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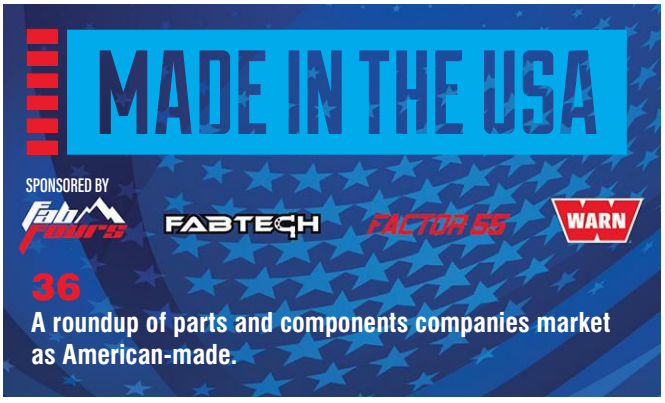
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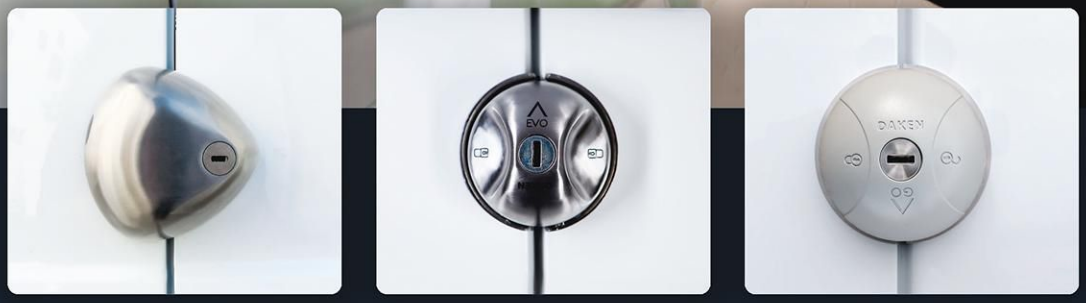
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Jef White
Editor in Chief
theshopmag.com

American Drivers Are Less Predictable, Less Trusted on the Road

A new survey from insurance company Nationwide finds many believe driving in America is becoming less predictable and less trusted. While (not surprisingly!) most drivers rate their own driving highly, many say the behavior from others on the road is getting worse.

Distraction, aggression and recklessness are rising, making everyday driving more stressful and harder to anticipate, according to respondents. Nearly 9-in-10 drivers say phone use behind the wheel has increased in the past year, alongside similar spikes in aggressive and reckless driving.

As a result, 40% say they experience stress while driving, and more than two-thirds frequently witness road rage.

The erosion of trust is reshaping how families think about safety. In fact, 4-in-10 parents say they would trust an autonomous vehicle over their teen driver in certain situations, despite ongoing skepticism about the technology.

Even the most experienced drivers are seeing the same shift. Company drivers who operate a vehicle as one of their core job responsibilities report worsening behaviors across the board, including increases in distraction, recklessness and unsafe driving around larger vehicles. Even some of their professional driving peers, they say, are guilty of unsafe practices.

"Driving no longer feels as predictable or routine as it once did," says Mark McGhiey, commercial risk management leader at Nationwide. "Many describe a road environment with more distractions, more tension and less trust in the people around them. These conditions are particularly concerning for company drivers, as many worry about the threat of accidents, injuries and the ripple effects on future employment opportunities."

The report states that, while drivers can't control the behavior of others, they can take steps to help reduce their own risk in an environment that feels increasingly unpredictable.

Businesses can leverage insurance carrier-provided resources, like guides for safely handling aggressive or distracted drivers. For us in the aftermarket, they can also lean into tech solutions like dashcams that capture critical evidence in the event of an accident caused by another vehicle, as well as GPS telematics, which can help proactively reduce risk through driver monitoring, coaching and route optimization.

"Drivers are noticing changes in driving behavior on the road, and that awareness is an important first step toward improving road safety," says Chris Lee, VP of personal lines auto at Nationwide. "While we can't control every driver around us, we can control how we drive. Reducing distractions, staying alert and giving other vehicles more space are simple actions that can make a real difference."

Review the full survey findings at news.nationwide.com. ***TS***

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Protecting Against Nonpaying Customers

Watch for signs of financial trouble & take steps to mitigate risks.

BY MARK E. BATTERSBY



Wringing money out of deadbeat customers has become a common issue in today's slow-growing economy. (Image credit: YummyBuum - stock.adobe.com)

Mark E. Battersby writes on financial and tax-related topics. Learn more at thetaxscribe.com.

It doesn't take too many nonpaying customers to create an expensive problem. In fact, far too often today, a specialty automotive aftermarket professional must be concerned not only with his or her own operation's financial well-being, but also the financial situations of customers.

There are always customers who seemingly disappear without warning—and without paying their bills. In these cases, it is often too late to collect anything.

However, if the owner or manager of a performance, restyling or automotive customization business is vigilant about the financial status of everyone they work with at the beginning of a project, dealing with troubled customers—before the dreaded final step of "firing" those customers—can be less impactful.

RECOGNIZING TROUBLED CUSTOMERS

It's far easier to take a proactive approach by avoiding the types of customers/clients who u gns having financial problems and, more importantly, taking quick action when their payments are slowing down, is a viable strategy.

Although a credit check is important, it's not a fail-safe. Because things can go south quickly, minimizing exposure to a customer or potential customer's credit troubles requires every specialty automotive aftermarket professional to exercise due diligence.

In other words, minimizing your operation's exposure to the credit troubles of others in the beginning of the relationship—and then at every step afterward—is vital.

FINDERS KEEPERS

Remember the old saw about possession being 9/10ths of the law? No restyled or customized vehicle should be returned without full payment.

In most jurisdictions, a so-called "mechanic's lien" allows a shop to protect itself against nonpaying customers by permitting the shop to retain the vehicle until full payment is received.

A specialty automotive aftermarket shop can often sell a vehicle that is not picked up within 30 days after the work has been completed. The sale price should cover costs, including labor and parts.

Avoiding this potential problem means verifying the identity of every customer, making a copy of their driver's license and the vehicle's registration. Requiring a deposit is also important, with some shops requiring a 50% payment to cover parts and, perhaps, some labor.

Of course, obtaining a signed order detailing all services to be performed, the cost of parts and labor rates should be a standard practice. A signed repair order is considered essential documentation if the matter eventually ends up in small claims court.

AND THEN THERE'S INSURANCE

Insurance won't help with slow or nonexistent payments, but it may reduce the cost of excuses frequently used by nonpaying customers. Insurance coverage such as Errors and Omissions policies covers lawsuits that might result from professional errors.

The more common Garage Keeper's insurance covers physical damage to a

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customer's vehicle while it is in the shop. It usually protects against "perils" such as fire, theft, vandalism and collision.

General liability insurance protects against customer claims of faulty work or repairs. If someone else's property is damaged and the shop is found to be liable, the cost of replacement or repairs is covered by liability insurance.

In fact, should someone's—a competitor, customer or supplier's—reputation be damaged by something said by the shop's owner or its employee, the associated costs could be covered.

FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT

Most business owners and managers are aware that contracts and payment terms should always be put in writing. Unfortunately, this alone may not protect the business if a customer runs into financial problems. Few troubled customers are likely to begin paying simply because there is a contract.

Depending on one or two customers as the main source of income can put any performance, restyling or customization business at risk, should payments from one of them slow down or dry up. Even a business whose plate is full now might be well advised to continually look for new customers.

Make sure there's a constant inflow of clients so, if one faces unforseen issues and isn't able to pay on time, potential problems are avoided. It also provides more time—and a financial cushion—to work things out with a troubled customer.

BAD DEBT BATTLES

Unfortunately, wringing money out of deadbeat customers has become a common issue in today's slow-growing economy. In some cases, the only option may be hiring a collection agency or going to court to collect—but many small business owners don't like these routes.

Despite the general rule of not releasing a vehicle before payment in full is in hand, there are occasions when an exception might be in order. In some cases, those unpaid amounts can be written off as a bad debt deduction.

When all else fails and further collection efforts are fruitless, Uncle Sam, in the form of our tax laws, may provide a solution: the bad debt deduction.

Under tax rules, a business's bad debt is defined as an account or note receivable that proves to be entirely or partially uncollectible despite collection efforts.

Bad debts are written off as soon as they are determined, because the shop doesn't expect future economic benefits and it no longer remains an asset.

Of course, just because something is labeled as "business bad debt" doesn't necessarily make it tax deductible.

A bad debt deduction can only be claimed if the amount owed was included in the operation's gross income.

This is almost never the case for cash method businesses (that means most of us who report income when we receive it). Accrual method businesses, however, report income as it's earned; if receivables have already been claimed as income, a bad debt deduction for uncollectible receivables is appropriate.

When a customer fails to pay his or her debts, the specialty automotive aftermarket shop (creditor) has several remedies available to help collect the funds due

In addition to the common collection strategies such as dunning notices, collection agencies and even small claim courts, bankruptcy all too often rears its ugly head in such situations.

DREADED BANKRUPTCY

Worst-case scenario, a troubled customer appears to be on the brink of declaring bankruptcy. Bankruptcy will, of course, impact the shop's collection efforts and may even require repayments of already collected funds.

Possession of the funds collected may not be forever, but when trying to avoid paybacks, it does give a performance, restyling or customizing business negotiating leverage in a lawsuit or bankruptcy case.

Of course, if a shop owner or manager is aware of a customer's bankruptcy, even informally, they must act to preserve their operation's rights. Fortunately, creditors do have rights, too.

Naturally, when a notice of the bankruptcy is received, proof of a claim should be promptly filed with the court. Also keep in mind that deadlines and other rules are strictly enforced in bankruptcy cases, which might make legal guidance necessary.

Under bankruptcy laws, creditors usually have the right to be heard in court regarding a payment plan, liquidation of the debtor's nonexempt assets and payments from the assets of the debtor's "estate."

In other words, creditors can voice their opinions about debts that might or might not be forgiven. They can also argue about assets that, perhaps, should have been included in the bankruptcy estate but weren't.

When it comes to dealing with a customer or supplier after discovering they are bankrupt, all collection efforts should cease. This automatic stay is designed to protect the debtor and his property from all forms of collection during the bankruptcy process.

Whether the aftermarket shop is a secured or unsecured creditor, the best deterrent to abuse of the bankruptcy system is creditor vigilance.

Some bankruptcies are dismissed because of the debtor's failure to comply with the requirements of the bankruptcy law. When that happens, creditors are free to pursue collection according to state laws.

SLASHING UNPROFITABLE CUSTOMERS

Often ignored by many business owners or managers is whether the best business decision may actually involve "firing" some of their worst customers. While this may seem like an illogical suggestion (particularly in a bad economy), having the wrong customers can cost shops in unexpected ways and hold them back from real success with the temptation of short-term profits.

Worried about the customer going elsewhere? Sometimes that's a good thing. Troubled or problem customers become problems for competitors, too.

AVOIDING TROUBLE

Staying alert for signs that customers' financial situations are changing can protect your business. If, for example, a customer ignores or doesn't return phone calls, it may mean nothing. However, if three or four calls have been ignored and the last payment was late, it could mean the customer can't afford the work—but hasn't gotten around to telling you.

Minimizing a shop's financial risks and bad debts can be achieved by using various strategies ranging from initial credit checks to well-thought-out collection steps and parting ways with troubled customers. In the end, there is always the tax deduction for business bad debts. ***TS***

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FROM COVER TO COVER

BY JEF WHITE

Offering tonneau sales & installations requires strong product knowledge & flexibility.

When it comes to tonneau covers, the name of the game is choices. Deciding between hard or soft material designs and price versus value propositions are just the beginning. Then come questions regarding access and attachment systems (soft); fit, finish and locking mechanisms (hard); and a variety of accessory options to accommodate different cargo and travel requirements.

For shops, that means understanding the differences and directing customers accordingly. The good news is that truck popularity remains high, meaning more sales opportunities and the chance to establish your business as the local go-to tonneau cover source.

Quality suppliers are standing by with the support shops need to be successful, including observations on industry trends, hot new products and sales strategies to keep you focused as projects take you from cover to cover.

A STAPLE FOR PICKUP OWNERS

Once viewed mainly as simple pickup bed accessories, tonneau covers have become an important part of a truck's overall appearance, utility and ownership experience.

"Today's customers expect bed covers that not only protect cargo but also enhance the look of the vehicle. Designs have become much sleeker, with low-profile and flush-mount styles that complement the body lines of modern trucks," says Tim Watts, vice president of sales for Rough Country. "Materials, fitment, and weather resistance have also improved, giving truck owners more durable, dependable options than ever before."

Shops don't have to search far to find customers interested in the latest tonneau cover products.

"Today's truck owners use their trucks for more than just work—they're part of their everyday lifestyle," says Sara Ford, marketing manager for TrailFX. "Tonneau covers have evolved to give owners the flexibility to securely haul both their tools during the week and their toys on the weekend, without compromising functionality or style."

Tailored solutions built around the client's needs create a better experience, thereby increasing trust and gaining more sales. (Photo courtesy Sawtooth)

The systems have been evolving along with truck styling and utility.

"Thinking back to snap-style covers seems like something from decades, and maybe even eons ago," says Fred Gatti, territory sales director – West for RealTruck. "Covers nowadays, especially hard folding covers like our MX4, are more advanced with better seals, better functionality and just better overall durability."

The tonneau cover market has evolved from simple vinyl covers to premium products that protect more than cargo, says Eric Mitchell, director of product management for Trucks Accessories Group/LEER Group.

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- Allows the cover to be folded in three sections, giving you flexible access to your truck bed while maintaining security



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- Soft top cover mounts 1-1/8" high
- Simple roll-up operation that is easy to open and close
- Equipped with a pull cable for quick and easy operation



SOFT TRI-FOLD
TONNEAU COVER

- Lightweight, easy-to-handle design
- Allows the cover to be folded in three sections, giving you flexible access to your truck bed while maintaining security
- Pull and twist latches ensure a fast and secure lock in the closed position

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"Today's options blend tough materials, improved seals and lightweight construction with added security, better weatherproofing and effortless installation using clamp-on hardware," he says. "Most offer modular cargo solutions on how the cover operates and functions, some with built-in versatility to add accessories and sleek aerodynamics that add real value to the truck."



Make tonneaus a part of every truck conversation. (Photo courtesy Bestop)

TRUCK BED COVERS

■ **HOT PRODUCTS:**
EZ Roll & EZ Fold Tonneau Covers
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Easy to sell as truck owners immediately understand the value of added security, weather protection, clean styling and quick bed access without a lot of complexity or extra cost; cut-and-sew fabric systems fit tight, look clean and hold up over time.

Bestop
Jake Taylor
Director of Brand Management

■ **HOT PRODUCT:** RollTrac Electric Retractable Tonneau Cover
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Fully electric retractable cover built from aerospace-grade aluminum slats that disappear into a sleek canister at the cab; key fob operation; full bed access; premium weatherproofing; ultralow-profile design; integrated weatherstrip and drain system.

EGR USA
Justin MacLauchlan
Director of Marketing

■ **HOT PRODUCT:** Retrax Pro EZ-Off Manual Retractable Tonneau Cover
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Removable canister for all bed sizes provides full access for hauling cargo; included handles make removing the canister easy; BedRug material protects the canister when it's being stored; TraxLatch simplifies cover opening and closing.

RealTruck
Fred Gatti
Territory Sales Director – West

■ **HOT PRODUCT:**
Powered Retractable Bed Cover
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Integrated utility rails with T-slots; built-in bed rail controls: remote key fob; LED light strip; smooth, maintenance-free operation.

