and hot rod scene in the early 1980s.

"The business was originally called Graffiti Auto Art," says King, "and because we didn't know any better, we were customizing British cars in the American style—lowered, roof chops, etc. In 1980, I had made my first trip to California and was blown away but the 'Cal Look' VW scene. Because VWs were cheap and plentiful in England, I knew that it was authentic, had context and could easily translate to the UK."

Once back in England, he immediately bought a VW and helped create a new customization wave.

"We have continued to stay on the crest of that," he says. "In some ways, we copied the U.S. Cal Look, but we added our own unique British twist. For example, we added Moon discs, which the Americans did not use, plus louvers, Targa Tops and T-tops, and we chopped them into roadsters."

King and his crew were so good at what they did that they got plenty of magazine ink and even made the cover of VW Trends magazine in July 1986.

"I loved working on cars, but couldn't see doing it for 40 years," he continues. "Somehow, I figured that parts were the answer. My first product was a knock-off Moon disc. Other than carry them home in our luggage, we didn't know how to import them, so we just had them spun up locally—we also louvered them and painted them and I even made clocks. The possibilities were endless."

A SUCCESSFUL BLEND

At the same time, King and his team had also discovered the trick of installing



Richard Watts, left, purchased the business in 2025, about a year after Ritchie King, right, had closed its doors. (Photos by Tony Thacker)

Porsche parts on Volkswagens—for example, the popular Porsche 356 "nipple" hub caps complete with Porsche emblem.

"This trend and the fact that my dad had owned a 1960 356 T5 Super 90 coupe pushed me in the direction of Stuttgart," King recalls. "I had to get a Porsche and went back to the U.S. where I bought a rare 1952 356 for $6,000. Trying to restore the car back in the UK proved difficult and I was back to importing what few parts were available."



England's Karmann Konnection (KK) is a 40-year-old customizing and parts shop inside a closed pub that focuses on Volkswagen and Porsche models.



KK searches out hard-to-find and New Old Stock (NOS) parts and has been known to manufacture some that are no longer available. (Photo by Tony Thacker)



KK earned such a reputation that it even made the cover of VW Trends magazine in July 1986.

At the same time he also began selling used and refurbished parts and making steering wheels.

"The first was a replica of the RSK 718 wheel and that was followed by a 550 Spyder wheel," he recalls. "We laser-cut the flat centers, Colin Meyers made the billet hubs and my brother John made the wood rims. It was all done locally with old-school craftsmen—some of whom are still doing it."

By this time, the company had morphed into the German Car Company and was based in Leigh-on-Sea, Essex. Later it moved to a larger premises in Hadleigh, Essex, where a young Richard Watts got his first Volkswagen-related job.

"At the time, Richard owned a '71 1500 Beetle and to be working in the business was a dream come true. Little did he know that 23 years later he would own the company."

Another name change to Karmann Konnection and more growth saw KK move into even larger premises in central South-end-on-Sea. By this time, it was now well and truly a household name in the VW and Porsche scene as King traveled the world to trade at shows and collected the rarest of rare parts.

The final move to the current premises at The Golden Lion in Southend came in 2011, coinciding with a shift predominantly into Porsche 356 and 911 parts and a shift away from VWs. KK is actually located inside the now-closed pub, and while there are plenty of goodies to be had, there is no beer.

DIFFERENT, SPECIAL & EXCITING

In 2024, King decided to retire and close the doors after more than 40 years in business. However, on Sept. 1, 2025, that kid who went to work there in 1999 stepped up to purchase the company and get it rolling again.

Also passionate about early Porsche 356s and 911s and, more importantly, equally passionate about attention to detail and superior products, Watts was ideally placed to bring the company back to life.

"Whilst building Porsche 356s for another well-known restoration company in Essex, Sportwagen Ltd., it became obvious that many of the restoration parts available were of low quality, refused to fit and had to be returned," Watts says. "Even Porsche itself admitted its hands were tied with how some parts were now being manufactured."

Parts quality and excellent service has therefore become the main focus of KK. While it remains in the same location as before, the premises have received a makeover, as has the company's official website (karmannkonnection.co.uk), which has been revamped to make searching for those rare and hard-to-find parts easier than ever.

As well as being able to locate New Old Stock (NOS) gems and high-quality second-hand parts, Watts is planning on focusing



The shop has long been known as a passionate advocate for early Porsche 356s and 911s. (Photo by Tony Thacker)



King's goal was to create authentic builds easily identified as distinctly English. (Photo by Tony Thacker)

on manufacturing parts that other people cannot supply.

"I'm concentrating on all the products that we make in-house and the items that other people don't offer. I don't want to do what the competition is doing—I want to supply people with items that will make their Porsche 356 or SWB 911 feel different, special and exciting. So, you'll be able to find quality parts to help build your car the right way."

Those offerings will include classic steering wheels, Sebring-style exhausts, detailed headlights and once-unavailable parts like starter buttons, map lights, idiot lights and more, he reports.

"We're kicking it hard on social media (instagram.com/karmannkonnectionporsche). In my opinion, ordering parts should be an enjoyable experience and a conversation, not filling out forms and waiting for your ticket to be replied to in the next 24 hours."

It's Karmann Konnection reimagined.

As for King, he's still playing as he always has.

"I'm building the world's lightest 911, which is currently on a strict diet toward my goal of 595 kilos (1,312 pounds)," he says. "Perhaps I'll bring it to the U.S. and do a few events. We'll see."

It's fantastic to see a small business thrive and survive in these turbulent times, and as the Porsche phenom continues to grow, I have no doubt Karmann Konnection is well-positioned to play a significant part. ***TS***



More Than Just a Game



JackUltraMotive's builds, such as this widebody Corvette, are often put through extreme tests.

Pennzoil influencer partner JackUltraMotive's automotive journey began digitally.

ARTICLE & PHOTOS COURTESY PENNZOIL

JackUltraMotive is one of the most recognizable personalities in automotive gaming. His community spans digital roads and real-world garages. With millions of views and a passion rooted in both simulation and wrenching, he's made a name for himself by blurring the lines between virtual and real-world car culture.

What started with a controller and a copy of the Forza Horizon video game has evolved into an automotive lifestyle. Today, Jack builds high-performance machines in real life and continues to inspire his global audience to chase their automotive dreams on-screen and on the road.

As an influencer partner with Pennzoil's Long May We Drive automotive marketing campaign, the brand sat down with him to talk about the evolution of JackUltraMotive (youtube.com/@jackultramotiv) content, his connection to the brand and how gaming continues to shape the next generation of car enthusiasts.

PENNZOIL: For many enthusiasts, gaming is a gateway to car culture. How did online racing games become your entry point into real-world car culture?

JACKULTRAMOTIVE: I've always been into cars and knew early on that I wanted to work toward owning the dream cars I loved. Gaming allowed me to role-play and simulate that journey when I was younger. I'd hop on games like Forza and even set budget restrictions to make it feel realistic, driving cars I thought might be my first "dream" build and modifying them in-game.



Today, Jack builds real-life high-performance machines and continues to inspire his global audience to chase their automotive dreams on-screen and on the road.

It taught me about different manufacturers, options and the overall landscape of car culture. I think it's important that the automotive industry recognizes this space. Gaming is where many young people form their first ideas about what's cool and what they want in a car. It's a powerful touchpoint.

PENNZOIL: This year marks Forza Motorsport's 20th anniversary. Looking back, what role has Forza played in your career and shaping the wider car community?

JACKULTRAMOTIVE: Forza essentially made my career. Horizon 3 was the turning point for me. I had been creating content across various gaming genres, but that game allowed me to combine my love for cars with my content creation. I dove headfirst into it and created ideas that hadn't been done on YouTube then.

That game took me from about 75,000 subscribers to more than 800,000 in just a couple of years. It also helped mainstream audiences get into car culture. Forza was often bundled with Xbox consoles, so people who weren't necessarily car enthusiasts tried it out and many of them became car fans because of it. It's done a lot to grow the community.

PENNZOIL: How did your online community react when you shifted from virtual to real-life car content?

JACKULTRAMOTIVE: Like any other niche content creator, expanding into new areas can be risky. My close fans appreciated it. Any die-hard follower tends to love seeing more of your personal life and real-life car content gave them that.

Of course, not everyone crossed over, but as I was evolving, I knew my audience was growing up, too. I was passionate about this content and it felt like the right time.

PENNZOIL: What role has Pennzoil played in helping you level up your builds and bring your vision to life?