Rough Country
Tim Watts
VP Sales

■ **HOT PRODUCT:** Sawtooth STRETCH ACMS for Ford F-150
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
An Adaptive Cargo Management System (ACMS) that adapts to the bed; designed to stay on the truck while handling loads that sit above the bed rails; truck bed remains useful in real life and not just when the load fits neatly under a flat cover.

Sawtooth
D.J. Potter
CEO

■ **HOT PRODUCTS:** RC1 Retractable Hard Tonneau Covers
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Durable, no-drill covers built with OEM-grade black powder-coated aluminum for performance and a sleek finish; small canister design maximizes interior bed cargo space; integrated T-slot rails; compatible with DECKED truck bed storage systems.

TrailFX
Sara Ford
Marketing Manager

■ **HOT PRODUCT:**
HF650M Tonneau Cover
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Quad-fold design with an ultralow 12mm profile; exclusive CYNC latching system with accessibility from both sides of the cover.

Truck Accessories Group LLC dba LEER Group
Eric Mitchell
Director of Product Management

■ **HOT PRODUCT:**
American Work Cover
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Tonneau cover with heavy-duty aluminum sectioned toolbox; multi-functional, durable and convenient with two removable tool trays; OEM-grade locking mechanisms; optional upgrades include power actuators, LED lights and chrome handles.

Truck Covers USA
Kim Tremelling
Marketing & Sales Manager

■ **HOT PRODUCT:**
Hard Tri-Fold Tonneau Cover
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Premium security; clean, low-profile, flush-mount styling; durable aluminum panel construction; tri-fold design for practicality and everyday usability; all-weather seals and integrated drainage system; no-drill clamp system.

Westin Automotive Products
Tony Savasta
Vice President of Marketing

■ **HOT PRODUCT:**
The WildTop Beast
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Load-rated soft truck cap; patented 2-in-1 rack and 100% waterproof soft top system; 1,500-pound static load rating; 360-degree integrated east-west and north-south rack; T-slot frame for accessory mounting; four-sided roll-up access; made in Australia.

WildTop Truck Caps
Tiziano Cuce
Marketing Manager

■ **HOT PRODUCT:**
Nexus Hard Folding Tonneau Cover
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Three-times thicker aluminum is highly dent-resistant; full bed access; no drilling, no drain tubes and easy installation; made in the USA; exclusive Active Lock Technology allows the cover to be opened and closed from one side.

Worksport
Steven Rossi
CEO



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Trucks are part of a driver's everyday lifestyle. (Photo courtesy TrailFX)



Truck owners often arrive at shops with some product knowledge thanks to information available on YouTube and elsewhere. (Photo courtesy EGR USA)

Product advancements allow a more individualized consumer approach.

"The market has shifted from traditional tonneau covers to innovation-based covers that suit different needs and different people," says Tiziano Cuce, marketing manager for WildTop Truck Caps. "Gone are the days of one option for all. Today's truck owners want products that turn their truck into everyday freedom and let them use it their own way. We design around that idea every day."

And there's still room for improvement, says Steven Rossi, CEO of Worksport.

"Pickup trucks are the most well-endowed vehicles on the market, often coming with the newest technology," he says. "We're innovating with unique tonneau covers to match the innovation of today's trucks."

MATCHING THE INVESTMENT

Increased light-duty truck ownership has pushed tonneau covers into the mainstream, significantly expanding overall demand, says Tony Savasta, vice president of marketing for Westin Automotive Products.

"At the same time, part of the market has shifted away from basic soft roll-up covers toward more durable and secure hard folding and retractable designs, reflecting changing customer priorities around protection and long-term value," he notes. "This shift has also seen more consumers willing to invest in higher-priced products that offer better materials, improved styling and enhanced functionality."

Jake Taylor, director of brand management for Bestop, sees a market that has become more segmented and competitive over the last decade. Truck owners now have more options, which at times can create hesitation and confusion.

"Customers are much more educated on what's available, while also being blissfully unaware of options and differences," he observes. "A lot of truck owners still want a product that's simple, functional, looks good, protects their gear and doesn't overcomplicate the truck. For shops, this creates a real opportunity, as customers are looking for guidance and products backed by heritage, proven quality and strong brand recognition."

To see just how popular the market has become, look no further than the number of suppliers seeking market share.

"The tonneau cover industry has never been more crowded," observes Kim Tremelling, marketing and sales manager for Truck Covers USA. "A wave of new manufacturers has entered the market in recent years, while established brands continue to rebrand and repackage existing models. For shop owners and fleet managers, navigating the good, the better and the best has become a real challenge."



Serious consumers are often willing to invest in higher-priced products that offer better materials, improved styling and enhanced functionality. (Photo courtesy Westin Automotive Products)

It's important that shops understand their choices, she notes, because today's owners are more particular than ever regarding what they put on their trucks.

"Tonneau covers are almost always at the top of every new truck owner's wish list—one of the very first purchases they make," Tremelling says. "Someone willing to invest six figures in a new vehicle isn't looking for a bargain-bin accessory—they want products that match the quality, durability and style of the truck beneath them."

Pickup trucks are more prominent than ever, says D.J. Potter, CEO of Sawtooth, as customers turn to them for work, travel, family life, camping, hunting, sports and daily projects. Those types of activities often require a versatile bed cover to enhance efficiency and utility.

"The (tonneau market) has become heavily consolidated. A small number of large companies now control most of the larger, familiar brands. That has made the market less competitive and the products staler," he states. "That kind of scale can help with distribution, but it has not helped consumers, dealers or retailers as much as it should have. The category has become bigger, but not necessarily more useful, more independent or more innovative."

Meanwhile, truck owners visiting shops often arrive with some product knowledge thanks to information available on YouTube and elsewhere, helping them develop real expectations around convenience, technology, fit and finish, says Justin MacLauchlan, director of marketing for EGR USA.



Ask qualifying questions to help get the customer into a cover that fits their lifestyle. (Photo courtesy LEER Group)



"The truck itself is no longer just a work tool—it's a lifestyle statement. A $60,000-$80,000 truck deserves a cover that matches the investment," he says.

CREATING CONNECTIONS

Practical tonneau cover offerings allow drivers to fully utilize their pickups.

"Many modern covers are designed to enhance versatility, giving truck owners secure storage while still allowing them to haul gear, mount accessories and maximize usable bed space for both work and recreation," says Ford.

Shops that find success selling tonneau covers take customers on a three-step journey, says Tremelling.

1. ***Know What You're Selling*** – "A common mistake is not fully understanding the differences between the many styles of tonneau covers and the manufacturers behind them."
2. ***Ask the Right Questions*** – "Every customer who walks through your door has a different need."
3. ***Install It Correctly*** – "Your customers aren't coming to your shop for a box and a set of instructions; they're coming for expertise, confidence and the assurance that the job will be done right."

Differences in truck bed designs, rail systems and cover types significantly impact both installation complexity and long-term performance, says Savasta.

"Customers often assume a quick, universal fit, but improper installation can lead to issues like water leakage, poor alignment or reduced security," he says.





Product advancements allow a more individualized consumer approach.
(Photo courtesy WildTop Truck Caps)

"Higher-priced, premium options offer additional benefits like stronger materials, better sealing systems and improved durability, which reduce callbacks and increase customer satisfaction."

Drivers may think all covers are identical and install the same way, Mitchell notes.

"This is an opportunity to win the customer's trust by explaining the differences—both functionally and the ease or difficulty of removing or reinstalling the cover," he says. "Ask qualifying questions to maneuver the customer into a cover that fits their lifestyle."

Such a "consultative approach," as Watts calls it, can make a big difference.

"It helps set proper expectations, improves customer satisfaction and reduces the chance of returns or disappointment after installation," he says. "A tonneau cover should fit not only the truck, but also the way the owner uses it."

Product versatility can attract new clients.

"After going through hundreds of stores in the USA and Australia, the key misconception when selling has been the belief that you need five products to do one job," says Cuce. "Thanks to the amazing minds out there with innovations and ideas, it's clear now that there are many products that can do five jobs on their own, and those are taking the market by storm."

Accurate reporting of things the covers can and cannot do helps build trust with clients.

"Not all covers are going to be 100% waterproof," says Gatti. "It's crucial to make sure the customer understands that and knows that covers are designed to be 'weather tight' and not 'waterproof.' Water intrusion can happen not just from the cover, but also from all angles of the bed itself."

Explaining that not all covers are the same helps customers recognize and place value on important features, says Rossi.

"All solid covers are durable, yes, but not all are equal," he explains, noting that some poorly made offerings can "warp, crack, chalk and fade in months. This quickly diminishes the cover's durability and aesthetics."

Potter believes shops that deliver tailored solutions built around the client's

Customers recognize and place value on important tonneau features.
(Photo courtesy Worksport)

needs create a better experience, thereby increasing trust and gaining more sales.

"Many conversations start with material or style: vinyl, aluminum, folding, rolling, retractable, soft, hard or powered. Those details matter, but they should not be the starting point," he suggests. "The starting point should be the customer's real use. Is the customer buying the cover for style, cost, security, weather protection or function? Does the customer need the bed to do more than cover flat cargo? That is where flat tonneaus are one category. Truck caps are another. Adaptive cargo systems like ours are another. When a shop understands and communicates those differences, it can guide the customer to the right product instead of treating every bed cover option as the same thing."

Needs are ever-present, regardless of customer type, says Taylor.

"The shops that tend to sell the most tonneaus are the ones that make them part of every truck conversation and not just a specialty add-on. When you see a truck with no bed cover, that's an opportunity," he says. "Tonneau covers are one of the easiest and most functional upsells in the truck market because the value proposition is so easy for customers to understand. Security, weather protection, cargo management and improved styling are benefits almost every truck owner appreciates."

MacLauchlan recommends training the sales staff to lead with the customer's pain points instead of the typical product specs.

"Ask them, 'Do you ever have trouble opening your current cover when your hands are full?' 'Does your bed get wet when it rains hard?' 'Do you worry about stuff getting stolen from your bed?'" he says. "Customers don't buy tonneau covers—they buy dry cargo, secure gear and convenience. And don't underestimate upsell timing. The moment a customer is buying a new truck—or has just bought one—is a golden window. Truck buyers are already spending; they just need to know these options exist."

PATHWAYS TO SUCCESS

When it comes to sales success, "it's all about serving your customer," says Worksport's Rossi.

"Educate them and give them the best service and support," he suggests. "With today's 'keyboard cowboys,' everything is easy online, but the consumer—now well





Know your customer and how they use their truck before recommending a solution. (Photo courtesy RealTruck)

acclimated from decades of online shopping—has been stung. They've bought high-ticket items online only to receive junk, or a frustrating installation and/or service experience. More high-end items are being marketed online but sold in stores. Consumers are hungrier now for amazing, speedy service from a local store. Service always wins, along with offering great products that just aren't available on Amazon."

Tremelling recommends shops be prepared with product knowledge and fitment options so that when someone walks into the store looking for a tonneau cover, the best option quickly becomes apparent. Outfitting a shop vehicle with a quality cover as a prime example can also go a long way.

"And don't be shy about discussing price," she adds. "Today's truck owner is prepared to invest in quality. Truck Covers USA's premium product range includes a wide selection of optional extras. From toolboxes and racks to LED lights and more, these upgrades practically sell themselves."

Savasta notes the sales process sometimes means moving clients away from what they initially envisioned.

"The biggest lever is guiding the customer to the right product; not just selling what they asked for," he explains. "Many customers walk in thinking 'cheap and easy,' but once you ask about how they use their truck, you can confidently sell the best-fitting solution, like a Westin Hard Tri-Fold, soft tonneau or retractable cover. Plus, have a display or demo unit in the showroom to demonstrate how they operate. When customers can see and feel the value, price becomes less of a barrier."

A forward-thinking approach helps shops keep pace with a fast-moving market.

"Look for what makes the market better and bigger in the future—don't fall behind and look at what used to work," says Cuce from WildTop Truck Caps. "The world is constantly developing and advancing, so if you keep selling what used to work, then you will remain behind."

Mitchell from LEER Group recommends qualifying customers early by asking targeted questions about their intended usage, and then highlighting core benefits, including security, water management, ease of use and cargo versatility.

"And don't forget to close the deal by asking for the sale," he says "Oftentimes in sales we forget to close—we simply give information thinking that's enough. To maximize sales, ask and then ask again for the sale."

As stated earlier, a strong understanding of the planned vehicle usage gets transactions off on the right foot.

"'Know your customer and how they use their truck' would be my biggest piece of advice," says Gatti from RealTruck. "Not every cover works for every person. They may buy a lower-end cover today, but that could lead to a bigger-ticket item with their next vehicle. People appreciate honesty, and if you treat them well, you're sure to build lifetime customers."

Watts from Rough Country recommends looking beyond the cover itself and identifying additional products that help the customer get more use, convenience and enjoyment from their truck.

"Tonneau covers often create natural add-on opportunities—products like bed mats, cargo management systems, storage solutions and cross rails for mounting gear above the bed cover can all complement the sale," he says. "These accessories not only increase the overall ticket value for the shop, but they also provide real, practical benefits for the customer."

To show their value, MacLauchlan from EGR USA also suggests shops have a working demonstration unit or shop truck installation to demonstrate the units' many features and benefits.





Designs have become much sleeker, with low-profile and flush-mount styles that complement the body lines of modern trucks. (Photos courtesy Rough Country)



Tonneau covers are almost always at the top of every new truck owner's wish list. (Photo courtesy Truck Covers USA)

"Shops sometimes worry that a higher-ticket item like our RollTrac is a harder sell. In practice, the opposite tends to be true. Once a customer sees a demo and opens/closes it a few times, the value is self-evident," he explains. "The tactile experience sells it. The challenge isn't convincing customers once they see it—it's making sure they get the chance to see it. That's why we encourage shops to have a demo unit on the floor."

Taylor is a proponent of physical displays and examples as well.

"When customers can see and interact with a tonneau in person, it helps remove hesitation and makes the product much easier to sell," he notes. "Bestop offers full vehicle samples as well as scalable retail display opportunities through dealer support programs to help shops merchandise more effectively and drive sell-through."

During the selection process, Ford from TrailFX says eliminating potential compatibility issues prior to a sale is a key to helping customers complete their ideal truck bed setup.

"If a customer already has accessories like racks, storage systems or toolboxes installed, shops can recommend a cover that integrates seamlessly and helps maximize functionality," she notes.

Ultimately, Sawtooth's Potter suggests building trust by asking good questions and listening closely to the answers. Strong retailers focus on the driver's ideal outcome.

"That trust can lead to more than one sale," he reveals. "Customers are more likely to come back to the retailer that helped them make the right choice the first time. The goal is not just to sell a cover—the goal is to become the place customers trust when they need the right answer for their truck."

Put it all together and it quickly becomes apparent that the more tonneau cover choices emerge, the more truck owners need shops that have them covered. ***TS***



SEMA PRO Cup Challenge: Building Better Restylers

How an annual contest became a blueprint for growth in the auto restyling industry.

BY DINO PERFETTI





Dino Perfetti is president of Automotive Concepts, a nationally recognized automotive restyling company serving dealership partners throughout the Midwest. A past chairman of the SEMA PRO Council board and longtime industry advocate, he has written extensively on dealership partnerships, vehicle personalization and the evolving role of professional restylers in the automotive aftermarket. Reach him at dino@ac-mn.com.

Every year, the SEMA Show in Las Vegas brings together the best our industry has to offer—spotlighting everything from innovation, craftsmanship and technology to bold vehicle design. For professional restylers, however, one event stands apart from the rest: the SEMA PRO Cup Challenge.