JACKULTRAMOTIVE: Pennzoil has been essential in keeping my builds healthy. Most of my cars have high-performance engines and reliability is key. They've also supported some of my coolest opportunities, like helping me prep my Camaro for a rally across the western U.S.

That rally was a dream come true. I was out there with exotic cars, exploring incredible roads and essentially living out what I used to simulate in Forza. Thanks to Pennzoil, the car ran flawlessly the entire way. It was surreal and something I'll always be grateful for.

PENNZOIL: What's one thing gaming has taught you about cars that you wouldn't have learned as quickly through real-world experience?

Continued on page 23

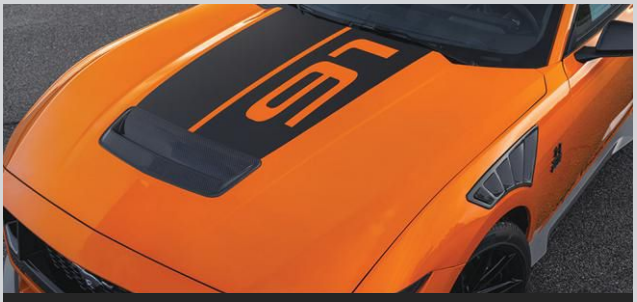


From controller to car keys, JackUltraMotive brings an automotive passion fostered through video games to real-world builds.

‘SUPER VENOM’ MUSTANGS HELP CELEBRATE HENNESSEY’S 35 YEARS







Hennessey has created an 850-hp Super Venom Mustang to help celebrate the high-performance vehicle builder’s 35th anniversary. (Photos courtesy Hennessey)

Hennessey has created an 850-hp Super Venom Mustang to help celebrate the high-performance vehicle builder’s 35th anniversary. Marking John Hennessey’s founding of the company in 1991, the Texas-based firm chose Ford Mustang for a special anniversary treatment.

Limited to just 35 units, the Super Venom Mustang lives up to Hennessey’s long-standing view that “there’s no such thing as too much power” by increasing the factory 5.0L V-8’s output by 70%, from 500 hp to 850 hp, with torque rising by 55% to 650 pound-feet at 4,900 rpm.

A bespoke VenomAero carbon fiber performance kit improves cooling and handling, while each of the 35 cars feature unique “35” fender badging and a stylized “91” hood graphic referencing Hennessey’s founding year.

“What started as a love for racing and going fast has turned into something far bigger than I ever imagined, but the fun of building extreme vehicles is still what drives us every day,” says Hennessey. “We’ve scaled the business while staying true to our roots, and looking ahead there’s a tremendous amount to be excited about. With our 35th anniversary Super Venom Mustang, a new Hennessey hypercar on the way, and ever-stronger relationships with partners like Ford, GM and Stellantis, the future has never looked brighter.”

Across three-and-a-half decades, Hennessey has built a reputation for authentic engineering, extreme capability and record-setting performance. Early motorsports success at Pikes Peak, the Bonneville Salt Flats and the Silver State Classic established the brand’s credibility, while landmark vehicles spanning American muscle cars, trucks, SUVs and hypercars helped define entire performance segments, the company notes in a press release marking the Super Venom release.

The company has grown from a simple passion for speed into an influential high-performance manufacturer, having reengineered more than 18,000 vehicles for customers around the globe, the release adds.

A defining milestone in Hennessey’s evolution came in 2000 with the creation of Hennessey Special Vehicles and the launch of the Venom F5 hypercar program. Known as “America’s Hypercar,” it established the company as a skilled bespoke vehicle manufacturer, placing the U.S. firmly on the global hypercar map.

In parallel, Hennessey Performance Engineering continues to shine in the high-performance car, truck and SUV markets, supported by deep OEM partnerships. Earlier this year, Hennessey recognized Ford Motor Company for the impact it’s made on high-performance manufacturing, while longtime dealer partner Ken Grody Ford was honored as Dealer of the Year.

The company’s Tuner School has trained hundreds of technicians over the years, many of whom are now part of Hennessey’s 140-person workforce. To support increasing demand, Hennessey is expanding its Sealy, Texas, campus to more than 100,000 square feet, bringing composite manufacturing and vehicle painting in-house while scaling high-performance vehicle production toward 2,000 units per year.

JACKULTRAMOTIVE: Gaming helped me develop a sense of car control and driving intuition earlier than most. By the time I could legally drive, I felt more in tune behind the wheel because I had logged countless hours virtually.

Games, especially with a sim setup like a wheel and pedals, can teach fundamentals like easing onto the gas out of a corner or braking in a straight line. That foundation helped me feel more confident when I got behind the wheel in real life.

PENNZOIL: So many of your followers grew up gaming like you did. How do you inspire them to get their hands dirty and start wrenching for real?

JACKULTRAMOTIVE: The coolest cars, especially the ones we drive in games, usually come with a catch—they require work. If a car doesn't need any servicing, it's either very new or expensive.

For someone chasing a Nissan Silvia or a JDM dream car, it's doable, but you'll need to wrench. I encourage my followers to take on those challenges. It's part of the journey and it can save you a ton if you're willing to learn.

PENNZOIL: Have any of your virtual builds inspired real-world purchases or upgrades?

JACKULTRAMOTIVE: Absolutely. I often use Forza as a virtual test drive. If I'm interested in a car, I'll drive it in-game first, which usually solidifies my desire to own it in real life.

I've even used the game's livery editor to design wraps that I later applied to my real cars. It's wild to build something in-game and then see it sitting in your garage.

PENNZOIL: Which of your cars do you see as a lifelong keeper, and what adventure has had the most lasting impact?

JACKULTRAMOTIVE: I want to keep my 1991 Nissan Skyline GT-R forever. It was the car I drove on my last day of high school and one of the first dream cars I could buy because of my YouTube success.

The video of me driving it to school has almost 10 million views, and people still associate me with that car. I sold my very first car, so the GT-R is now the one I've owned the longest, so it holds a lot of sentimental value.



From coast-to-coast rallies to late-night wrench sessions, many of Jack's adventures are powered through a partnership with Pennzoil.

As for adventures, driving my Hennessey Exorcist Camaro across the western U.S. with the support of Pennzoil stands out. It was a wild, high-horsepower road trip from Houston to Arizona, LA, Palm Springs, Vegas and back to Seattle. That Camaro has more than 27,000 miles now, which is rare for that build. The fact that it handled it all without a hiccup is a testament to the car and the Pennzoil Ultra Platinum 5W-30 protecting it. ***TS***



PERFORMANCE **PRODUCTS**

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Brake Line Quick-Disconnect

MPD Racing, Watervliet, Michigan, presents its new Quick-Disconnect System for hydraulic brake lines (MPD28600). Designed to allow easy, leak-free servicing of brake components, the hard-anodized aluminum disconnect features -3AN male ends and a compact design for inline installation. A twist-lock mechanism ensures a firm hold and easy disconnection with no fluid loss or need for bleeding.

Audi R8/Huracan Exhaust

Valvetronic Designs, Boyertown, Pennsylvania, presents its True F1 Exhaust program, including an application for Audi R8/Huracan models. Featuring purpose-built cat-back architecture designed to maximize exhaust velocity and pulse interaction, the system includes a dual X-pipe layout beginning with 3-inch tubing that transitions to 2.5 inches, intentionally increasing exhaust velocity as gases pass through the second merge section. The rise in velocity elevates the acoustic frequency, producing the sharp, high-pitched tone associated with F1-inspired engines.





Cybertruck Accelerator Response Controller

Pedal Commander, Thousand Oaks, California, presents a dedicated Accelerator Response Controller for 2024-newer Tesla Cybertrucks. The unit plugs directly into the Cybertruck's accelerator pedal assembly and recalibrates the stock drive-by-wire signal to optimize factory programming with vehicle-specific software. Designed to remove the programmed hesitation, drivers receive instant access to full power without delay. The systems offer four driving modes—Range+, City, Dynamic and Hyper—each with nine incremental levels.

Combination Parking Brake Caliper

Wilwood Engineering, Camarillo, California, introduces a new, narrower rotor size application for its Hydra-Mechanical Combination Parking Brake (CPB) Caliper, now compatible with 0.38-inch-wide rotors. The addition expands the CPB lineup for builders using 11- to 13-inch rotors on rear brake systems that are seeking space and weight savings. Designed for rear axle applications, the caliper is suitable for drum brake conversions and disc brake upgrades.