Started in 2019 by the Professional Restylers Organization (PRO), a Specialty Equipment Market Association (SEMA) council, the PRO Cup Challenge has become a way to showcase the automotive restyling industry. It is more than a competition or a simple collection of impressive builds—it's a proving ground where creativity must meet business discipline, dealer expectations and real-world profitability.

Here at Automotive Concepts, we've had the privilege of participating in the PRO Cup Challenge five times, bringing home three trophies, including the 2025 title with our Ford F-150 Black Label Edition.

While the recognition is something we are incredibly proud of, the real value of this experience goes far beyond the trophy.

My purpose in sharing this is not to boast, but to encourage other restyling shops across the country to step into this arena. The PRO Cup Challenge is one of the most impactful business building experiences we've ever participated in, and I believe it can be the same for others in our industry.



GROWING STRONGER

The PRO Cup Challenge is not just about building vehicles—it's about building stronger businesses, stronger teams and stronger partnerships.

Automotive Concepts was crowned the winner of the 2025 PRO Cup Challenge with its Ford F-150 Black Label Edition package. (Photos courtesy Dino Perfetti)

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The PRO Cup Challenge has become a proving ground where creativity must meet business discipline, dealer expectations and real-world profitability.

What makes this event unique is that it reflects the same challenges and opportunities we face every day in our businesses. These are not one-off concept vehicles built without limits. Instead, every PRO Cup entry must be designed with dealership viability, curb appeal, profitability and repeatability in mind.

The central question is simple: "Could this vehicle be sold successfully on a dealership showroom floor tomorrow?"

That's what makes it so powerful.

Last year, our team had the opportunity to answer that question with a build we called the Black Label Edition, a customized F-150 that ultimately earned the overall first place trophy. More importantly, it became a defining project for our team.

From the very beginning, this build was a collaborative effort that brought out the best in our staff. From styling concepts and the final wheel package to the interior finish, suspension design and visual details, this was a team project.

One of the most rewarding parts of the PRO Cup Challenge is seeing your employees take ownership of the vision. When people are given the opportunity to contribute creatively, they invest themselves in the outcome.

The Black Label build energized our entire company and reminded us how powerful teamwork can be when everyone is pulling toward a common goal. That collaboration translated directly into the finished vehicle.

The Black Label Edition was designed to be bold, dominating and fully dealer showfloor ready. Every component had to serve a purpose—not just visually, but functionally. The package had to be exciting enough to draw the attention of SEMA Show attendees while still being practical enough for dealership replication and profitable resale.

That balance is where the PRO Cup Challenge truly elevates the craft of professional restyling.

UNIQUE DEALER OFFERINGS

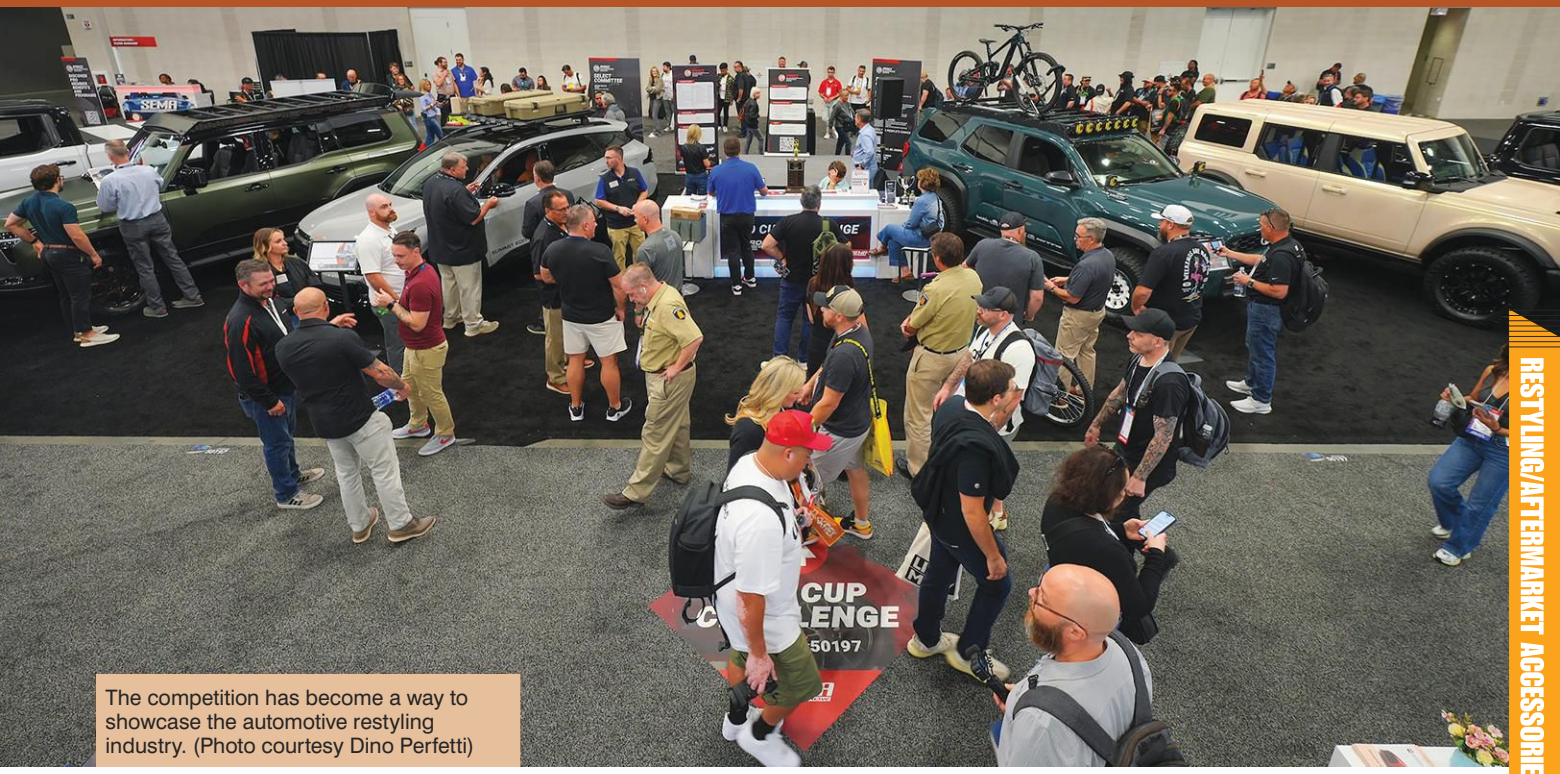
The project also significantly strengthened our dealer relations.

Our dealer partner on this build, Metropolitan Ford in Eden Prairie, Minnesota, played a major role in the build's success. Its willingness to release a vehicle from inventory weeks ahead of the show for us to upfit demonstrated tremendous trust in our team and our ability to execute at the highest level.

That trust matters. When dealerships see firsthand what a professional restyler can

When dealerships see firsthand what a professional restyler can create, it reinforces the strategic value accessorization can bring to their business. (Photos courtesy Dino Perfetti)





The competition has become a way to showcase the automotive restyling industry. (Photo courtesy Dino Perfetti)

create and, more importantly, what that build can mean for sales opportunities, it reinforces the strategic value we bring to their business.

Mike Nelson, general sales manager at Metropolitan Ford, joined us at the show and was able to witness firsthand the industry response to the truck. It was through his input that we added a Whipple supercharger when the truck returned to Minnesota.

And, as luck would have it, a consumer from Chattanooga, Tennessee, who happened to see the Black Label Edition F-150 in person on Friday (consumer day at the SEMA Show) was also destined to see it in his driveway.

The truck was delivered three weeks after the show. More importantly for us, since then, four additional Black Label Edition trucks have been built for Metropolitan Ford.

VENDOR PARTICIPATION

The PRO Cup Challenge also strengthens another critical part of our business: vendor partnerships.

Each time we participate, our aftermarket manufacturer partners are eager to support the build. They recognize the exposure and credibility it provides and the benefits of showcasing their products in a real-world, dealer-focused application.

Several years ago, I was given a piece of advice that has guided much of my career: "Treat your employees, your customers and your vendor partners like your very best customer." The PRO Cup Challenge brings that principle to life.

It reminds us that success is built through relationships, inside our companies, with our dealership partners and throughout our vendor network.

BEST PRACTICES

A final reason I strongly encourage other shops to participate in this challenge is the level of excellence among the competing builders. The competition is exceptional.



REGISTRATION OPEN FOR 2026 SEMA SHOW

Attendee registration is now open for the 2026 SEMA Show, set for Nov. 3-6 in Las Vegas. The premier destination for the global automotive aftermarket, the show brings together the industry's leading builders, brands and innovators for four days of product discovery, education and networking.

Attendees have access to the latest vehicle builds, exclusive product debuts, live demonstrations and a full slate of education sessions highlighting emerging trends and technologies shaping the industry. Enthusiasts are welcomed during SEMA Show Friday—Open to the Public and SEMA Fest.

"The SEMA Show is where the industry comes to see what's next and experience innovation firsthand," says Tom Gattuso, SEMA vice president of events. "This is the only place to see the products and technologies that will define the aftermarket landscape over the next five years."

New for 2026, the show will feature an expanded Powersports/SxS/Lifestyle section in the West Hall, creating a unified "Adventure Lifestyle" destination alongside the Truck, SUV, and Off-Road section, according to show officials. The expanded footprint brings together side-by-sides, off-road vehicles, motorcycles, V-Twin performance and related gear in one centralized location, designed to reflect real-world enthusiast behavior.







Attendees are encouraged to register early at semashow.com to secure credentials and begin planning, including building schedules, securing meetings and maximizing time on-site.

"With registration now open, attendees can begin planning their show experience," says Andy Tompkins, SEMA trade show director. "This year's expanded floor plan and feature areas give attendees even more opportunities to explore, connect and experience what's happening across the industry."

Registration is now open for the 2026 SEMA Show, set for Nov. 3-6 in Las Vegas. (Photos courtesy SEMA)



Dealer partner Metropolitan Ford in Eden Prairie, Minnesota, played a major role in last year's winning build.

Every year, shops from across the country bring extraordinary builds that showcase the very best of our industry. The creativity, craftsmanship and business strategy on display continue to raise the standard for professional restylers everywhere.

In my opinion, 2025 was one of the strongest years yet, making our victory even more meaningful. So, for any restyling shop considering participation, my message is simple: Take the leap:

- Whether you win or not, the process itself will elevate your business.
- It strengthens your team.
- It deepens your dealer and vendor relationships.
- It challenges your creativity.
- It showcases your capabilities on a national stage.

At Automotive Concepts, we have been truly blessed by the opportunity to participate in this event over the years, and we are grateful for the chance to share that experience with others.

The SEMA PRO Cup Challenge is not just about building vehicles—it's about building businesses. And for those willing to step onto that stage, the rewards extend far beyond the trophy. ***TS***

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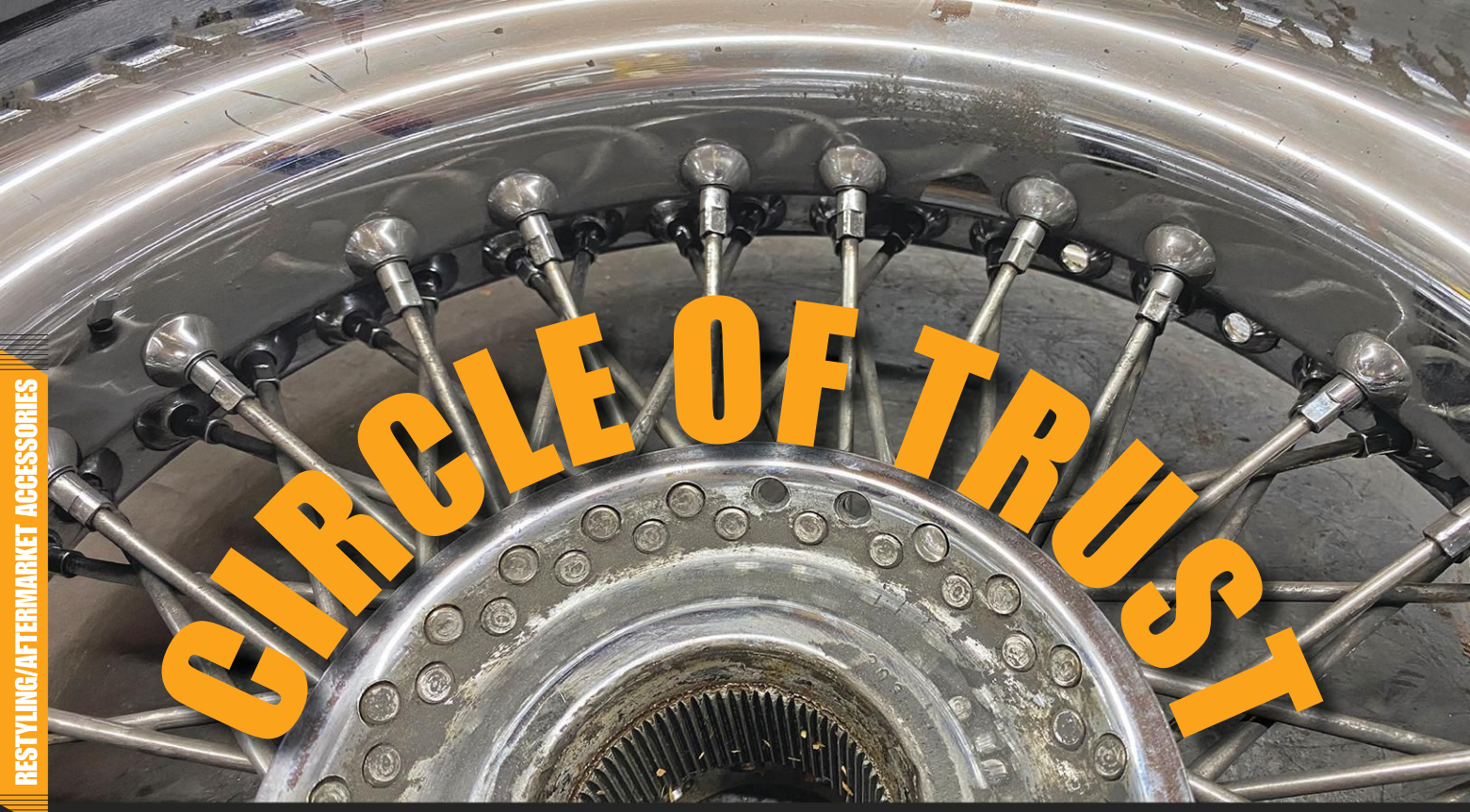
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WHSE26TS



CIRCLE OF TRUST

Buchanan's Spoke & Rim keeps those classic wheels turning.

ARTICLE & PHOTOS 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.

As many old-timers in our industry age out, it's becoming harder and harder to find people to tackle certain tasks. Even in Los Angeles, the birthplace of hot rodding, we recently struggled to find anybody to balance a 1964 Corvette flywheel—a job that should have been simple enough.

Meanwhile, around the same time, some friends had a 1950 straight-8 Buick engine in need of a rebuild. Unfortunately, the one company we found that would even look at it made a mess of it.

In some respects, the aging-out process opens doors of opportunity for entrepreneurs to start a business filling those niche needs. But it initiates the question: "Are there enough customers?"

I hang out at Mick's Paint in Pomona, California, where they build, restore and paint everything from America's Most Beautiful Roadster contenders to concours-quality Pebble Beach entries. Consequently, there isn't a day that goes by that they aren't looking for somebody to do some specialty work.



Ken, left, and Robert Buchanan operate Buchanan's Spoke & Rim in Azusa, California.

One day, they are looking for somebody to rebuild a Lucas fuel-injection system for a 1960s Maserati—there's one guy in the world in Holland (Holland, the Netherlands, not Holland, Michigan) and he charges $20,000 minimum plus shipping both

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Many vehicles sporting wire wheels are anywhere from 50 to 70 years old, meaning business should be booming as proud owners search for repairs and replacements.

ways—and the next they're looking for someone to rebuild vintage wire spoke wheels.

With the odds stacked against them, at least the wire wheel story has a happy ending.

BUSINESS KEEPS ROLLING ALONG

With all the wire wheels that exist in the world, you'd think a rebuilder would be easy to find—but not anymore. Luckily, we chanced upon Buchanan's Spoke & Rim, which has been specializing in wire wheels since 1958.

Back then it was known as Buchanan's Frame Shop and was located in Monterey Park, California. Founded by Jim Buchanan and his wife Vernice, they offered motorcycle frame and wheel repair using brought-in spokes and nipples.

In 1971, in order to keep up with demand, Buchanan's began manufacturing its own spokes and nipples, and by 1975 it was in a position to sell prepackaged spoke kits to other motorcycle and wheel repair shops.

Another innovation that soon followed was an automated rim driller developed and built in-house by Jim's brother-in-law, George Hansen. Hansen's innovation allowed the business to drill blank rims supplied by various manufacturers including Sun Metal of Indiana. Sun Metal was a leading manufacturer of high-performance alloy rims for motorcycles, standard bicycles and BMX bikes. Today, you might recognize the name SUNringlé as a manufacturer of mountain bike wheels and even wheelchair rims.

Buchanan's became the largest distributor of Sun Metal's undrilled aluminum rims and eventually purchased the rights to produce the Sun Metal product line as well as the equipment to produce rims. In 1987, the company began manufacturing its own line of Sun Rims that could be drilled to order, thereby offering a truly "bespoke" service.

Product demand prompted Buchanan to eliminate the frame straightening service the same year while adding automobile rims to his list of can-dos.

When I think of wire wheels, I immediately think European sports cars: Austin Healey, Jaguar, Ferrari, Maserati, Rolls-Royce, etc. But I also remember many American cars from the '50s and earlier that had wires: think Buick, Cobra (I know, it's only partly American), Cadillac and T-Bird, to name but a few.

Those wheels and, of course, the wheels of European sports cars are now all at least 50 years old—many of them 70 years old or more—and, if they are anything like me, they need a reset!

WHEELING INTO TOWN

To better understand the wheel repair process, I visited Buchanan's modern 24,000-square-foot facility in Azusa, California, where they settled in 1997. The company is now run by the founder's sons, Ken and Robert.

Luckily for us, besides the hundreds of motorcycle wheels in process, they were also working on automotive wheels for Aston Martins, Rolls-Royces, T-Birds and others, so there were plenty of examples to choose from. While Buchanan's still manufactures blank motorcycle rims, it does not make blank automotive rims.

However, there are a handful of companies around the world that make blanks in aluminum and steel. For example: Borrani in Italy; Dayton, Truespoke and Wheelsmith in the U.S.; and Motor Wheel Service and Turrino in the U.K.

Buchanan's (buchananspokes.com) can dimple and drill blank automotive rims.





Spokes are adjusted to keep the wheel straight in a time-consuming process called "truing."

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The repair process begins by assessing the condition of the wheels, looking for loose, rusty or broken spokes, as well as inspecting the hub and rim.

"The process of restoring wire wheels begins with consultation with the customer and an inspection," says Ken Buchanan. "We assess the condition of all the wheels before work begins. We're looking for loose, rusty or broken spokes as well as inspecting the condition of the hub and the rim."

Decisions also have to be made concerning the desired finish for the hub, rim and spokes.

"Are they to be powder-coated or plated or is it a combination of finishes?" he asks. "Buchanan's does not offer either service in-house, but we can, of course, get the finish outsourced, and typically, customers direct us to their preferred finisher. Attention must also be given to the spoke pattern, as there many layout variations, and for important restorations they must match the factory pattern."

Sometimes customers try to save some money by disassembling their own wheels and getting the hubs and rims finished before contacting Buchanan's.

"Unfortunately, this can prove to be a costly mistake, because they invariably do not examine the rims for straightness before having them finished—only to find that the rim was not straight," Buchanan explains. "It's better if we remove the spokes—typically with a bolt cutter—and check the hub and rim for straightness before we begin the build process."

After taking careful measurements, the shop assembles the necessary nipples and stainless steel spokes, cut to the correct length and threaded at the nipple end.

"Most of these components we have in stock, but occasionally we have to outsource special spokes and nipples," he reveals. "There is no norm and each wheel can have anywhere from 40 to 150 spokes."

When all of the components have been finished and assembled, the build process of mounting the spokes into the hub on a bench begins.

"After all the spokes have been installed into the hub, the rim is positioned and the spokes are threaded through the rim," Buchanan says. "Anti-seize is applied to the threaded ends of the spokes before the nipples are installed."

With everything loosely assembled, the wheel is installed on a rotating fixture and the process of gradually tightening the spokes is started using a spoke wrench



If all goes well, a typical wheel takes about two hours to assemble.







Typical wire wheels can have anywhere from 40 to 150 spokes drilled into blanks.

while constantly checking the wheel's trueness with a dial indicator and adjusting accordingly—a time-consuming process called "truing."

"After all the spokes are tight and the rim is deemed to be true, a final check of all the spokes is taken, as occasionally a spoke can be missed or come loose," he continues. "If all goes well, a typical wheel (if there is such a thing) takes about two hours to assemble. Something most customers don't realize is that spoke wheels need to be rechecked for trueness after 200 miles of driving. If you're racing, then they should be checked much more regularly."

As more enthusiasts take to the track and the street in vintage or classic automobiles, the need for experienced wire wheel builders and restorers increases, and companies such as Buchanan's can thrive in the world of Artificial Intelligence. ***TS***



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NEW VEHICLE REPORT
LUXURY EDITION

A sampling of the latest high-end models, updates & special editions.

As restylers look to expand their offerings and customer base, many are turning to high-end OEMs in pursuit of exciting new opportunities. Here's a sampling of what they may encounter on local dealer lots with a specific focus on luxury models.

2026 LEXUS ES

The eighth-generation Lexus ES is now available in battery-electric (BEV) and 2026 ES 350h hybrid models. Every 2026 Lexus ES shares new styling inside and out, a multi-pathway platform capable of supporting internal combustion and all-electric powertrains, and the latest Lexus Interface touchscreen and digital Multi-Information Display (MID) ahead of the driver.

The ES also upgrades to the newest Lexus Safety System+ 4.0 (LSS+ 4.0) active safety and convenience feature suite. For the first time, an optional Executive package (available on ES 350e Luxury trim only) upgrades the rear outboard seats with power adjustments, heating and ventilation functions, a massage feature and an ottoman on the passenger side.

Every 2026 ES shares a body shell and styling inspired by the rakish Lexus LF-ZC concept. L-shaped LED running lights sit above dual LED headlights and flank a pinched surface evocative of Lexus' spindle grille design, and a prominent body shoulder line rises from behind the front wheels to meet the wraparound LED blade taillamp with illuminated logo, visually lengthening the ES' sleek shape.



The eighth-generation Lexus ES is now available in battery-electric (BEV) and 2026 ES 350h hybrid models. (Photos courtesy Lexus)

Every ES comes standard with 19-inch aluminum wheels. The ES 350e can be optioned with multispoke 21-inch wheels while the ES 500e has available 21-inch wheels with an aerodynamic spoke design. Wavelength and Copper Crest paint colors are newly available on the ES, alongside Caviar, Ultra White, Cloudburst Gray and Iridium that were offered on the seventh-generation ES.

Inside, ES 350e and ES 500e Premium trims include NuLuxe-trimmed seating, embossed door panel accents and micro-geometric pattern dashboard trim, as well as Thematic Ambient Illumination. Luxury trims upgrade to semi-aniline leather-trimmed seating and Thematic Ambient Illumination with Bamboo Layering, a new LED-backlit layered bamboo wood-trimmed door panel design, along with bamboo trim on the center console.

2026 INFINITI QX80



The 2026 Infiniti QX80 looks to boldly elevate the luxury SUV space. (Photo courtesy Infiniti)

The 2026 Infiniti QX80 looks to boldly elevate the luxury SUV space with intuitive technology, highly crafted design and a commanding driving experience.

Offered in PURE, LUXE, SPORT and AUTOGRAPH grades, updated design cues begin with a new front grille, a restyled front bumper and 22-inch wheels.

The exterior is replete with darkened elements—exterior trim, mirror caps, lower bumper finishers, roof rails and emblems.

Within the cabin of the luxury SUV, drivers will find a SPORT treatment that includes a Dusk Blue color scheme with dark matte chrome accents, graphite for the headliner and pillars, open pore wood trim for the instrument panel and doors, and black/blue seat inserts, including a unique diamond-pattern perforation.

The 2026 Infiniti QX80 SPORT is available in Mineral Black, Radiant White, Grand Blue or Dynamic Metal, with the latter three available optionally paired with a contrasting Black Obsidian roof.

BENTLEY SUPERSPORTS









The new Bentley Supersports is a driver-focused Continental GT with rear-wheel drive, a two-seat cabin and a gross weight under 4,000 pounds. (Photos courtesy Bentley)

A century after the birth of the first Bentley Supersports, the nameplate returns for only the fourth Supersports model in history.

The new Bentley Supersports is the most driver-focused Continental GT ever, according to the company, with rear-wheel drive, a two-seat cabin and a gross weight under 4,000 pounds.

A nonhybrid, pure internal combustion powertrain has a new 657-hp twin-turbo 4.0L V-8 at its heart, with power fed through an 8-speed double-clutch gearbox to the rear wheels only. Carbon ceramic brakes, new 22-inch lightweight forged wheels developed with Manthey Racing and an Akrapovič full-length titanium exhaust system are standard, while Pirelli Trofeo RS tires are available.

The exterior includes a new front bumper integrating the largest front splitter ever fitted to a Bentley road car, feeding cool air to the engine and front brakes. Carbon fiber dive planes, side sills, fender blades, and a rear diffuser and fixed rear wing combine to generate downforce with a lower center of gravity.

Inside, the two-seat cabin features new, highly bolstered sports seats, positioned lower in the car, with the rear cabin environment replaced with a carbon fiber and leather shell. Monotone, dual- and tri-tone interiors are available, with extensive use of leather, Dinamica and carbon fiber for a performance-focused space.

2026 PORSCHE 911

Porsche is expanding the 911 model range with three new all-wheel drive variants. The 911 Carrera 4S is available as a coupe and Cabriolet. Together with the Targa 4S, they bridge the gap between the standard 911 Carrera—which is not available with all-wheel drive—and the significantly more powerful GTS models.



Porsche is expanding the 911 model range with three new all-wheel drive variants. (Photo courtesy Porsche)

Like on the rear-wheel drive 911 Carrera S models, additional options for individualization and extended standard equipment are distinguishing features. The latest models began arriving at dealerships late last year.

All-wheel drive variants are popular among customers buying a 911 "S" variant. As with every other model equipped with Porsche Traction Management (PTM), the torque split is rear-biased by default. If required, PTM directs more torque to the front axle. As on its predecessors, the front differential is water-cooled and uses an electromechanically controlled clutch.

The new all-wheel drive variants of the 911 adopt the upgraded engine of the Carrera S. The 3.0L twin-turbo six-cylinder boxer engine produces 473 hp and 390 pound-feet of torque.

Increased performance is partly due to the optimized intercooling—the design of which comes from the 911 Turbo. An 8-speed Porsche dual-clutch transmission (PDK) transmits power to all four wheels. The 911 Carrera 4S coupe accelerates from 0-60 mph in 3.1 seconds using Launch Control with the optional Sport Chrono Package, and is capable of a top track speed of 191 mph.

The new models feature an upgraded interior with extended leather upholstery as standard including the seats, headrests, upper dashboard, upper door panels, and—if equipped—the rear seats. Matrix Design LED headlights and wireless smartphone charging are also included.

ASTON MARTIN DB12 S



Aston Martin's new DB12 S halo model is described as the new pinnacle of Super Tourer. (Photos courtesy Aston Martin)





Aston Martin's new DB12 S halo model builds on the pioneering recipe of intensely dynamic ultra-luxury performance by adding more power and even greater dynamic prowess. Together with exterior changes and interior enhancements, officials are calling the DB12 S the new pinnacle of Super Tourer.

The heart of the DB12 S is a more potent version of the formidable Aston Martin 4.0L twin-turbo V-8. The vehicle is rated at more than 690 hp with a top speed of 202 mph, featuring a distinctive new exhaust sound character with a quad-tailpipe stainless steel sports exhaust system and optimized powertrain calibrations. A new S-specific drive-by-wire throttle map gives drivers an even greater sense of connection and control.

Software changes to the Bilstein DTX dampers improve roll and pitch control to work in harmony with a stiffer rear anti-roll bar and finessed camber, toe and castor geometry settings. Additional tuning of the steering calibration and electronic rear differential (E-diff) has enabled Aston Martin's chassis engineers to dial in further connection and response for an even more natural and intuitive feel—with the ability to use more throttle earlier in the corner.

Standard fitment carbon ceramic brakes (CCB) benefit from the next-generation corner braking control system (CBC), which optimizes interaction between the Integrated Brake Slip Control and the Integrated Vehicle Control modules. A predictive function within the CBC allows the car to maintain optimum stability while trail braking into a corner, using more of the rear braking performance to maintain a tighter line from corner entry to apex.

2026 LOTUS EMIRA SCURA



The 2026 Lotus Emira Scura features a blacked-out, sinister appearance. (Photo courtesy Lotus)

Paying homage to the original and rare Lotus Exige Scura first introduced in 2009, the eye-catching limited edition returns with the 2026 Lotus Emira Scura. Meaning "darkness" in Italian, the new Emira Scura—limited to 60 units—includes a blacked-out, sinister appearance.

Using the performance of a Lotus Emira equipped with the optional Driver's Pack that yields a track-focused Sport suspension and Michelin Pilot Sport Cup 2 tires, the Scura edition adds a specialized Satin Nebulous Grey paint hue. Breaking up the satin paint and adding multiple layers of darkness is a gloss-black roof. The mirror caps and other exterior components are also finished in gloss black to give the Emira Scura its unique, bold visual identity.

Red brake calipers behind gloss-black 20-inch V-spoke forged wheels add a splash of color, along with special "Scura" exterior badging.

The limited-edition treatment extends to the interior. Alcantara covers the seats along with contrasting red stitching, matching red seatbelts, specialized interior badging and a TDC steering wheel. Adding to the opulence of the interior is the Lotus Emira's flagship KEF 10-speaker audio system and privacy glass.

2027 GENESIS GV70 SUV



Genesis recently expanded its Prestige Graphite trim offering to include the popular 2027 GV70 SUV. (Photo courtesy Genesis)

Genesis recently expanded its Prestige Graphite trim offering to include the popular 2027 GV70 SUV. Following its debut on the G70 sport sedan, the distinctive trim brings a sport-oriented option designed to affirm the brand's commitment to bold designs and refined performance, according to company officials.