Severe-Duty Gear Oil

Hot Shot's Secret, Mt. Gilead, Ohio, presents Blue Diamond S8 Severe-Duty Gear Oil (SAE 75W-80). Designed to offer the same protection expected of higher-viscosity gear oils with the benefit of improved fuel economy, heat management and longer drain intervals, the oil was developed from a 100% PAO formula and is infused with proprietary FR3 nano technology and an extreme-pressure additive package developed specifically for severe-duty and e-mobility applications. It is recommended for electric commercial and passenger vehicles.



GM Truck/SUV Supercharger Kits

ProCharger, Lenexa, Kansas, presents Supercharger Kits for 2025 5.3L, 6.2L and 6.6L GM trucks and SUVs. Designed for approximately 50% power gains while remaining durable and reliable, the turnkey systems deliver increased torque for towing and smooth power for 10-speed transmissions. Offering on- and off-road capability, they are easy to install with large air-to-air intercoolers for maximum power and 100% reversibility with no permanent modifications. ***TS***


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STILL BUILDING THE FUTURE

Hot Rodders of Tomorrow continues to attract young talent to the industry.

BY PATRICIA KAOWTHUMRONG
PHOTOS COURTESY
HOT RODDERS OF TOMORROW

The automotive aftermarket has a people problem—and shop owners across the country are feeling it. As experienced technicians age out of the workforce and fewer young people enter the trades, the talent pipeline has thinned to a critical point.

As the owner of Winners Circle Speed and Custom in Joliet, Illinois, Jim Bingham understood firsthand how difficult it was to find skilled, motivated employees. Instead of waiting for a solution, he set out to build one.

In 2008, alongside industry icon Vic Edelbrock Jr., Bingham launched Hot Rodders of Tomorrow (HROT). The high school engine-building competition is designed to introduce students to the fundamentals of the trade—and the opportunities within it.

"These blue collar jobs are not going away," says Rodney Bingham, HROT's president and event coordinator and Jim's son. "In fact, (trade workers) are actually getting paid more and more."

What began as a local initiative rooted in the desire of two industry veterans to foster the next generation of automotive enthusiasts and professionals evolved into a national program that connects thousands of students with hands-on experiences, industry mentors and career pathways. Today, HROT remains a grassroots answer to one of the aftermarket's biggest challenges: developing talent.



Hot Rodders of Tomorrow (HROT) remains a grassroots answer to one of the aftermarket's biggest challenges: developing talent.

"The engine is a tool to allow kids to learn teamwork, to learn fundamentals of the engine—and to earn a scholarship," Rodney Bingham says.

LOCAL COMPETITIONS, NATIONAL PIPELINE

Hot Rodders of Tomorrow's signature Engine







Challenge was inspired by a surprisingly modest setup—junkyard engines and a handful of high school and college teams competing inside a 10-by-20-foot booth that Edelbrock discovered at the Race and Performance Expo trade show.

Seeing the potential, Edelbrock brought the idea to Jim Bingham, and the two set out to build something bigger. Jim acquired a truck and trailer, and together they rallied industry vendors to support a more structured, scalable version of the competition.

"All of the engines are from partnerships with sponsors, and then Begler's machine shop here in Illinois did all the machining and got all the parts put together," Rodney says.

HROT officially launched in 2008 with five high school teams and 35 students at the Race and Performance Expo. Within a year, it had expanded to 36 teams competing across three events.

Momentum continued to build as the program introduced significant scholarship opportunities, including $250,000 from Ohio Technical College (OTC) and the University of Northwestern Ohio (UNOH), at its first Showdown at the SEMA Show.

By the early 2010s, Hot Rodders of Tomorrow had expanded beyond its Midwest roots, establishing a footprint with events stretching from California to the East Coast. Along the way, the program also earned a place on some of the industry's biggest stages. Students have the opportunity to compete at events like the SEMA Show and Performance Racing Industry (PRI) Show—where they can test their skills against top teams, compete in front of family and industry representatives and experience the automotive world firsthand.

HROT (hotroddersoftomorrow.com) has generated more than $50 million in scholarship opportunities through partnerships with schools and training institutions, including OTC, UNOH, the School of Automotive Machinists & Technology (SAM Tech) and Universal Technical Institute (UTI).

That growth, however, didn't happen on infrastructure alone. At its core, Hot Rodders of Tomorrow has always been powered by people.

A VITAL COMMUNITY

While HROT has expanded across the country, its leadership remains rooted in the same family that started it. Rodney Bingham took over day-to-day operations in 2012 and carries forward the vision of his father, while adapting it for a new generation.

Today, he balances the demands of the program with his role at Winners Circle Speed and Custom (winnerscircle.com)—a business now in its 56th year and on its third generation.

But HROT's reach extends far beyond the Bingham family. In many ways, its success hinges on instructors. Often volunteering their time outside the classroom, these educators are responsible for recruiting students, organizing teams and, in most cases, fundraising to get them to competitions.

"I always tell these students, 'Thank your instructor as much as you thank us,'" Bingham says. "Ninety-nine percent of the instructors do not get paid to do the engine challenge here. It's something they do out of the love of their part, not that they're making extra money."

Supporting HROT is a nationwide network of roughly 150 volunteers, many of whom are former competitors themselves. As alumni return to judge events, mentor





students and help run events, the program has evolved into a self-sustaining pipeline.

Meanwhile, industry suppliers see the benefits of being involved as sponsors and advocates.

"The Hot Rodders of Tomorrow program continues to be one that we are happy to support," says Rick Love from Vintage Air. "In addition to teaching students valuable engine-building skills, it also emphasizes the importance of teamwork and attention to detail—traits that will help students be successful in any future endeavor."

Looking ahead, that same model may shape HROT's future. As Bingham continues to guide the program forward, he acknowledges that one day, the torch will need to be passed again—likely to someone who once stood on the competition floor themselves.

THE ROAD AHEAD

Even with that foundation in place, the road hasn't been without challenges. Like many education-based initiatives, HROT felt the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Momentum stalled as schools shut down, hands-on programs were put on hold and some of the program's most dedicated instructors chose to retire rather than navigate an uncertain teaching environment.

For a program built on consistency and in-person mentorship, the disruption was significant.

"COVID has been the biggest single challenge to the actual program," Bingham says.

While he admits HROT almost shuttered permanently because of the pandemic, the pause turned into a reset.

In the years since, the program has restructured how it operates. Bingham leans more on host schools to run local events, which reduces the need to transport equipment across the country. The shift has allowed the program to rebuild more sustainably while still maintaining a national reach.

At the same time, Bingham is focused on lowering barriers to entry. One of the newest initiatives, the Spark Plug Challenge, simplifies the competition into an individual, entry-level format. That gives students a chance to participate without needing a full team or extensive resources.

As demand for skilled trades continues to rise, programs like HROT are increasingly relevant to the automotive aftermarket and the broader









workforce.

Bingham says the point of the program is more than simply attracting young people into the automotive industry.

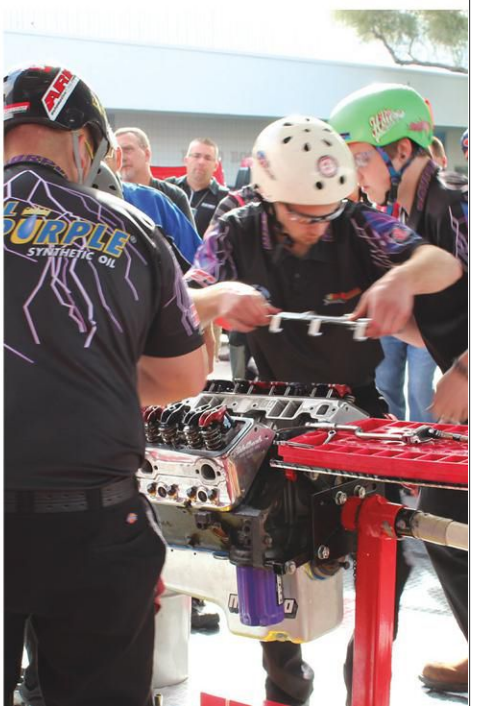
In fact, its impact goes beyond the shop floor—alumni have gone on to careers across the spectrum, from NHRA and NASCAR to roles as welders, truck drivers and other in-demand trades

"As a country, we need welders; we need people to go into our military—so, as long as they do something with their hands, then I've done my job," he says.

Bingham recalls a former student from Virginia who stopped into his shop to share that he earned so much scholarship funding from participating in HROT and the workforce development program SkillsUSA that his schooling at Ohio Technical College was 100% paid for.