The exterior of the GV70 Prestige Graphite features a darker, performance-driven character and is complemented by 21-inch dark metallic glossy alloy wheels and new, exclusive red brake calipers. Gloss black mirror caps add a sleek, athletic feel, while dark chrome accents applied throughout the exterior further refine GV70's already distinctive styling. Customers can choose from two new exterior paint colors, Ceres Blue Matte and Bering Blue, along with Makalu Gray and Uyuni White.

The interior features Nappa leather seating surfaces with suede inserts and headrest logo embossing. New carbon fiber trim adds a high-performance edge to the cabin's aesthetic while unique startup animation further enhances the digital experience. ***TS***



The benefits of producing products close to home.

In a world where global sourcing is now commonplace, are there still benefits to domestic manufacturing for the automotive aftermarket?

The Warn Group—which offers made-in-the-USA truck, Jeep and off-road products through its Fab Fours, Fabtech, Factor 55 and Warn Industries brands—can actually name three.

"Top of the list is quality control," says Corby Phillips, VP of aftermarket sales for The Warn Group. "If we find an issue with any product, our engineers are steps away to view the problem and take corrective action."

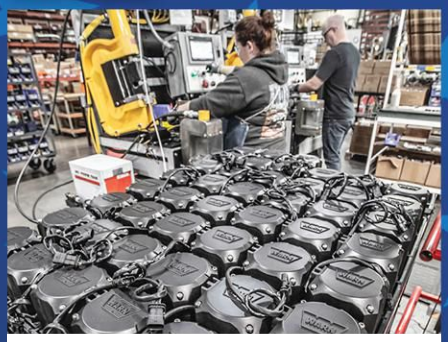
Agility is next on the list.

"We can adjust production to the needs of the market quickly," Phillips notes, "as filling customers' needs is a top priority here at Warn."

Finally, there's creating jobs for American workers.

"Keeping a strong workforce employed here in the States is important. We have sub-suppliers, and they have sub-suppliers—the trickle-down of what it takes to produce products in the U.S. has a positive impact on our economy."

Your customers may feel the same way, which is why THE SHOP is highlighting products that manufacturers market as "Made in the USA" on the following pages. Check them out to find parts and accessories produced close to home.



The Warn Group enjoys real-world benefits from offering products made in the USA. (Photos courtesy The Warn Group)



Super Duty Radius Arm System



Fabtech, Chino, California, presents its 6-inch FTS-X Radius Arm System for 2023-newer Ford Super Duty F-250/F-350 models. Made in the USA, the FTS-X adjustable radius arms (FTS22390, radius arms only) directly replace the factory arms for use with lifted 2.5-, 4- and 6-inch suspensions. The arms have an adjustable lower link to eliminate binding and allow for a preferred caster profile.

Compact Winch

Warn Industries, Clackamas, Oregon, presents its compact, low-profile ZEON XC Winch. Made in the USA, the premium recovery tool features all the capability of the company's ZEON XD winch in a more compact size, making it ideal for tighter mounting spaces. Available in 10,000-, 12,000- and 14,000-pound capacities, the ZEON XC pairs a high-performance motor and geartrain with fast no-load line speeds. Choose between durable steel or easy-to-handle Spydura synthetic rope.





4Runner Semi-Hidden Winch Mount

Fab Fours, Lancaster, South Carolina, presents its Semi-Hidden Winch Mount (T4R-N6851-1) for 2025-26 Toyota 4Runner applications. Weighing 75 pounds and made in the USA, the system delivers full recovery capability in a clean, factory-integrated design. Built from 3/16-inch U.S. steel with a two-stage matte black powder-coat and epoxy primer, it's winch-ready for **WARN** Zeon 10, XD, VR EVO and M8000 winch models. SmartSteel sensor compatibility keeps vehicle technology intact, and two integrated D-ring mounts are included.

Lighted Fairlead



Factor 55, Boise, Idaho, presents a Lighted Fairlead designed to bring precision and safety to low-light recovery situations. Machined from aluminum and fitted with a recessed LED light bar, it illuminates the winching area where headlights and auxiliary lights often don't reach. Switch between white 6000K light at 560 lumens or amber 3000K light at 425 lumens—both delivered in a wide flood beam pattern that reduces glare and flash blindness. A forward-facing beam lights up the ground in front of the winch, while rear projection illuminates the drum.

Ram Cold-Air Intake



aFe POWER, Corona, California, presents its Momentum HD Cold-Air Intake for 2025-26 Ram Cummins 6.7L models. Designed to provide maximum airflow, the system is dyno-tested to increase horsepower and torque and comes with the choice of a high-flowing, dust-holding Pro 10R air filter or a convenient Pro DRY S air filter, both washable and reusable, and reinforced with expanded metal to withstand high boost pressures. The Magnum Force Stage-2 intake is an open-element version that offers more sound.

Tilt Steering Column



Flaming River Industries, Berea, Ohio, presents a Tilt Steering Column designed for mid-1980s muscle cars and trucks. The premium steering column features an integrated turn signal arm with wiper control and cruise control, offering modern convenience in a classic design. The innovative low-beam/high-beam microswitch enhances safety, while the tilt design and compact shroud improve the driving experience. Offered in a sleek black powder-coat finish, the columns are made in the USA and available in floor shift and column shift options.

Suspension Line

MetalCloak, Rancho Cordova, California, presents its RockSport BLACK suspension product line engineered to elevate traction, durability and ride quality for modern off-road vehicles. The line's adjustable reservoir shocks are manufactured in the USA to deliver tunable damping performance for technical trail driving, daily commuting and high-speed off-road use. Available for Jeep JK, JL and JT platforms, Ram trucks and Ineos Grenadier models, the shocks incorporate patented technologies including parabolic internal valving.



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Anti-Rust Sealant



KBS Coatings, Valparaiso, Indiana, presents RustSeal rust control sealant. Made in the USA and available in 11 color options, the sealant applies by brush, roller or spray equipment and is deigned to permanently stop and prevent rust and corrosion. Hard yet flexible, the coating fully seals bare metal—or even lightly rusted or corroded surfaces—to lock out moisture, salt and other contaminants. RustSeal prevents new rust and corrosion from forming and stops existing oxidation from spreading.

Cadillac Exhaust Suites



AWE, Horsham, Pennsylvania, introduces Exhaust Suites for Cadillac CT4-V and CT5-V Blackwing models. Made in the USA with 0.065-inch T304L stainless steel, the products feature the company's SwitchPath technology—a valved cat-back configuration that allows drivers to toggle between a refined, sophisticated Touring tone and an aggressive, track-ready Track bark. The 3-inch systems are designed to integrate seamlessly with the factory valve motors, retaining all original drive-mode functionality while delivering horsepower and torque gains.

Honda Lowering Springs

Eibach, Corona, California, presents its PRO-KIT Lowering Springs for 2022-26 Honda CRV 1.5L Turbo models. Designed to drop the front of the vehicle by 0.8-inch and the rear by 0.9-inch, the products are made in the USA and deliver upgraded performance and ride comfort using progressive spring technology. By lowering the center of gravity, the PRO-KIT increases steering response and improves vehicle dynamics for a sportier, more balanced feel. Additionally, the reduced height eliminates excessive ground clearance and fender gap for enhanced aesthetics.



Gooseneck Hitch Ball System



GEN-Y Hitch, St. Nappanee, Indiana, presents its DOMINATOR with Torsion-Flex Technology system that integrates patented shock absorption directly into a gooseneck hitch ball for truck beds. By absorbing harsh road shock and reducing inertia transfer between the truck and trailer, it delivers a smoother ride while helping protect the trailer and cargo. Made in the USA, the system offers a 25,000-pound towing capacity and fits select Ford, Ram and GMC OEM puck systems. It is constructed from heavy-duty steel with long-lasting rubber torsion arms.

Diesel Treatment

Hot Shot's Secret, Mt. Gilead, Ohio, presents its Everyday Diesel Treatment (EDT), a multifunctional diesel fuel additive designed to improve performance and protect vital fuel system components. Made in the USA, it is now available in a new, twin-neck bottle design that allows users to easily measure and pour the correct amount without a funnel, making it cleaner, faster and more convenient. The design also works with modern capless and double-door fueling systems that are increasingly common in newer diesel vehicles.



Color-Change Vehicle Wrap Film



Avery Dennison, Mentor, Ohio, presents its Supercar Blondie color collection, featuring four additions to its Supreme Wrapping Film vehicle color-change film series. Made in the USA, the colors are Gloss Smooth Sage, Satin Sunset Ride, Matte Dreamline Blue and Gloss Metallic Cosmic Rose. Selected by automotive influencer Alex Hirschi (Supercar Blondie), they allow installers to create custom looks with a wide range of colors and special effects. The films provide improved durability and conformability with Easy Apply RS adhesive technology.



Electric Cooling Fans

Maradyne High Performance, Cleveland, presents its Champion Series electric cooling fans for street performance, racing, off-road and truck applications. Supported by expanding operations at the company's facility in Grand Prairie, Texas, the fans continue scaling through U.S.-based molding, assembly and testing operations. Designed for demanding automotive applications, the product line combines engineering, quality and production operations with vertically integrated motor manufacturing through parent company **DCM FAZ**.

Toyota Leveling Kits



Tuff Country EZ-Ride Suspension, West Jordan, Utah, presents Leveling Kits for late-model Toyota 4Runner, Land Cruiser and Tacoma 4WD applications. The 1.5-inch front leveling kits deliver a durable, bolt-on suspension upgrade to create a balanced stance, improve tire clearance for larger wheels and tires, and enhance on-road stability without sacrificing ride quality. Constructed in the USA from 3/16-inch steel with a rugged black powder-coat for durability and corrosion resistance, the kits include two front strut spacers and eight flange nuts.

Injector Test Bench



Dynocom Industries Inc., Fort Worth, Texas, presents its AIC Mini Injector Test Bench. Engineered and manufactured in the USA, it offers a max injector flowrate of 2,500cc-per-minute (flow sensor limited), an 80-2,500cc-per-minute (single sensor) flow range, and an estimated max fluid flow of 8,800cc/min at 43.5 psi and 5,400cc/min at 90 psi (528 pounds-per-hour). The primary fluid pump works at 540 lph at 40 psi, with an injector capacity of up to four injectors (clean or test mode). Max injector current is up to 4 amps (high-impedance injectors only).

Coolant Manifolds



Wilson Manifolds, Fort Lauderdale, Florida, presents its Billet Coolant Manifolds. Made in the USA with 5-axis lightweight machining and black anticorrosive coating, the manifolds collect coolant from multiple inlets and route it efficiently through a single outlet to provide uniform cooling and help eliminate hot spots to maintain consistency in racing applications. Adapt up to four No. 12 ORB (O-ring) inlets into a single 1-1/4-inch, 1-1/2-inch or -16AN hose outlet. An 1/8-inch NPT sensor port is included on all variants.

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When it comes to American-made performance, The Warn Group sets the standard. Fab Fours, Fabtech, Factor 55 and Warn Industries each bring something distinct to the table but share a common foundation of U.S. design, engineering and manufacturing that keeps their products at the forefront of the off-road and work vehicle market.

Fab Fours, headquartered in Lancaster, South Carolina, continues to turn heads with its boldly styled, battle-ready bumpers and truck bed accessories built for serious duty. Fabtech, with manufacturing in Lancaster and R&D in California, delivers more than three and a half decades of expertise in premium suspension systems, from shock absorbers to springs and beyond. Out of Boise, Idaho, Factor 55 remains the go-to source for precision-engineered recovery gear, pioneering the closed system winching approach that raises the bar on vehicle recovery safety. And Warn Industries, an off-road icon since 1948, continues producing its renowned winches, bumpers and 4WD hubs across more than 200,000 square feet of factory space in Clackamas, Oregon, serving consumers, OEMs and military customers alike.

Collectively, these four brands bring more than 140 years of American manufacturing expertise and employ roughly 500 people across disciplines including engineering, machining, welding, assembly, quality control and more. Some facilities hold ISO and IATF quality certifications, reflecting a commitment to precision that runs deep across the group.

The result? A lineup of innovative, high-performance products that help vehicles go farther, perform harder and tackle whatever the terrain demands, whether that's a weekend trail run or a demanding work environment anywhere in the world.

Connect with a Warn Group sales representative today to explore how adding these four brands to your lineup can strengthen your offering and better serve your customers. Four brands. One group.





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American-Themed Removable Vehicle Protection

MEK Magnet, Miami Beach, Florida, presents a new, limited-edition America 250 design for its Removable Vehicle Protection offerings. Created for Jeep Wrangler LJ/JL/JK, Gladiator JT and Ford Bronco applications, the design is inspired by vintage Americana, classic road trip culture and off-road adventures, blending bold red, white and blue tones with a modern edge. Built on patented removable armor technology, America 250 delivers trail-ready protection that shields against scratches, brush, rocks and debris, and a no-commitment installation with easy removal.



Chevrolet Corvette Z06 Cat-Back Exhaust

BORLA Performance Industries, Johnson City, Tennessee, presents its Cat-Back Exhaust System for the 2023-26 Chevrolet Corvette Z06 applications that improves horsepower and torque. System 140957 features NPP valves, SwitchFire technology and the company's aggressive ATAK sound with no drone or resonance inside the vehicle. The system is made in the USA from T-304 stainless steel and features all-welded construction for durability and long life.

Dual Belt Sander

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



Truck & SUV Brake Kits

Wilwood, Camarillo, California, presents Aero6-DM direct-mount, easy bolt-on Front Brake Kits for a variety of late-model GM, Ford, Ram, Jeep and Toyota trucks and SUVs. Designed to work with most 17-inch and larger wheels, the kits are manufactured in the USA to be fully compatible with factory rear brakes, master cylinders, ABS and onboard computer systems. They include larger brake pads and rotors along with new stainless flex lines to provide more holding power for confident braking in high-demand highway, off-road, towing and hauling applications.



Complete Fuel System Service

Red Line Synthetic Oil, Houston, presents its Complete Fuel System Service. Engineered to meet the rigorous standards of professional service centers, the system includes the company's Total Intake System Cleaner that addresses carbon buildup, rough idling, knocking and minor power loss. It can be paired with SI-1 Fuel System Cleaner to address issues in PFI, GDI and hybrid engines and is also safe for high-performance vehicles running E-85. An optional 8-foot S-Hook hose is available.





Hybrid Camper

BundutecUSA, Raymond, Iowa, introduces the newly redesigned RipTide hybrid camper. Made in the USA, RipTide blends the functionality of a hard-sided camper with the versatility of a truck topper. The hybrid approach creates a lightweight, low-profile platform that serves as a gear hauler and comfortable retreat. A roof-mounted sleeping system is designed to integrate seamlessly with a BunduTop rooftop tent. With approximately 56 inches of interior height, it maximizes storage through smart cabinetry, a cabover compartment and flexible floor space.

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Ford Van Idler Arm Bushings

Rare Parts Inc., Stockton, California, presents its Diamond Series Idler Arm Bushings for 1969-74 Ford Econoline vans. Manufactured in the USA, the bushings directly connect to the original steering bell crank, pivoting as the steering wheel is turned left or right. The upgraded offerings feature a robust steel-on-steel "pin and bushing" design to replace the original unlubricated encased-rubber bushing. Manufactured with a heat-treated outer bushing sleeve and solid steel internal pivot pin, it fits the original bushing mount location without modification.



Jeep Interior Door Panels

Warrior Products, Tualatin, Oregon, presents Interior Door Panels for Jeep Wrangler TJ/LJ applications. Made in the USA, the panels fit full hard doors and are offered with or without a manifest pocket. Available in multiple material and finish options that allow customers to customize their Jeep's appearance, the replacements fit in place of sun-faded or cracked plastic OEM panels. Installation is simple with no drilling required. A half-door version is coming soon.

Sound & Thermal Insulation



HushMat, Olathe, Kansas, presents its TriFusion Sound and Thermal Insulation Composite Material. Made in the USA, the advanced 3-in-1 material is engineered to reduce noise, control vibration and block heat in automotive interiors. Designed for easy installation, it combines sound damping, thermal insulation and vibration control into a single, lightweight material, eliminating the need for multiple layers. Applications include cars, trucks and specialty vehicles, improving the driving experience with a durable, long-lasting construction.



LS Swap Headers

Hedman Hedders, Whittier, California, part of the **Hedman Performance Group**, presents its LS Swap Headers, available for 1967-87 Chevy/GMC 2WD trucks and SUVs. Designed and manufactured in the USA, the mid-length headers feature 1-3/4-inch mandrel-bent primary tubes and 3-inch ball-style collectors for strong street performance, mid-range torque and improved ground clearance. The headers are available in both mild steel (69710 series) and T304 stainless steel (62740 series). Matching engine mounts and oil pan components are available.



Miata Billet Steel Flywheel

Centerforce, Prescott, Arizona, presents the Centerforce 600827 Lightweight Billet Steel Flywheel designed primarily for 1994-2005 Mazda Miata 1.8L applications (NB chassis). Designed, manufactured and assembled in the USA as part of the 600 Series Low Inertia lineup, the flywheel is built for faster engine response and improved acceleration without sacrificing durability. Weighing 10 pounds, it features a 112-tooth ring gear and 6-bolt crank pattern. The flywheel is SFI 1.1-approved for performance and racing use.

Soft Bedliner



Husky Liners, Lawrenceville, Georgia, presents its Guardian Comfort Full Bedliner. Assembled in the USA, the soft-yet-durable liner delivers protection for the truck's bed and cargo, providing a completely flat surface that grips, guards and protects. A proprietary DriGard top layer cushions knees and belongings and allows for easy spray-off cleaning and maintenance. Compatible with all bed covers, it is UV-, stain-, mildew- and odor-resistant, and an optional adhesion kit allows installation over spray-on liners.

Toolboxes & Truck Equipment

Westin Automotive, San Dimas, California, presents its Brute Toolboxes and Commercial Truck Equipment. Manufactured in the United States, the Westin Brute lineup is engineered for professional-grade durability, secure storage and heavy-duty commercial use. Product categories include Commercial Class Toolboxes, HD Class Toolboxes, Flatbeds, and Shelving and Organizational Systems that optimize storage and workspace management. The products feature heavy-duty aluminum construction, reinforced lids and hinges, and stainless steel latches.





F-150 Supercharger Systems

ProCharger, Lenexa, Kansas, presents its Intercooled Supercharger Systems, now available for 2024-26 Ford F-150 5.0L truck applications. Designed, engineered, manufactured and supported in the USA, the systems deliver substantial horsepower gains while maintaining drivability, reliability and everyday utility. Built around centrifugal supercharger technology, the kits feature a complete bolt-on design with large air-to-air intercoolers and precision calibration, allowing for 80% power gains on otherwise stock engines. Stage 1, 2 and 3 configurations are available.

Snap & Grommet Installation System

HooVer Products, San Jacinto, California, presents the Pres-N-Snap, a versatile, easy-to-use system for installing snaps and grommets. The system includes interchangeable die sets that fit a variety of fasteners to complete any upholstery project, from standard marine snaps to turn fasteners and grommets. The Pres-N-Snap and all its components are made in the USA.





Wheels Application Kit

ZyCoat, Olathe, Kansas, presents the ZyClear Wheels Application Kit by ZyCoat, a high-performance, polymer-based coating designed to protect and enhance automotive wheels. Made in the USA, the system creates a durable, crystal-clear barrier that repels brake dust, road grime and contaminants, making routine cleaning faster and eliminating the need for frequent polishing. Offering UV resistance, ZyClear prevents yellowing or milky discoloration over time, helping wheels maintain a clean, glossy appearance.



Electric Fan Line

Flex-A-Lite, Burlington, Washington, presents its patented Flex-Wave Electric Fan. Made in the USA, the fan is designed to be more efficient and quieter with increased airflow, combining advanced aerodynamic engineering with domestic assembly. A patented blade design developed using advanced Computational Fluid Dynamics (CFD) modeling and validated through wind tunnel testing follows a sine-wave profile that improves how air is captured, accelerated and discharged.





Custom Car Floor Mats

Covercraft Industries, Pauls Valley, Oklahoma, presents Lloyd Mats Ultimat Custom Car Floor Mats. Designed for protection, comfort, style and long-lasting durability, the mats are custom-fitted to cars, trucks or SUVs, preventing slipping and shifting with the help of proprietary or factory-compatible safety anchors. Applications include Cadillac, GMC, Chevrolet, Ford, Dodge, Jeep and Toyota models, with more than 130 officially licensed GM and Mopar logos in black, tan or gray available. They are crafted in the USA from a dense, high-quality material.

Slide-Out Truck Bed Cargo Tray



Rough Country, Dyersburg, Tennessee, presents its Slide-Out Truck Bed Cargo Tray, designed to deliver simple, practical storage with the durability and craftsmanship expected from a product made in the USA. The tray features rugged, high molecular-weight polyethylene construction, a removable design and support for up to 500 pounds evenly distributed. Available for a variety of truck applications, the system offers quick, no-drill installation and better organization without sacrificing bed space, with easier tailgate access and everyday functionality.

Trim Sealing Solution

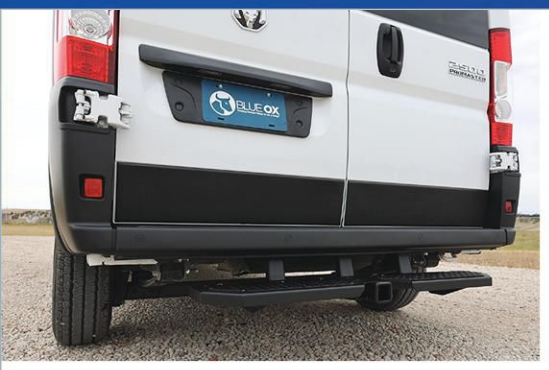
Trim-Lok, Buena Park, California, presents its Trim Seal versatile sealing solution that combines a PVC plastic edge trim with an EPDM sponge rubber bulb to provide both edge protection and a compressible, weather-resistant seal. Ideal for doors, lids and panels on truck accessories, toolboxes and custom enclosures, Trim Seal is designed for durability, withstanding prolonged exposure to sunlight and harsh environmental conditions. It can be customized with a variety of edge trims, bulb sizes and bulb locations to ensure a precise fit.



Off-Road Chase Light

Diode Dynamics, Earth City, Missouri, presents its all-new SS10 LED Chase Light. A high-performance, multifunction lighting solution designed for trucks, overlanding vehicles, UTVs and motorsports applications, it is engineered and assembled in the USA with global materials. Designed to combine safety, visibility and durability into a compact, versatile package, the IP69K-rated, programmable chase light includes 20 selectable strobing patterns and an additional high-powered reverse light with optional vehicle signal activation.





Van Receiver Hitch With Integrated Step

Blue Ox, Pender, Nebraska, presents its Receiver Hitch with Integrated Step. Offering a one-piece design for easy van loading and unloading, the system delivers a proper fit and enhanced towing capabilities. Made in the USA with quality materials and finished with an e-coat-under-powder-coat paint process shielding against rust and corrosion, the BXH3013 model fits Ram ProMaster 1500, 2500 and 3500 applications, while the BXH8502 fits Mercedes-Benz 2500 and 3500 Sprinter vans.

Modular Cargo Management System

Tmat, Wheatland, Oklahoma, presents its TMAT Modular Cargo Management System. Designed to keep truck bed cargo organized and stationary, the American-made system combines modular design with real-world usability. It features an innovative X-grid platform that allows users to position adjustable blockers anywhere across the surface, instantly creating custom compartments for tools, gear or recreational equipment. Installation is straightforward between the wheel wells, with no drilling, brackets or permanent modifications required.





Nonadjustable A-Arm Kits

BMR Suspension, Lakeland, Florida, presents its A-Arm Kits that deliver improved handling and front-end stability on 1970-81 F-Body and 1975-79 X-Body applications. Manufactured in the USA from 1.25-, 1.5- and 1.525-inch heavy-duty DOM tubing, the kit works to eliminate deflection and improve performance on the road and track. Upper A-arms (AAU321) feature dual-offset cross-shafts for minimizing shim stack, and Lower A-arms (AAL321) feature a CNC-machined ball joint cup and Delrin bushings for a more responsive driving feel.

Toolboxes

Dee Zee, Des Moines, Iowa, presents its Pro Series Toolboxes. Designed to deliver durability, security and no-nonsense performance for contractors, the toolboxes feature heavy-duty, American-made construction with reinforced lids and dependable locking systems. They are built to take a beating and keep tools protected job after job.





Dry Sump Oil Pumps



Peterson Fluid Systems, Longmont, Colorado, presents its R4 Dry Sump Oil Pumps. Made in the USA since 1976, the pumps feature the unique Peterson R4 twisted-lobe rotor design that develops solid oil pressure even in high-temperature conditions while pulling strong vacuum. A standard rear-drive setup allows for direct mounting of all popular drive accessories, and pumps can be configured for applications from single-stage to multistage setups to ensure proper oiling conditions.

Adjustable Ladder Bars



Chassis Engineering, West Palm Beach, Florida, presents its Outlaw Ladder Bars. Made in the USA, the triple-adjustable systems combine a 4-link and a ladder bar to allow for height adjustments with bind-free pinion angles, preloads and leverage changes. The Outlaw design includes 1-3/8-by-0.095-inch moly upper and lower tubes, moly rod ends and 1/4-inch-thick brackets. Other variations are available.



Jounce Shocks

Specialty Products Company (SPC), Longmont, Colorado, presents its Jounce Shocks, a patented form of bump-shock that maximizes suspension capacity and performance. A nitrogen-charged secondary shock adds compression damping and controlled rebound to the vehicle's existing suspension system for bottoming protection, increased stability and improved handling at any speed. The rebuildable SPC Jounce Shocks are made in the USA and offer several accessories for specific applications.



Exhaust Pipe Kit

Heatshield Products, Escondido, California, presents its Heatshield Armor Exhaust Pipe Kit, a high-performance thermal protection solution designed and manufactured in the USA for demanding automotive and industrial applications. Engineered to reduce radiant heat by up to 70% and withstand continuous temperatures up to 1,800 degrees, the kit helps protect components from heat-related damage while improving overall system performance. Durable construction and high-temperature insulation make it well-suited for performance and off-road vehicles.



Camaro Carpet Kit

Auto Custom Carpets, Oxford, Alabama, presents a One-Piece Carpet Kit for 1967-69 Chevrolet Camaro applications. Designed as an upgrade from the original two-piece carpet, it fits restomods, customized interiors and original cars where the owner wants to eliminate the visible seam. Available in three materials and 161 colors, the company's carpets are fully made in the USA.

Jeep Lighting

ORACLE Lighting, Metairie, Louisiana, presents its new Pre-Runner-Style LED Grille Light Kit for 2024-newer Jeep Wrangler JL and Gladiator platforms. Engineered for OEM-style integration and easy installation, the kit features four amber LED marker lights mounted in precision-designed snap-fit housings that install directly into the factory grille openings without drilling or modification. The grille light housings are made in the USA using an advanced additive ASA production process, allowing for a highly precise fitment.



Convertible Topping

The Haartz Corp., Acton, Massachusetts, presents its Stayfast and Twillfast Acrylic Convertible Topping, offering premium material solutions for a wide range of soft-top convertibles. Made in the USA to deliver long-lasting durability and performance, the toppings feature solution-dyed acrylic, three-layer construction and a proprietary water-repellent formula. The materials are designed to support high-quality convertible top replacements across a wide range of vehicles, including Ford, Chevrolet, Mazda, Nissan, BMW, Volkswagen and Porsche models.



Performance Ethanol Content Sensor

Advanced Fuel Dynamics, Troy, Texas, presents its ESense Performance Ethanol Content Sensor. The sensor features big, unrestricted flow; native digital (Hz) and analog (0-5V) outputs; modular, factory-style quick-connect and -AN fittings for easy plumbing into any fuel system; and increased accuracy in a compact laser-etched billet housing with available Bluetooth wireless content gauge. Made in the USA and compatible with existing GM/Conti wiring harnesses, the ESense is a scratch design for any stock or aftermarket fuel system and works with factory and standalone ECUs for reliable flex fuel management.

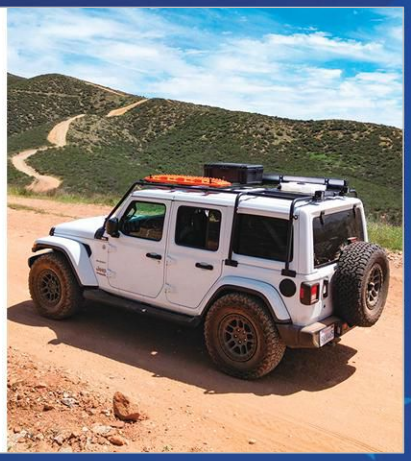






Roof Rack Cage

Surco Products Inc., Los Angeles, presents its JC100 Jeep Wrangler JL Roof Rack Cage. Made in the USA, the full-length roof rack cage is designed for 2018-current JL hardtop models. It mounts to existing factory locations at the cowl and rear hardtop area, adding overhead cargo capacity without drilling or permanent modification to the vehicle body. Constructed from 1.5-inch, heavy-duty steel tubing with anodized aluminum slug connectors and finished in a fine-texture black powder-coat, the system works with rooftop tents and modular crossbar accessories.



Restoration Seat Foam

PUI Interiors, La Grange, Kentucky, presents its Restoration Seat Foam, available for a wide variety of American muscle cars including GM, Ford and Mopar vehicles. The product is made in the USA with high-quality, automotive-grade materials for long life and comfort.



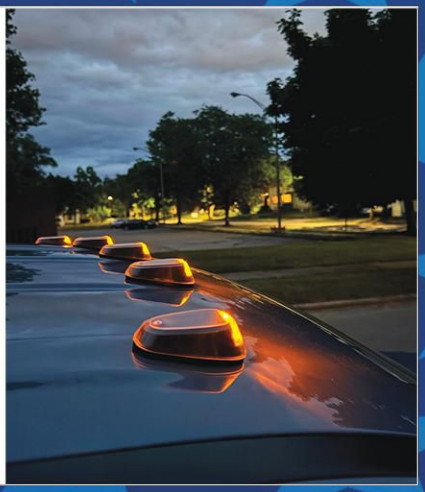


Jeep Floor Liners

Quadratec Inc., West Chester, Pennsylvania, presents its top-tier Ultimate All-Weather Floor Liner series, now available with officially licensed Jeep-branded badging. Delivering a seamless “OEM-plus” interior aesthetic without sacrificing protection, the liners are manufactured in the United States utilizing advanced thermoplastic materials. They are designed to maintain their structural integrity and precise fitment across extreme temperature fluctuations, ensuring year-round protection against mud, snow and debris. Non-badged liners are also available.

Wireless Cab Lights

Spirit Fire Lights, Holland, Michigan, presents its Wireless Cab Lights. The veteran-owned company offers American-made, solar-powered cab lights engineered for truck owners who want a premium OEM-style appearance without drilling holes or running wires. Designed for easy peel-and-stick installation in about 20 minutes, the lights activate automatically at night through patented vibration-sensing technology. Features include wireless installation, solar charging, weatherproof and automotive-grade adhesive and automatic shutoff timer.