"He was super thankful to us for doing what we do," Bingham says. "That's what fuels me and fuels my volunteers." ***TS***





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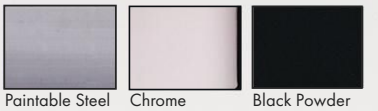
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Whether it's supporting educational programs for the next generation of professionals, participating in charity builds or working with nonprofits, the specialty aftermarket isn't shy about giving back.

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

Here are a few recent examples:

'MATCHBOX' JEEP WRANGLER AUCTION BENEFITS GAS MONKEY FOUNDATION

Truck accessories supplier RealTruck's collaboration with Mattel on a one-of-a-kind, heavily modified "Matchbox" Jeep Wrangler raised $110,000 at the Barrett-Jackson 2026 Scottsdale auction, with 100% of the hammer price benefiting Richard Rawling's Gas Monkey Foundation.



RealTruck's collaboration with Mattel on a "Matchbox" Jeep Wrangler raised $110,000 for charity at the Barrett-Jackson 2026 Scottsdale auction. (Photo courtesy RealTruck)

The organization, established by Rawlings in 2014, provides funding for veterans, first responders and families impacted by Alzheimer's disease.

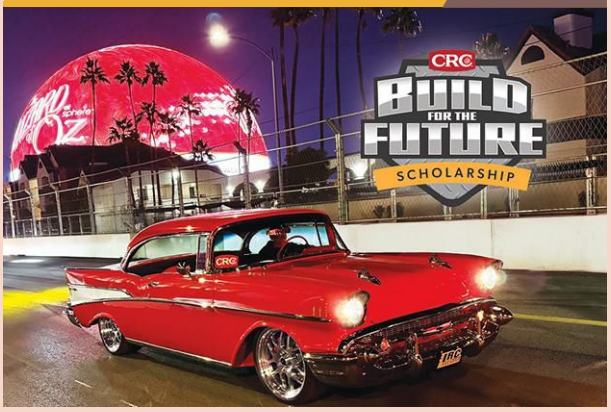
"Year after year, our outfitted vehicles take the auction block by storm, each one telling its own story and captivating bidders," says Lee Riser, RealTruck Inc. vice president of marketing. "We're excited to have brought to life another Matchbox build with Mattel while also supporting a worthy cause as a result of celebrating the partnership."

Built by Doetsch Off-Road in Chandler, Arizona, and originally unveiled during the 2025 SEMA Show, the 2018 Jeep Wrangler (JLU) is outfitted with premium RealTruck accessories and a custom Matchbox and Husky Liners exterior. Highlights include a RealTruck Superlift 4-inch lift kit, Husky Liners Weatherbeater floor liners, Rugged Ridge HD stubby front bumper, XOR rear bumper, a roof rack and an AmFib snorkel system.

A 1:64 scale version of the build was introduced at mass retailers globally in April.

"We're thankful to our friends at RealTruck for supporting Gas Monkey Foundation with increased funding and awareness," says Rawlings. "This donation will make a real impact on causes near and dear to my heart, supporting those struggling with Alzheimer's as well as first responders and veterans."

CRC INDUSTRIES' BEL AIR SALE RAISES $100,000 FOR SKILLED TRADE SCHOLARSHIPS



Specialty car care chemicals company CRC Industries raised $100,000 for skilled trade scholarships through the sale of a hydrogen-powered 1957 Chevrolet Bel Air at the Barrett-Jackson Scottsdale auction in January. Built for the company's Build for the Future scholarship initiative, the full vehicle hammer price will benefit TechForce Foundation.

The winning bidder was Devin Smith, owner of Southern Elite Contracting Inc., a general contracting firm with nine locations across the Southeast and more than 500 employees working in the skilled trades. Smith raised the final bid from $80,000 to $100,000 to maximize the impact of the scholarship effort.

"When the bidding reached $80,000, I felt a strong personal conviction to push it further to support this important mission," says Smith. "My wife has been a teacher for 21 years, and my business relies on skilled tradespeople every day. This purchase allows us to combine our love of classic cars with our calling to be good stewards, while supporting education."

The cherry-red Bel Air marked Barrett-Jackson's first-ever sale of a hydrogen-powered vehicle, drawing a large crowd. Bidding was intensified by NHRA Top Fuel world champion Clay Millican, who acted as vehicle spokesperson on the block and, together with Jeff and Jeffrey Lutz of Lutz Race Cars, was a builder of the vehicle. Millican contributed one of his racing fire suits to the auction package to entice higher bids.

"Everyone at TechForce Foundation is deeply grateful for the outcome of the 1957 Bel Air at Barrett-Jackson and for the leadership CRC Industries demonstrates through its Build for the Future initiative," says Jennifer Maher, CEO of TechForce Foundation. "This funding is critical; it will support more than 10 scholarships and provide students with access to training, tools and industry connections that prepare them for the in-demand skilled trade roles that keep America running."

The Bel Air features a hydrogen-fueled 5.7L Gen 3 Hemi V-8 engine built by Mike Copeland, CEO of Arrington Performance, paired with an Edelbrock 2650 supercharger to deliver 500 hp. Additional upgrades include a TCI automatic transmission, power steering, power brakes, air conditioning and a custom red-and-black interior.

NORTHWOOD UNIVERSITY LAUNCHES MOTORSPORTS MANAGEMENT DEGREE



Northwood University in Michigan has launched a Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) degree program dedicated to the full motorsports ecosystem. (Photo courtesy Northwood University)

Northwood University in Michigan has launched a Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) degree in Automotive and Mobility Studies with a concentration in Motorsports Management.

The program creates a business-first academic pathway dedicated to the full motorsports ecosystem.

The Motorsports Management concentration includes specialized coursework and structured fieldwork experiences in sponsorship activation, event operations, team management and talent development, according to Northwood officials.

"This program marks a defining moment for Northwood as America's Automotive University," says Dr. Kristin Stehouwer, academic vice president and provost. "Motorsports is a sophisticated global business that demands strategic thinking, ethical leadership and operational excellence. This BBA equips students with the business foundation and industry expertise to compete at the highest levels."

The global motorsports market was valued at $9.5 billion in 2024, with growth fueled by expanding media rights, sponsorship innovation, experiential fan engagement and global team operations.

"Despite this growth, industry leaders consistently report talent gaps in commercial strategy, logistics management and sponsorship activation," states Dr. Matthew Bennett, vice president of enrollment and strategic alliances. "Northwood's new BBA responds directly to that demand, as it was designed in consultation with numerous motorsport sector teams, sponsors, events and race organizations."

Northwood's BBA in Automotive and Mobility Studies emphasizes leadership, analytics, finance and enterprise strategy. Students enrolled in the Motorsports Management concentration will gain hands-on experience through:

- Industry events such as Performance Racing Industry's annual PRI Show
- Structured internships across motorsports organizations and teams
- Student-led leadership experiences like the Northwood University International Auto Show
- Applied learning in sponsor activation, logistics, operations and event production



STANADYNE HONORED FOR COMMITMENT TO HIRING VETERANS

The U.S. Department of Labor recognized aftermarket company Stanadyne's Jacksonville, North Carolina, plant as one of the record-breaking 887 recipients of the 2025 HIRE Vets Medallion Award. The Stanadyne facility earned the highest platinum award.

The Honoring Investments in Recruiting and Employing American Military Veterans Act (HIRE Vets Act) Medallion Award Program is the only federal award program that recognizes employers who successfully recruit, hire and retain veterans.

"This award reflects Stanadyne's intentional and sustained commitment to recruiting, hiring and retaining veterans and their dependents," says Lori Ready-DiGiovanni, human resources manager at Stanadyne. "We actively partner with local veteran-focused organizations, participate in military and veteran job fairs, and translate military experience into meaningful manufacturing and technical career pathways, supported by onboarding and development practices designed for long-term success."

Recipients of the 2025 HIRE Vets Medallion Award meet rigorous employment and veteran integration assistance criteria, including veteran hiring and retention percentages; availability of veteran-specific resources; leadership programming for veterans; dedicated human resource efforts; and pay compensation and tuition assistance programs for veterans, according to the company.

"Veterans strengthen our Jacksonville team through their leadership, accountability, and mission-driven mindset," Ready-DiGiovanni says. "Their contributions elevate our safety culture, teamwork and operational excellence every day."

Stanadyne, which designs, manufactures and remanufactures advanced fuel delivery systems for diesel, gasoline and alternative fuel engines, joins 886 other companies from 48 states, plus the District of Columbia, Guam and Puerto Rico, who have shown a commitment to hiring veterans and ensuring that they have a long-term career and growth plan that uses the diverse skills they acquired through their military service, officials note.