Jeep Tie Rods

Synergy Mfg., San Luis Obispo, California, presents its Titan Series Tie Rods for 2018-up Jeep JL, JLU and JT applications. Engineered for hardcore wheelers and daily drivers, the tie rods feature made-in-the USA, 1.75-inch heat-treated chromoly construction for strength. Outfitted with the company’s signature metal-on-metal tie rod ends, the setup delivers longevity and precision. A direct bolt-in replacement for stock tie rods, the system is built to keep steering performance tight and responsive in the toughest conditions.





Bumper Covering

Ecological, Rocklin California, presents Shellz, a simple, high-quality bumper covering solution for vehicle customization. Whether color-matching parts, deleting chrome or upgrading trim level, Shellz installs easily and provides a cost-effective alternative to full bumper replacement. More durable than paint or vinyl wrap, BumperShellz are engineered and manufactured in the USA through a vertically integrated process that ensures quality.



Raptor Front Bumper

Addictive Desert Designs, Chandler, Arizona, presents its ADD Edge Front Bumper for 2021-26 Ford F-150 Raptor applications. Featuring an ultralow-profile fitment to maximize front-end clearance, the bumper's sharp styling closely follows the truck's contours for a seamless fit. Made in the USA, it provides a removable heavy-duty aluminum skid plate for shielding the front undercarriage and is finished in a durable, dual-stage hammer black powder-coat with satin black accent panels. A center light mount accommodates four 6-inch round lights.



Classic Jeep Climate Control

Vintage Air, San Antonio, presents its new GEN 5 SureFit Complete Kit, offering climate control for 1981-86 Jeep CJ5, CJ7 and CJ8 models. Designed for classic Jeep enthusiasts seeking modern comfort, the systems are made in the USA to deliver powerful heating, cooling and defrost capabilities in a fully integrated package. Features include high-capacity A/C and heater coils paired with a blend air door to allow rapid vent temperature adjustment. An OE-style block expansion valve helps ensure consistent refrigerant flow. ***TS***





PERFORMANCE

Acme Profile p. 60



The Deceleration Equation

Performance brake systems deliver the stopping power required by today's powerful vehicles.

BY JOHN CAROLLO

It's a simple equation: the more power added to a vehicle, the more stopping force is required to maintain safety and drivability. A quick look at the performance brakes market shows the latest systems are up for the challenge.

Racing and competition cars, hot rods, classics, tow vehicles and more—there's an improved brake setup for any application. And they don't just make sense for spirited drivers.

Shops can benefit from the add-on and complementary sales brake systems bring—items from brake pads and calipers to rotors, master cylinders and related components can all be used to build systems that meet customers' needs, today and tomorrow.

Suppliers are ready to help shops build a reputation as the local brake expert by offering industry insights, sales strategies and updates on the latest systems and components that shine when it's time to slow down.

MASS APPEAL

From high-horsepower street and competition vehicles to trucks seeking extra stopping power while towing or hauling, performance brakes cover just about all corners of the aftermarket.

"The performance brake category continues to move decisively toward premium, engineered solutions that deliver not only higher stopping power, but also greater safety, control, durability and vehicle integration," says Greg Tackett, vice president, Brembo North America Aftermarket. "In the automotive aftermarket, this creates a significant opportunity for upgrade products that bring true motorsport technology and OE expertise to enthusiasts, performance drivers and shops looking for trusted, application-specific solutions."

Many projects involve older vehicles upgrading to modern braking standards.

"With improvements in aftermarket brake design and performance over the past decade, these days when a vehicle owner builds or has a shop build a car they expect more from the brake systems being installed," says Michael Hamrick, events and promotions manager for Wilwood Disc Brakes. "Most chassis components including brakes, suspension and even wheels and tires have improved so much, so your daily driver or weekend warrior has more advanced engineering and has become a much better handling and performance vehicle than the one you drove 10 years ago. Suspension and aftermarket spindle manufacturer improvements now incorporate our Wilwood performance brake products to completely transform an older car or truck from the late 1960s-70s."

Drivers expect more than ever from their brake systems these days. (Photo courtesy Wilwood Disc Brakes)

Accessorization is moving the segment forward.

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PERFORMANCE BRAKE COMPONENTS

■ HOT PRODUCTS:
Classic Series Brake Kits
■ FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Complete-per-axle kits offered for a wide variety of early vehicles; direct bolt-on installation; modern components at an affordable price; aluminum front calipers; red powder-coat; rear parking brake; OE pad shapes for easy replacement.

Baer Brakes
Rick Elam
Director of Brakes

■ HOT PRODUCTS:
Brembo GT Systems
■ FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Popular with consumers seeking a high-performance brake system upgrade specifically engineered for their vehicle; weight savings versus iron disc systems; carbon-carbon (C/C) disc constructions can last the life of the vehicle.

Brembo
Greg Tackett
Vice President

■ HOT PRODUCT:
Dash4 HD Performance Brake Pad Line
■ FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Engineered for heavy-duty fleets and demanding commercial applications; delivers improved stopping power, reduced brake fade, low-noise performance and long service life under extreme conditions; incorporates U.S.-made shims.

Dash4 Brakes
Shyan Chachi
Vice President

■ HOT PRODUCTS:
MaxGrip Lite 4-Piston Front Disc Brake Kits
■ FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Popular for classic and muscle cars; deliver a substantial upgrade in braking performance, safety and aesthetics; straightforward installation process; multi-piston calipers with high-performance MaxGrip XDS rotors; clear most 14-inch and larger wheels.

LEED Brakes
Bill Cummings
President

■ HOT PRODUCTS:
PowerStop PowerShield Rotor Line
■ FEATURES & BENEFITS:
FNC heat-treatment process transforms and hardens the rotor by diffusing nitrogen and carbon into the surface of the iron for rust and corrosion protection; offered in four platforms: Fleet, Muscle, Electric and Truck & Tow; clean appearance.

PowerStop LLC
Brian Rowland
Chief Commercial Officer

■ HOT PRODUCTS:
SSBC-USA B8 Barbarian & B8 Brawler Series
■ FEATURES & BENEFITS:
American-made, direct-fit, 8-piston billet aluminum caliper upgrade kits designed for 1/2-, 3/4- and 1-ton trucks; one of the largest piston and brake pad contact areas available in the market for improved stopping performance and heat management.

SSBC-USA
Tom Reid
President/CEO

■ HOT PRODUCTS:
Evolution Series Brake Kits
■ FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Popular in the drag racing and Drag & Drive segments; Evolution S Rotors mount to billet aluminum DDM hats for reduced rotating weight; rotors measure 11.25 inches OD with 0.355-inch thickness; 4-piston billet calipers provide maximum clamping force.

Strange Engineering
J.C. Cascio
Director of Business Development

■ HOT PRODUCTS:
Aero6-DM Direct Mount Front Brake Kits
■ FEATURES & BENEFITS:
True front brake upgrade for many late-model 1/2-ton and midsize trucks and SUVs; fit most 17-inch and larger wheels; easy bolt-on installation with the calipers directly mounted to the factory location; 6-piston Aerolite aluminum calipers; vented rotors.

Wilwood Disc Brakes
Michael Hamrick
Events and Promotions Manager



A true performance brake system will be engineered to fully integrate with the vehicle's factory actuation systems. (Photos courtesy Brembo)

"The performance aftermarket has grown significantly, as enthusiasts and truck owners continue modifying their vehicles with increased horsepower, suspension upgrades, lift kits and larger wheel and tire packages," says Tom Reid, president and CEO of SSBC-USA. "As these modifications push vehicles beyond their original factory design parameters, brake performance has become more critical. Today's consumers better understand that improved acceleration, towing capability and handling must be matched by braking systems capable of safely controlling those added demands."

Individual niches are reaping the benefits.

"If we look at the early domestic market (restomods, Pro-Touring builds, etc.), there are far more options available today, and the parts selection continues to expand," says Rick Elam, director of brakes at Baer Brakes. "With all the new chassis and spindle options for these vehicles, builders now have access to a much broader and more capable range of brake systems that can be tailored to fit virtually any intended use of the vehicle. We're also seeing the adaptation of late-model technology into these early cars, including iBoosters, ABS and electric parking brakes."

For shops, the market's growth has progressed with professionals in mind.

"The performance brake market, mirroring trends across the aftermarket, has undergone a significant evolution in its approach to installer-focused design," says Bill Cummings, president of LEED Brakes. "Today's kits boast enhanced ease of installation, greater completeness and a wealth of embedded knowledge. Driven by years of customer feedback regarding past struggles, many companies have proactively identified and addressed these pain points in their product development."

Today's systems feature top-quality engineering and construction.

"Advancements in friction materials, rotor technology, noise reduction and heat management have improved brake performance while reducing dust and maintenance," says Shyan Chachi, vice president of Dash4 Brakes. "Today's customers expect OE-level comfort combined with heavy-duty stopping capability, longer service life and reliable performance under more demanding operating conditions."

And advancements are continuing.

"Cars continue to get faster as massive amounts of horsepower are easier to attain. Of course, the vehicles then still need to slow down," says J.C. Cascio, director of business development for Strange Engineering. "With late-model cars getting heavier with today's safety standards, the brakes are pushed to their limits. We need to continue to evolve the rotors, calipers and related parts to handle the weight and speed while working within the dimensions of the wheels. Most drag racing vehicles still use 15-inch wheels, so rotor diameter is limited."

Through it all, performance brake customers have become more knowledgeable regarding available systems and their uses.

"The majority of searches and product discoveries now start online," says Brian Rowland, PowerStop LLC chief commercial officer. "While the expert guidance consumers receive at the local installer level remains very important, the internet is truly the 'front door to the store.' Also, consumers want a full brake service, including brake pads and brake rotors, for safety, convenience and peace of mind."

THE LOWDOWN ON SLOWDOWNS

For many customers, professional recommendations and installation are needed to





Builders have access to a broad range of brake systems that can be tailored to fit virtually any intended use. (Photo courtesy Baer Brakes)

fit the safest, best-stopping brakes to their vehicle. The process starts with information regarding how the systems will be utilized.

"Thorough upfront questioning isn't just helpful; it's absolutely critical," says Cummings. "Failing to meticulously gather information about the customer's exact vehicle specifications and their long-term vision is a recipe for misdiagnosis, incorrect parts, fitment nightmares and, ultimately, a dissatisfied customer. Investing the time to ask detailed questions at the outset streamlines the entire process, ensuring you guide them to the right product the first time."

Such questioning can reveal minor changes that can have a major impact on brake performance.

"Sometimes customers assume the car is still completely stock and don't account for spindle or rear-end changes that may have happened over the years," Elam notes. "A very common return involves rear brake backing plates (for parking brake), along with hubs and brackets for front spindles. For example, someone may assume an early Mustang still has its original spindle setup without realizing that, sometime during the life of the car, it was converted to a big-pin spindle or a Torino-style big Ford rear end. Brake kits are extremely specific to the spindle and rear-end housing being used—just like a door handle, one part does not fit every application."

The gathered information is crucial to project success and driver enjoyment, says Hamrick.

"Will it simply be a daily driver or a cruiser? Do they plan to autocross or occasionally track the vehicle? Do they want a manual or a power brake system and how much horsepower do they plan on having? If the shop does not select parts that will meet the customer's build level or expectations and the parts do not work well together, it will likely not match the customer's needs. Using recommendations from the manufacturers and taking these conversations as an educational opportunity will help not only the shop building the vehicle but also, most importantly, the customer."

Strong communication can also widen a shop's customer base.

"Performance brake upgrades are for more than just racing or high-performance vehicles," says Chachi. "Commercial fleets, towing applications, work trucks and daily-driven vehicles all benefit from upgraded braking systems through improved stopping power, better heat management, increased safety and longer brake life."

The importance of a quality braking system to driving safety can't be overstated—and shouldn't be undersold.

"A lot of shops seem hesitant to lean into recommending more premium options like performance brakes to their customers," Rowland observes. "Our research indicates drivers are willing to pay for the added value of premium brake solutions. Everyday drivers want great stopping power and zero fade in stop-and-go traffic. Brakes are not something they want to be worrying about.





Today's consumers understand that improved acceleration, towing capability and handling must be matched with braking systems capable of safely controlling those added demands. (Photos courtesy SSBC-USA)

Selling into the premium segment not only gives consumers the solutions they're looking for but also helps drive increased revenue and profit for the shop."

Components designed to work together alleviate potential problems, says Tackett.

"Many customers believe that bigger calipers or rotors alone create a true performance upgrade, when in reality an effective system must be fully engineered to work with the vehicle's factory brake balance, ABS and stability controls to deliver both performance and safety," he says.

Also, larger calipers and more pistons may require a larger volume of brake fluid.

"The brake kit alone does not necessarily improve all aspects of the brake system," says Cascio. "When upgrading brakes on a vehicle, one must consider the master cylinder, proportioning valve, line lock and leverage ratio to make sure the system works correctly and efficiently."

Reid explains how quality street systems are often designed to work with the latest technology.

"A common misconception is that upgrading calipers requires extensive modifications or replacement of OEM components such as rotors, brake pads, brake lines, master cylinders, boosters or even wheels," he says. "Our kits dramatically improve stopping power while maintaining compatibility with factory brake system components. They also do not require proprietary rotors or pads, and our calipers are engineered to fit within OEM wheel applications whenever possible."



Getting the rotors, calipers, pads and related parts right the first time benefits everyone involved. (Photos courtesy Strange Engineering)

POWERFUL CONNECTIONS

Sales strategies for performance brake systems often start with the power numbers that are so prevalent in today's market.

"Horsepower upgrades are one of the most popular modifications people make, so it's





always important to remind customers—especially considering the age of many of these vehicles—that suspension and brakes should be upgraded along with the powertrain," says Elam from Baer Brakes. "If a customer is interested in brakes, make sure to discuss wheel size, the spindle and rear-end combination currently in the car, and the importance of evaluating the entire brake system as a whole."

There are plenty of opportunities to be found, once shops understand their customers and their vehicles.

"Classic, late-model, enthusiast and family vehicles are all great options for premium products," Rowland explains. "If your customer drives in heavy traffic, tows a boat or has a lifted Jeep, chances are high that they're looking for improved performance over the original manufacturer's equipment. Products like PowerStop are not only designed to operate at a very high level, but drive repeat purchases for shops through clean, quiet and consistent performance."

Distinguishing between subtle differences can help shops build a reputation as the area's local brake expert.

"There's a fine line if the customer has a race car they drive on the street, or a street car they take to the track," says Cascio from Strange Engineering. "By understanding the ultimate goal of the build, it's easier to map out the proper combination of the braking system. No one wants to spend money twice. Getting the rotors, calipers, pads and related parts right the first time around only benefits everyone involved."

Choosing the right brake kits the first time turns into repeat business and attracts new customers who know the shop has a winning formula.

"Use proven methods and a chassis component matching process that works, as some aftermarket products are uniquely designed to work well together. For example, Wilwood makes specific brake kits that work with certain manufacturers' spindles, so there is no guesswork. If a wheel and tire size fitment on a particular vehicle has worked well with a suspension and brake package selected, then it will likely work again," says Hamrick. "Another opportunity for sales are easy upgrades, where installation shops can simply change brake pads in the vehicle to match their level of driving performance a year later without having to change the entire brake system."



Everyday drivers want great stopping power and zero fade in stop-and-go traffic. (Photo courtesy PowerStop)



Proactively educate customers on past experiences and the advantages of performance upgrades. (Photos courtesy LEED Brakes)

When it comes to important purchases, drivers want to work with businesses they trust.