"Veterans bring a strong sense of leadership, accountability, and adaptability shaped by high-expectation, mission-driven environments," Ready-DiGiovanni adds. "Their experience strengthens teamwork, reinforces operational discipline and elevates our safety and reliability standards, contributing directly to a culture of excellence and continuous improvement at the Jacksonville plant."



Stanadyne's Jacksonville, North Carolina, plant was among the recipients of the 2025 HIRE Vets Medallion Award, honoring efforts to hire, train and retain military veterans. (Photo courtesy Stanadyne)

SEMA RELAUNCHES ORBA IN SUPPORT OF THE OFF-ROAD INDUSTRY

The Specialty Equipment Market Association (SEMA) relaunched the Off-Road Business Association (ORBA) this spring with an expanded advocacy strategy, enhanced research capabilities and a renewed commitment to coalition-based action to protect the future of the off-road industry and enthusiast community.

With a focus on trucks, SUVs, powersports and dirt bikes, ORBA's core mission is to serve as the off-road business community's leading advocate on issues affecting access, recreation and responsible land use. A rigorous, data-driven approach includes regional economic impact reports, consumer research and deeper collaboration across the outdoor recreation ecosystem.

"No single organization can achieve our advocacy goals alone," organization officials state in a press release. "The future of off-road access depends on strong coalitions, shared expertise and coordinated action. We are always stronger together."

Stated priorities for the organization include:

- Protecting access to public lands
- Supporting federal legislation that preserves motorized access to outdoor spaces
- Continuing the EcoLogic Partners collaboration
- Launching regional economic impact reports
- Expanding coalitions and partnerships
- Aligning efforts with SEMA's Truck and Off-Road Alliance (TORA) council
- Land stewardship and driver education



SEMA has relaunched the Off-Road Business Association (ORBA) with an expanded advocacy strategy and a renewed commitment to coalition-based action. (Photo by Jef White)

The ORBA Leadership Team:

- Karen Bailey-Chapman, SEMA senior vice president, Public and Government Affairs
- Sean P. Holman, interim executive director
- Laura Butcher, legislative director

ORBA's stated mission is to "represent the interests of the off-road industry and enthusiast community by advocating for responsible access to public lands, supporting sound public policy and working collaboratively with partners across the outdoor recreation space," according to a press release.



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TOYOTA, onX PARTNER ON TRAIL REVIVAL INITIATIVE



Toyota and onX Offroad are partnering for a second year on the Trail Revival Project, a nationwide stewardship initiative dedicated to protecting and restoring access to public land trails. (Photo courtesy Toyota)

Digital navigation technology company onX and Toyota are partnering for a second year on the Trail Revival Project, a nationwide stewardship initiative dedicated to protecting and restoring access to public land trails.

This year, the Trail Revival Project will support 24 trail restoration and cleanup projects across the United States, bringing together off-road clubs, volunteers and land managers to maintain and reopen trails threatened by erosion, storm damage, overgrowth and illegal dumping.

The effort comes at a critical moment for public lands, as outdoor recreation continues to surge. Many off-road trail clubs—longstanding operational partners to land managers responsible for clearing, maintaining and restoring trails—are facing declining participation, while land management agencies contend with limited staffing and funding. As a result, many trails go without consistent maintenance, leaving them increasingly vulnerable to erosion, overgrowth and closure.

"Access without stewardship is simply not sustainable," says Griffen Gilbert, onX Offroad community marketing manager. "Trails don't maintain themselves. The Trail Revival Project supports the land management agencies, local clubs and volunteers who do the work to keep these routes open for future generations."

Toyota returns this year as onX's key partner, providing funding, vehicles and logistical support to help power trail restoration efforts nationwide.

"Toyota trucks are designed for adventure seekers, and with that passion comes a responsibility to help preserve the places where those adventures happen," says Mike Tripp, group vice president of Toyota Marketing. "Building on the positive impact we made in 2025, we're excited to continue supporting the Trail Revival Project and the dedicated volunteers working to keep trails open for the community."

Remaining 2026 Trail Revival Project events include:

- June 6: Langlade County OHV Trails, Wisconsin
- June 28: White River National Forest, Colorado
- June 28: Salmon-Challis National Forest, Idaho
- July 26-Aug. 8: Pioneer Trail, Carson National Forest, New Mexico
- Aug. 8: Arapeen OHV Trail System, Utah

In its first year, the onX and Toyota Trail Revival Project initiative mobilized more than 400 volunteers across 14 projects in 13 states, contributing more than 2,400 hours of trail work to restore 30 trails and nearly 50 miles of access routes through debris removal, drainage repairs, trash cleanup and other maintenance.

SUN AUTO'S DRIVE WITH PURPOSE PROGRAM SUPPORTS COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS



Sun Auto Tire & Service's Drive With Purpose community impact initiative enables employees and customers to participate in meaningful community partnerships. (Image courtesy Sun Auto Tire & Service)

Automotive service and wheel and tire company Sun Auto Tire & Service's Drive With Purpose program is a community impact initiative that enables employees and customers to participate in meaningful community partnerships through each service visit.

The program was built from Sun Auto's independent shop roots and is focused on local action with national support, officials state in a press release.

"Drive With Purpose is a platform in which we can support our local communities every day," said Tony Puckett, Sun Auto Tire & Service CEO. "It connects the automotive service work that we are doing in our stores to the opportunity to serve others in need within our local markets and gives our teams and guests a great way to support these amazing charitable organizations. Every mile truly matters, and this is how we bring that to life."

Drive With Purpose is organized around three focus areas that reflect how Sun Auto serves the communities where its stores operate:

- **Community Partnerships** support local events, food banks and grassroots efforts that strengthen the neighborhoods Sun Auto serves, while creating new ways for routine maintenance to contribute to fundraising efforts.
- **Veteran Causes** focus on supporting veterans and first responders through trusted nonprofit partners, with programs that promote mobility, independence and pathways to meaningful careers beyond service.
- **Educational Development** invests in technical education and workforce training, helping create new pathways for future technicians and strengthening the long-term health of the automotive industry.

In January, more than 700 teammates attended the DRIVE 2026 Leadership Workshop in Arizona. Regional teams from across the Sun Auto Network competed for donations toward charities in their local communities, including America's VetDogs, Susan G. Komen, Tunnel to Towers Foundation, TechForce Foundation and No Kid Hungry.

Last year, the company invested more than $70,000 in charitable giving and it has donated $30,000 in the first quarter of 2026. Sun Auto Tire & Service owns and operates more than 550 tire and service centers across the United States. **TS**

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Closely compare components to identify which ones offer the quality off-roaders expect. (Photo courtesy Synergy Mfg.)

Q&A: Lifts & Leveling Kits

Addressing buying trends, common misconceptions & hot new products in an elevated market.

BY JEF WHITE

Editor's note: *This is the first in a two-part series highlighting the latest trends in the lifts and leveling kits market. Part II, featuring insights from a new batch of industry suppliers, will appear in the September 2026 issue of THE SHOP.*

There's a lot for shops to like when it comes to offering lifts and leveling kits. It starts with strong demand from a variety of truck, van and SUV owners—everyone from off-roaders and overlanders to those simply looking for appearance upgrades with larger wheels and tires.

The fertile market has attracted a high number of manufacturers and system options, however, meaning a little education goes a long way when seeking out the perfect setup for each application.

Suppliers are here with answers to the big questions facing salespeople and installers, from market trends and common misconceptions to hot new products. Add it all up and your shop can become the local expert vehicle owners turn to when they're looking to elevate their 4x4 experience.

ARE LIFTS AND LEVELING KITS ONLY FOR OFF-ROAD AND OVERLANDING CUSTOMERS?

NO

Demand for these components continues to grow as more truck and SUV owners use their vehicles for towing, hauling and recreation, says Cody Wolgamott, product marketing manager for Air Lift Company.

"Customers expect their vehicles to handle a wide range of uses, creating opportunity for shops to offer solutions that improve safety, stability and overall performance under load," he explains.

While attractive, modern leveling kits also provide real benefits such as towing and hauling stability, front-end sag reduction and improved stance without compromising daily drivability, says Justin Coulter, director of sales for SuperSprings International.

"Pickup trucks still dominate the automotive aftermarket, accounting for roughly 75% of U.S. aftermarket spending," he explains. "Leveling kits provide a high-

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Part of the attraction of offering a variety of lift and leveling systems and components is that they are attractive to a wide range of consumers. (Photo courtesy Van Compass)

volume, repeatable service that appeals to owners of both new and aging trucks. For shops, they deliver strong margins and easy add-on revenue through alignment services, tire upsells and shock upgrades (if not included in the leveling kit), and they present a low warranty risk when done correctly."

DO THE UPGRADES MAKE SENSE OUTSIDE OF TRADITIONAL TRUCK/SUV APPLICATIONS?

YES

Part of the attraction of offering a variety of lift and leveling systems and components is that they are attractive to a wide range of consumers.

"With camper vans and RVs, the factory suspension is sagging due to all the added weight of the conversion," notes Andy Knox, general manager for Van Compass. "It's a perfect upgrade that makes the van much more enjoyable to drive, even if we're leveling the opposite end (rear) versus a usual truck/SUV leveling kit."

It's also no surprise the components appeal to drivers who like to go outside.

"People have been enjoying the outdoors longer than we have had vehicles," says Sean Fox, product manager for KYB. "As technology in vehicles and ride control products continue to evolve, what was once just a dream becomes reality. Lift and leveling kits aren't just about style; they are about lifestyle."

Even enthusiasts seeking only minor adjustments see value in the products.

"More vehicle owners are moving beyond stock setups and looking to upgrade their OE components with larger aftermarket wheels and tires," says Ryan Osborne, project manager for TrailFX. "To properly accommodate those upgrades, lifts and leveling kits often become a necessary first step."

The common theme is a desire to get away from a stock vehicle appearance.

"The goal is to increase wheel and tire size and gain ground clearance with an aggressive look," says Dan Walker, director of business development for Fabtech Suspension.

With so much going for them, the products will likely remain popular for a while.

"The customization market continues to thrive and, while maybe not as sharp of an increase as was seen a few years ago, it shows no sign of slowing," says Scott Adcock, marketing and creative services manager for Specialty Products Company.

DO THE PRODUCTS SERVE AS A GATEWAY TO FURTHER VEHICLE CUSTOMIZATION?

YES

The lift and leveling kit market remains a strong growth opportunity for shops, driven by the continued dominance of trucks and SUVs and a rising demand for vehicle



Customers expect their vehicles to handle a wide range of uses, creating opportunity for shops to offer solutions that improve safety, stability and overall performance under load. (Photo courtesy Air Lift Co.)

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Air Lift Company
Cody Wolgamott
Product Marketing Manager

■ HOT PRODUCTS: 2023-Up Ford F-250/F-350 and 2014-Up GM 1500 Kits
■ FEATURES & BENEFITS:
FTL leveling and 2.5-inch coil spring systems; can be upgraded to aftermarket radius arms and Dirt Logic 2.25 shocks.

Fabtech Suspension
Dan Walker
Director of Business Development

■ HOT PRODUCTS:
MonoMax 1000 Series
■ FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Front struts feature a spacer design to adjust the spring seat, allowing the strut to be set to stock ride height or adjusted to level the front of the vehicle or, when paired with components in the rear, offer a full lift; 2000 Series takes it to the next level.

KYB
Sean Fox
Product Manager

■ HOT PRODUCT:
2.5-Inch Stage 3.1 Lift Kit for Jeep Wrangler JL/JLU
■ FEATURES & BENEFITS:
A well-rounded, mid-height lift that prioritizes real suspension performance while keeping ride quality usable daily.

RSO Suspension
Jesse Brown
VP of Operations

■ HOT PRODUCT:
SPC 13010 Torsion Key Adjustment Kit
■ FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Provides easy adjustment for front ride height on torsion bar-equipped GM vehicles; hex-key kit includes a stronger-than-OEM forging in a durable e-coat finish; factory ride qualities with up to 3 inches of front-end lift to fine-tune vehicle stance.

Specialty Products Company
Scott Adcock
Marketing/Creative Services Manager

■ HOT PRODUCT:
JBS-301-01 Leveling Kit for Ram 2500 4x4
■ FEATURES & BENEFITS:
True 2-inch front leveling with no spacers; achieves lift through heavy-duty front coil springs; maintains proper suspension geometry and ride quality; front and rear solution maintains level while towing; firmer control under heavy payloads; made in USA.

SuperSprings International
Justin Coulter
Director of Sales

■ HOT PRODUCTS:
Ford and Ram Kits
■ FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Feature frequency-tuned, progressively wound, USA-made coil springs and proprietary valved Fox shocks, along with all needed components required to install the leveling kits correctly (brake line extensions, bump stop extensions, castor sleeves, etc.)

Synergy Mfg.
Dave Schlossberg
CEO/Owner

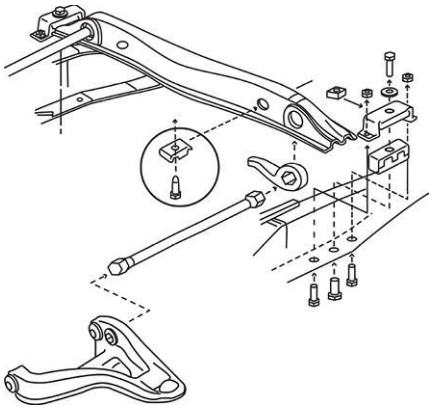
■ HOT PRODUCTS:
Suspension Pro Mid Lift Kits
■ FEATURES & BENEFITS:
The 3- to 3.5-inch kits are built for serious performance, combining high-strength steel with corrosion-resistant anodized aluminum; premium bushings and pre-installed ball joints deliver long-lasting performance and reduce installation time.

TrailFX
Ryan Osborne
Project Manager

■ HOT PRODUCT:
Stage 4.3 Kit for Sprinter 4x4/AWD
■ FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Four-corner adjustable shocks; rear leaf spring upgrade; front bump stop upgrade.

Van Compass
Andy Knox
General Manager





Lifting a vehicle is more than just the kit itself, offering shops a chance to cross-sell additional products that enhance the driving experience.
(Images courtesy Specialty Products Company)

personalization, says Jesse Brown, vice president of operations for RSO Suspension.

"These upgrades offer an accessible, high-impact entry point for customers while creating natural upsell opportunities for wheels, tires and related components," he notes.

They are often needed to complete or supplement wheel-and-tire swaps and other customizations, says Dave Schlossberg, CEO and owner of Synergy Mfg.

"Our leveling kits are high-margin (well above the industry standard) and quick and easy to install," he says. "This ensures big profit for shops, which helps offset typically lower-margin items like wheels and tires."

Osborne views the systems as a positive first step for shops looking to sell and install complementary components that complete custom projects.

"Customers investing in larger wheel-and-tire packages are also interested in suspension upgrades, along with accessories like fender flares and wheel adapters to achieve the right fit and look," he reveals.

Adcock focuses on specific paired parts.

"Lifting a vehicle is more than just the kit itself and there are many cross-selling products to enhance the driver experience," he says. "An adjustable upper control arm and





Lifts and leveling kits are often a first step toward full vehicle customization. (Photos courtesy TrailFX)

lower camber/caster cams should always be part of the complete package—not only will they increase sales, but the customer will be thankful and have a pleasant driving experience, not having suffered through 'death wobble' issues, rubbing tires and the like often associated with such modifications."

IS THE PERFORMANCE OF ALL LIFT AND LEVELING KITS THE SAME?

NO

With so many suppliers serving the market, there's a wide diversity of product offerings, requiring shops to do their homework on which systems to carry.

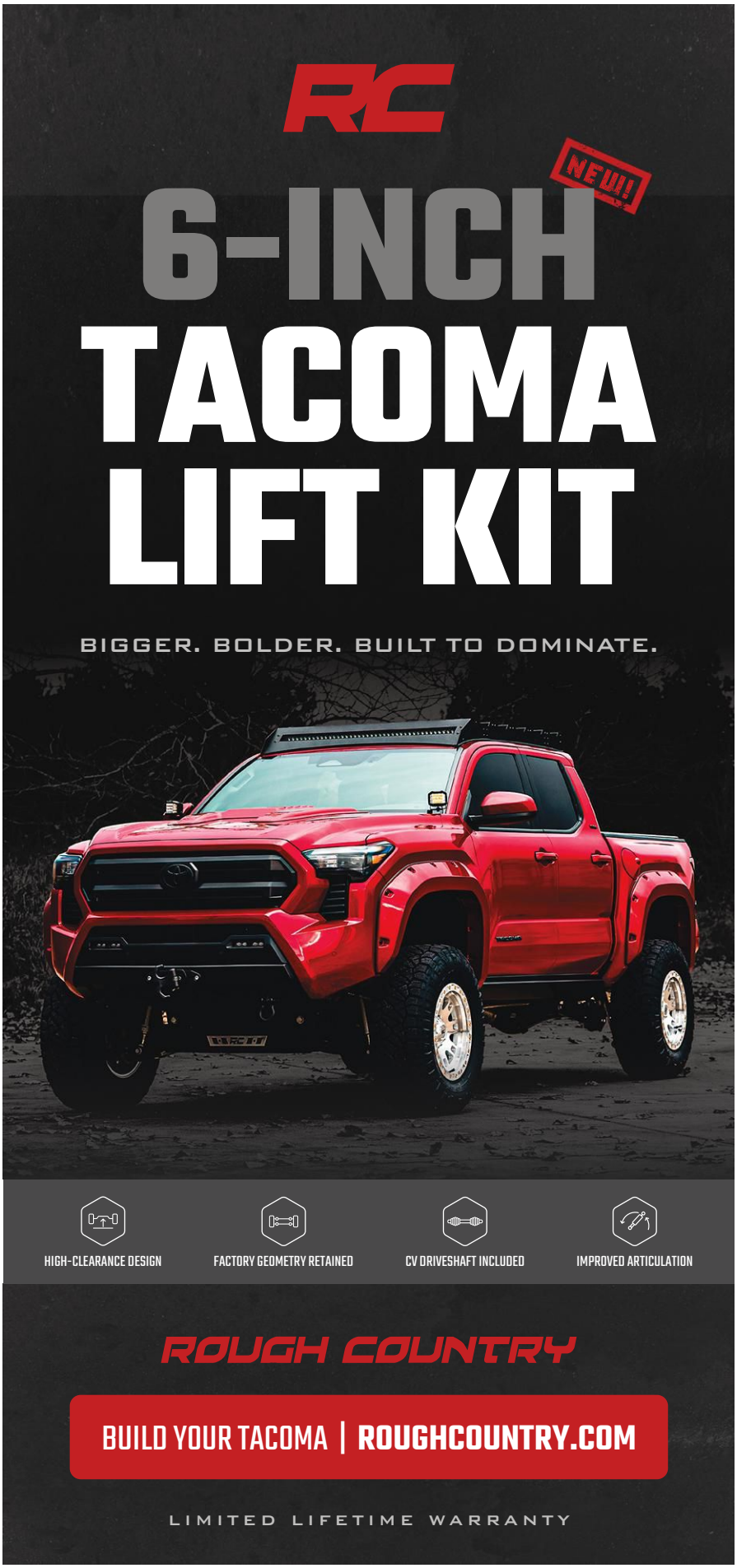
"Differences in engineering, shock tuning and geometry correction can dramatically change how a vehicle drives both on- and off-road," Brown says.

Schlossberg suggests closely comparing components to identify the ones that offer the quality off-roaders expect.

"There is a huge difference between kits that consist of low-tech coil spring spacers and shock relocation brackets, compared to kits like Synergy Mfg. offers that consist of replacement coils and longer-travel shocks," he says.

All systems are not created equal, Coulter agrees.

"Pay close attention to the features of each manufacturer's kit," he cautions. "Spacer kits are often just designed for aesthetics and do not improve the ride or handling characteristics as they can increase factory spring





Lift and leveling kits aren't just about style—they're about lifestyle. (Photos courtesy KYB)



Leveling kits provide a high-volume, repeatable service that appeals to owners of both new and aging trucks. (Photo courtesy SuperSprings International)

preload or alter suspension travel. Many customers will choose a better solution once they understand why it matters."

Walker also warns against diminished ride quality from poorly built spacer kits and reminds shops to weigh all aspects of installation costs when considering value for the customer.

DO THEY USUALLY REQUIRE MASSIVE VEHICLE MODIFICATIONS?

NO

A common misconception is the belief that installing a lift or leveling kit requires major, permanent modifications including cutting or drilling, Osborne from TrailFX notes.

"Shops should reassure their customers that most modern lift and leveling kits are engineered for straightforward, bolt-on installation and do not require permanent alterations," he says.

IS BIGGER ALWAYS BETTER?

NO

Shops will also want to match the size of the kit to the vehicle's planned usage.

"When properly set up and tuned, a premium product with less lift height will outperform a bigger lift with lower quality," says Fox. "We've proved this through extensive testing in the harshest conditions."

DO YOU GET WHAT YOU PAY FOR?

YES

In some cases, Knox adds, the components actually exceed a customer's initial expectations.

"Most associate these kits with being 'budget' or that they make the vehicle drive worse," he explains. "Our kits dramatically increase stability and performance."

Supplier support can also make a big difference—for shops and consumers.

"Focus on pairing the right product with the right use case and take advantage of programs that drive customer action," says Wolgamott. "Air Lift's ProSeries lineup is installer-exclusive, helping shops differentiate their offerings while protecting margins."



The lift and leveling kit market remains a strong growth opportunity for shops, driven by the popularity of trucks and SUVs and a rising demand for vehicle personalization. (Photo courtesy RSO Suspension)



Sales techniques involve knowing the products and focusing on the end goal for each vehicle. (Photo courtesy Fabtech)



The systems supplement wheel-and-tire swaps and related customizations. (Photo courtesy Synergy Mfg.)

CAN THERE BE A TECHNICAL ELEMENT TO SOME SYSTEMS?

YES

Installers may need some experience and product knowledge to fit systems to specific applications and get them aligned properly.

"Many installation shops assume that the manufacturer of the lift kit has accounted for the effect on alignment angles. While most kits have accounted for some alignment angle effect, all will require some additional adjustment to provide the best alignment and driver experience," says Adcock from Specialty Products Company. "The shop may find that additional adjustments and/or components will be required to be sure the alignment readings are within desired specifications for the vehicle, and these often will differ from the OE recommendations."

IS DRIVER EDUCATION REQUIRED TO FULLY ENJOY THE PRODUCTS?

YES



Clients want to get away from a stock vehicle appearance. (Photo courtesy Fabtech)

Brown from RSO Suspension suggests educating customers on the full transformation of their vehicles and not just the lift itself.

"Showing the consumer the before-and-after benefits in stance, capability and ride quality makes the upgrade easier to justify," he believes.

Coulter from SuperSprings stresses the importance of schooling customers on the basics—times three.

"Educate, educate, educate," he recommends. "Match kit types to truck usage and honestly explain any tradeoffs. And don't forget to compensate for removing the factory 'rake.' Removing it without rear support can cause further issues and rear-end sag when loaded. Build higher trust and you will have fewer comebacks, stronger margins and more repeat customers."

Walker suggests a three-step approach:

- Know the product: Ask your sales representative for specs.
- Focus on the end goal: Consider wheels and tires and the truck's finished look.



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DESERT POWER WAGONS' HELLCAT-POWERED WC-53



North Carolina's Desert Power Wagons recently unveiled a high-riding WC-53 four-door build, finished in deep Pepper Gray Metallic and designed to merge prewar American design with modern performance, luxury and capability.

At its core is a supercharged 6.2L Hellcat V-8 delivering 717 hp and 656 pound-feet of torque. Paired with a Randy's Transmissions heavy-duty TorqueFlite 48RE 4-speed automatic, the power delivery is immediate yet composed.

Beneath the surface sits a Tisdale Coachworks proprietary fully boxed steel ladder frame, forming the backbone of a purpose-built off-road machine. A custom four-link suspension system with King Shocks 3-inch internal bypass coil-overs, remote reservoirs and adjustable compression delivers serious off-road articulation while maintaining pavement composure.

A Bulldog Tough 241DHD transfer case provides true shift-on-the-fly capability, backed by 37-inch Toyo Open Country M/T tires wrapped around 18-inch Black Rhino Armory wheels. Highlights include leather wrapped front and rear bucket seats finished in a double-diamond stitch pattern, matching door cards and center console, Dakota Digital VHX analog gauges, an ATOTO infotainment system, a JL

- Upgrade shocks when installing a Fabtech FTL Leveling or 3-inch Sport System.

Highlighting safety aspects can also help customers recognize their value.

"A common misconception is that these upgrades are purely cosmetic. In reality, load support solutions like air springs play a critical role in improving vehicle performance by reducing squat, improving handling and enhancing safety when towing or hauling," says Wolgamott. "Helping customers understand that functional benefit is key."

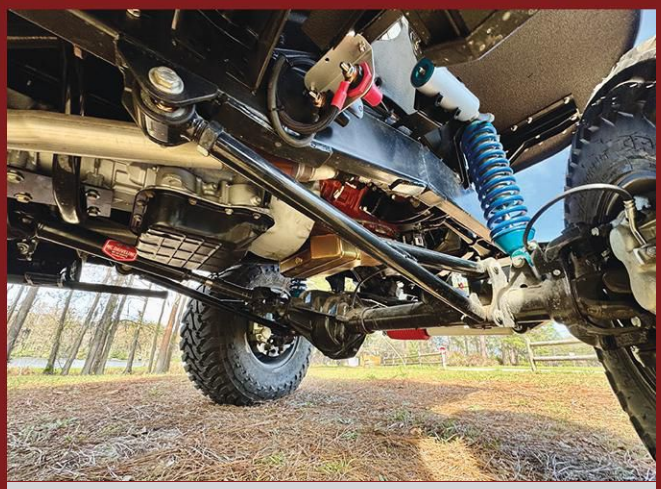
ULTIMATELY, DOES ADDING A LIFT OR LEVELING KIT ENHANCE DRIVER ENJOYMENT?

YES

When it comes to the features and benefits associated with lifts and leveling kits, vehicle performance is near the top of the list.

"Quality parts deliver quality results, and quality suspension is something you get to feel





Desert Power Wagons' Hellcat-driven WC-53 is a high-riding, purpose-built off-road machine.
(Photos courtesy Desert Power Wagons)

Audio/Rockford Fosgate sound system, Vintage Air climate control, power windows, cruise control, Viper security system, power-operated tailgate and a custom matching trailer.

every mile you drive," says Knox from Van Compass.

Benefits include improved ride comfort and better tire clearance for drivers, and higher profit margins on both parts and installation labor for shops, says Schlossberg.

"In addition to the suspension modifications, wheels and tires are often purchased at the same time, along with bumpers, rocker guards/side steps, tonneau covers and performance tuners/speedometer calibration modules," he notes.

Maybe most importantly, says Fox from KYB, is that the systems allow drivers to do the things they most enjoy.

"Lift kits and leveling units aren't just for folks who are looking to take their vehicles off-road," he explains. "These kits can be used to get your customers where they want to go for whatever adventures they love. Mountain biking, hiking, skiing, parasailing or any number of other activities require a way to get there. Properly outfitting their vehicles can help them get to where they want to go." ***TS***







Tesla Model Y Lowering Springs

Eibach Inc., Corona, California, presents its Eibach PRO-KIT performance springs, now in stock for 2020-25 Tesla Model Y (7-seat) applications. Made in the USA to deliver upgraded performance and ride comfort using progressive spring technology, the springs lower the vehicle's center of gravity to increase steering response and improve vehicle dynamics for a sportier, more balanced feel. The reduced height eliminates excessive ground clearance and fender gap for enhanced aesthetics.

Professional-Grade Cast Film



Avery Dennison Graphics Solutions, Mentor, Ohio, presents its new, professional-grade MPI 1903 Cast Wrapping Film for vehicle graphics. Designed as a high-gloss, multipurpose film that delivers strong performance at an affordable price point, the film features Easy Apply RS technology that allows a repositionable, smooth and bubble-free installation. Highlights include high-quality print performance across all major digital platforms and 7-year unprinted durability. The film is suited for commercial vehicle and truck branding, and full or partial vehicle wraps.



Truck Cap With Windows

Overland Vehicle Systems (OVS), Santa Fe Springs, California, presents its Expedition Truck Cap with Side Panel Windows. This new variant of the Expedition Cap combines rugged performance with enhanced visibility and customization, including integrated MOLLE panels on the side windows that act as a gear organization method as well as security for potential break-ins. Full-window wing doors and a rear hatch offer greater visibility, natural light and airflow inside the cap. Applications include popular Toyota, Jeep, Ford, GM and Ram models.

GM HD Commercial Chassis Air Suspension



Air Lift Company, Lansing, Michigan, presents its newest LoadLifter 7500 XL Ultimate air suspension kit, available for 2016-25 Chevrolet Silverado 3500 HD and GMC Sierra 3500 HD Commercial Chassis Cab, 2WD and 4WD models. Designed for tough towing and hauling tasks, the new LoadLifter 7500 XL Ultimate (PN 57543) kit is engineered to improve load-leveling capacity and ride quality for commercial vehicles. Features include a 7-inch, double-convoluted air spring and integrated closed-cell jounce bumper.



On- and Off-Road Wheel

Dirty Life Wheels, Ontario, California, a brand of **The Wheel Group**, presents its Dual Tek 9317 DT-3 Wheel with a simulated beadlock ring for Jeeps and trucks. Available in a 17x9 fitment, the wheel features an aggressive split-spoke design with Dual Tek technology that allows multiple uses, including a DOT street-legal option to mount tires and functional beadlock ability for off-road use. Optional rash rings or simulated rings change the look of the wheel in minutes. Forged beadlock rings are sold separately.



Power Retractable Tonneau Cover

Westin Automotive Products, San Dimas, California, presents its Power Retractable Tonneau Cover. Engineered for performance, protection and easy operation, the cover is designed to deliver dependable all-weather defense against rain, dirt, sun and wind to keep cargo secure and concealed. Durable aluminum construction provides long-lasting reliability for work or play, and the low-profile, OE-style design sits on top of bed rails for a clean, factory-installed appearance without sacrificing functionality. It supports up to 500 pounds when evenly distributed. ***TS***

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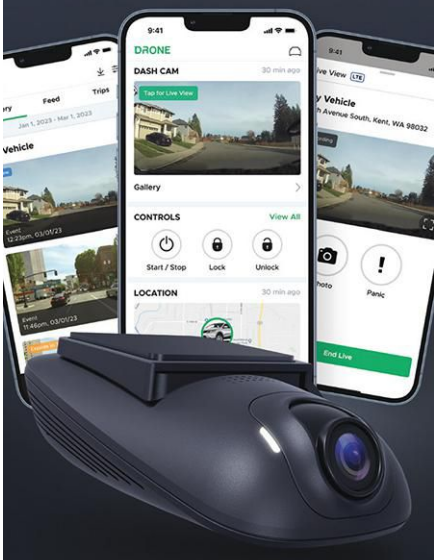
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Avery Dennison Sponsors Student Bus Wrap Art Contest

For the sixth year, Avery Dennison Graphics Solutions sponsored the Design-a-Bus-Wrap student art contest organized by Laketran, the public transit agency in Lake County, Ohio. The contest was open to the county's middle and high school students, and in recognition of the 250th anniversary of the United States, contestants were encouraged to design a bus wrap showcasing America250.

"A commitment to people and community—this is what Avery Dennison stands proud to represent. And we are grateful to be a part of this incredible Design-A-Bus event for Laketran and Lake County," says David Korvah, marketing manager at Avery Dennison Graphics Solutions.

A panel of transit employees, graphic arts professionals and community leaders served as judges for the contest. Ava Passalacqua, a sophomore at Riverside High School, was this year's first-place winner for her bus design, themed "We the People."

Her red, white and blue artwork, depicting American flags and bald eagle imagery, was transformed into a full bus wrap on one of Laketran's propane-powered Dial-a-Ride vehicles and will be displayed for a year.

"I wanted the bus to be meaningful while incorporating the America250 theme by combining classic vibrant American symbols that people can recognize with an artistic style that represents school spirit and creativity," she says. "I was inspired by traditional Fourth of July celebrations."

Other contest standouts included second-place winner Lailah Kerslake from iSchool Virtual Academy and third-place winner Anna Sweet from iStem/Auburn Career Center, according to the company.

"Each year, our team is honored to sponsor this program in support of our local schools and the creativity of our students. Laketran Design-A-Bus showcases our students' artistic talents while introducing them to a canvas for creative expression offered by the graphics and transportation industries," says Korvah. "The 'We the People' winning bus design from Ava Passalacqua, a sophomore at Riverside High School, is a perfect example of the captivating artistic medium graphic vinyl films provide to communicate a powerful and positive message."





Ava Passalacqua, a sophomore at Riverside High School in Ohio, created the winning design in this year's Design-a-Bus-Wrap student art contest sponsored by Avery Dennison Graphics Solutions. (Photos courtesy Avery Dennison Graphics Solutions)

The bus wrap material was donated by Avery Dennison, a Lake County-based manufacturer and distributor of pressure-sensitive adhesive graphic films.

The bus featuring the winning design was wrapped in Avery Dennison MPI 1105 Easy Apply RS supercast digital film with DOL 1360Z optically clear gloss digital overlaminate.

Avery Dennison also donated its MPI 2528 50/50 perforated film for the bus window graphics.

Cleveland-based Repros Inc. provided the print production and installation of Passalacqua's winning design on the Laketran 2025 bus.

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