"Boost sales with expert service and proactive performance solutions," says Cummings from LEED Brakes. "When diagnosing brake issues, proactively educate customers on past experiences and the advantages of performance upgrades. Set clear expectations about the value of performance options. By consistently delivering on promises, you create satisfied customers open to future upgrades. Understanding their long-term goals allows you to strategically position performance brakes as a key part of their build, thereby driving higher sales."

Quality brake systems are built to last, increasing return on investment.



Advancements in friction materials, rotor technology, noise reduction and heat management have improved performance while reducing dust and maintenance. (Photos courtesy DASH4 Brakes)

"A strong way for shops to maximize performance brake-related sales is to educate customers on the long-term value of upgraded brake components rather than focusing only on upfront price," Chachi reveals. "Recommending complete brake solutions—including pads, rotors, hardware and fluid—helps improve performance, safety and longevity while increasing ticket value. Shops can also identify customers with towing, fleet, heavy-load or high-mileage applications who will benefit most from heavy-duty performance brake upgrades like Dash4 HD."

Some drivers don't realize they need better brakes until a professional explains how their specific vehicle usage stresses the factory system.

"To maximize performance brake sales, shops should connect brake upgrades to how customers actually use their vehicles—such as spirited driving, towing, larger wheels or added power—and position a Brembo system as the essential upgrade that keeps stopping performance aligned with the vehicle's increased demands," says Tackett.

Once a vehicle gains weight, receives a lift kit or moves to larger wheels and tires, the factory brake system is often operating outside of its original design intent, agrees Reid from SSBC-USA.

"Many customers invest in modifications that improve speed, handling, towing or appearance, but braking performance is often overlooked until stopping distance, pedal feel or driver confidence becomes an issue," he notes. "Shops that educate customers early about the importance of braking upgrades create both safety value and sales opportunities. In many cases, a simple caliper upgrade can dramatically improve stopping performance while giving drivers confidence that their vehicle, cargo, passengers and families are all protected—whether it's a work truck or daily driver." **TS**





The shop's award-winning projects are built to stand out.

No Cutting Corners: Inside Acme Chop Shop

From award-winning builds to training the next generation, Jack Weaver is all in on his custom builds.

BY MARK BACH PHOTOS COURTESY ACME CHOP SHOP

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



Jack Weaver operates Acme Chop Shop in Grand Junction, Colorado.

Acme comes from the Greek language for "exceptional" and "top of the line." So, when Jack Weaver needed a name for his restoration shop in Grand Junction, Colorado, Acme Chop Shop was a natural choice.

His affinity for enhancing traditional classics with his own touch makes Acme's award-winning cars stand out. Weaver has been working on cars since he was 15, learning plenty from his father, who was also a hot rodder.

Weaver enjoyed customizing vehicles, making modifications and upgrades, even while working a full-time job in the trucking industry.

"I did it all—excavation, dump trucks," he recalls of his time running a heavy equipment business, even while working on cars for himself and his friends. "I just did the cars in my fun time in the winter."

Finally, in 2006, he launched his automotive dreams from his home garage.

"I had seen an opportunity to start doing cars for people, and that's where it took off," he says.

Weaver moved to a new home in 2008 and



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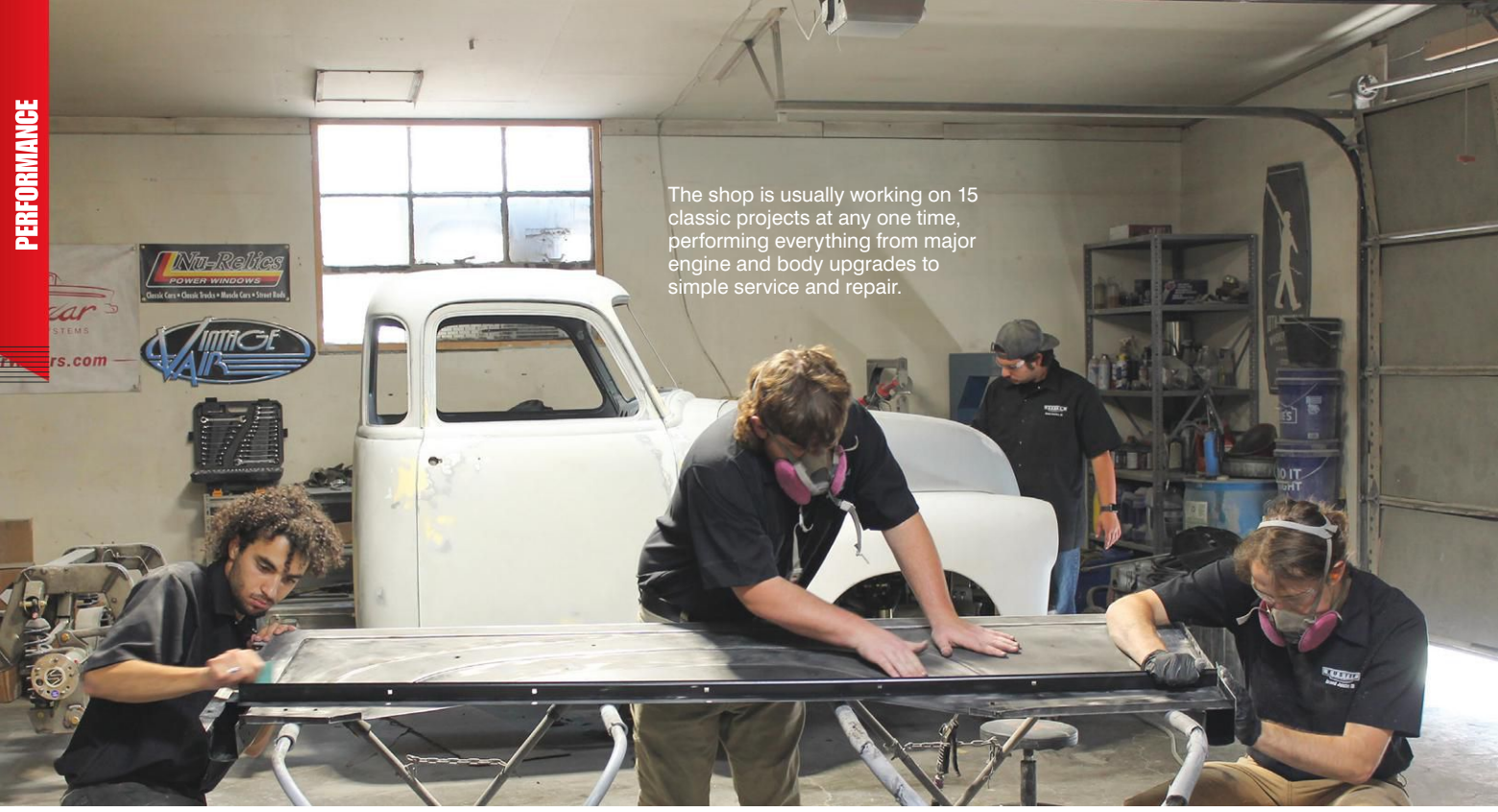
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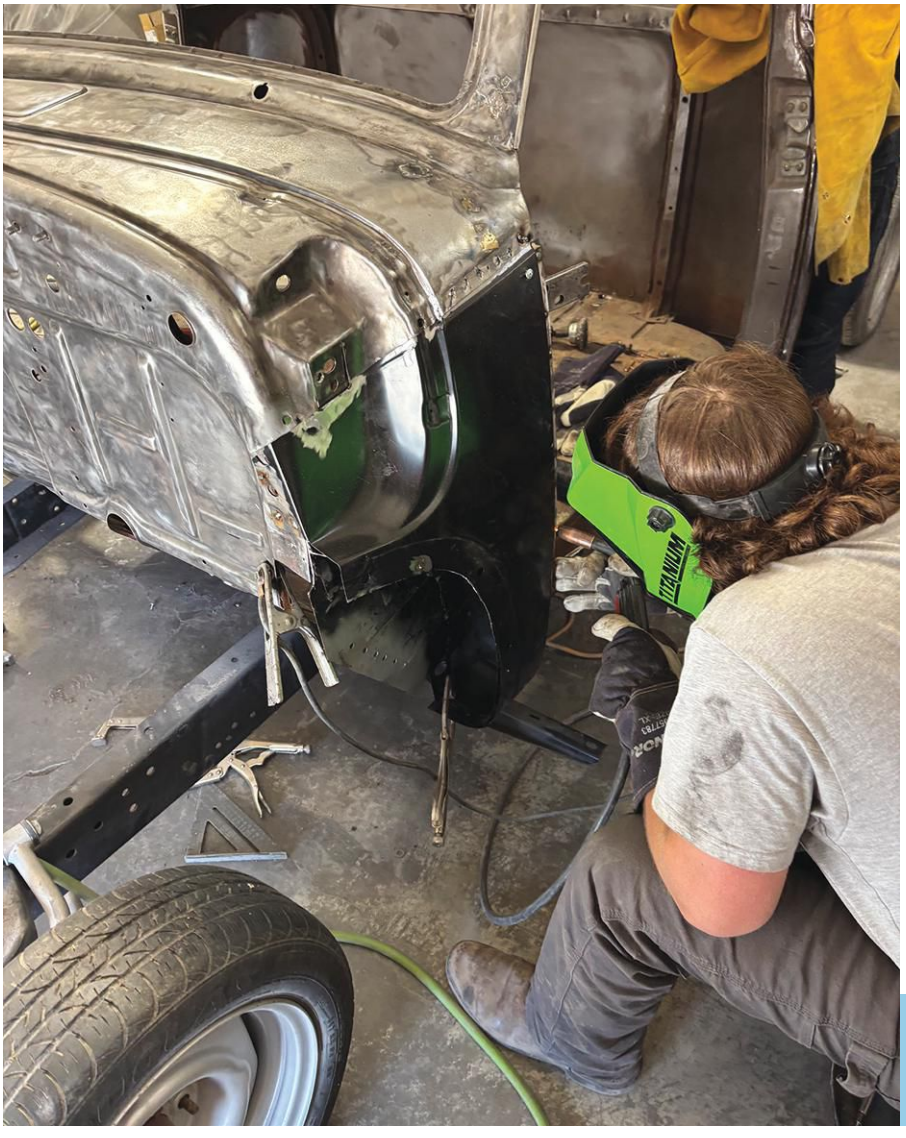


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The shop is usually working on 15 classic projects at any one time, performing everything from major engine and body upgrades to simple service and repair.



continued to build his business. In 2011, he expanded his efforts, moving into an 11,000-square-foot facility.

"I had to find another shop," he says. "I found a shop in downtown Grand Junction, and we leased it."

OFF & RUNNING

Weaver's first customer actually reached out to him from Slovakia. After seeing Acme's builds, he asked Weaver to work his magic and chop a 1953 Chevy. Weaver has done several cars for this customer and has yet to meet him in person.

Weaver moved to a 6,800-square-foot shop in 2015, and what started as a one-person operation has expanded to eight employees. He "was the main painter when we first started; I started doing it all, too, but it just kind of evolved from there. But engines have always been my thing, because I always had to work on my old cars."

These days, Acme typically has 15 cars in the garage at any one time. A complete restoration will normally take one-and-a-half years, and the wait time to take in a new project is generally three months.

Builds are not all the shop does. Weaver will still work with local owners who need repairs or service. He schedules a few owners

A complete restoration usually takes about one-and-a-half years, with a wait time of three months to take on new projects.



BUILD A HOT ROD FROM THE GROUND UP

Acme's customer base is split 50/50 between locals and out-of-state clients.

in at a time and wants to keep them happy, with cars that run well.

He and his crew do everything except interior and glass. Weaver initially preferred to work on pre-1970s cars, but his clients are now often bringing in cars from the '80s and '90s. His customer base is split 50/50 between locals and out-of-state clients.

Many from out of state enjoy visiting his shop on the Western slope of Colorado to see the progress. He sends plenty of pictures to the owners as well to keep them abreast of the car build, and bills monthly.

Weaver also sponsors a local show and attends a few car events on the other side of the Rocky Mountains, including the Goodguys show in Loveland, Colorado, to promote his work. Of course, he also relies on social media (@acmechopshop) to showcase his efforts.

A POSITIVE ENVIRONMENT

Acme Chop Shop runs on a traditional Monday-Friday, 8-to-5 schedule. Weaver notes that finding good workers who have a basic understanding of vintage mechanics and wiring is the hardest part of his job.

"We seek out quality people who love the work they do," he explains, searching for employees who interact well with others and can resolve differences amicably. "They have to have a decent skill set, the right attitude to work with other people and be able to mesh with everybody in the shop."

Closer to Utah than to Denver, Grand Junction offers plenty of recreational amenities to attract employees.

"It's a pretty cool place to live, with all the different outdoor activities and everything going on around here," Weaver notes. "People want to live here."

Still, he's seen new employees come in from out of town, only to return to their hometowns. Combatting employee turnover is one of the reasons he started a training course through Kustom Built Cars Educational Workshop, to help with worker training and career building.

Many builders and fabricators would love to open their own shop one day. Weaver's



The shop handles everything except interiors and glass.



One of Weaver's main endeavors is the Kustom Built Cars Educational Workshop, a non-profit program that brings in students for an intensive course on total vehicle restoration.

advice to getting started is "just keep an eye on what's going on. You've got to be there. You've got to put in the work. Don't depend on your employees to do everything. You have to be a part of it and put in the work."

While engine work is his preference, Weaver will gladly step in and help solve problems or offer suggestions on any portion of a build.

Any scaling back can wait for another decade or so, says Weaver, 50, possibly so he can spend more time on his chopped 1953 Chevy and 1962 Cadillac personal projects.

HANDING DOWN THE CRAFT

In the meantime, Weaver plans to continue passing down his knowledge to the next generation of builders.

Over the years, young adults have come to his shop, begging for a chance to start at the bottom and learn the restoration craft. But Weaver does not always have the time to offer one-on-one instruction.

As a remedy, six years ago he began offering an intensive workshop with practical experience. Kustom Built Cars Educational Workshop a 501(c)(3) non-profit, has been going strong ever since.

The workshop lasts five months (May-October) each year, providing students with hands-on training in all aspects of hot rod restoration. The workshop starts with a classic vehicle, usually a truck, that the trainees will work on.

Typically, the vehicle has already been acquired by Weaver, and the basic design and internals have been decided upon. So, when the students arrive, they can get right to work learning from Weaver and the other shop workers.

Participants are taught critical tasks like rust repair and bodywork, engine rebuilding, welding, painting and electrical skills. After completing the workshop, they receive a certification of completion in basic hot rod restoration, a starter set of shop tools and the opportunity to gain more experience at other shops. Weaver says all past graduates have landed jobs in the automotive industry.

Meanwhile, once completed, the restored truck is displayed at various events to garner additional word-of-mouth advertising for the workshop. It's later sold, with the funds supporting the following year's workshop, and so on.

Weaver notes that many young people are still deciding their career paths and the workshop gives them a chance to see what all is involved in the restoration business to help determine if it's a good fit for them.

Last year's build was a 1953 Chevy 5-window truck from Greeley, Colorado, that was turned into a gleaming showpiece in time to show it off at the 2025 SEMA Show in Las Vegas.

Weaver admits the classic pickup was initially in rough shape.

"The truck had a bunch of stuff welded on it and the fenders had been cut off to make a tilt front end," he explains. "The class had to do a lot of repairs and work on the cab."

Several companies including Auto Custom Carpets Inc., Hot Shot's Secret, Dapper Lighting, BedWood, Wizards Products, Steele Rubber Products, Roadster Shop, Auto Metal Direct, Retro Manufacturing/Retro Belt, Vintage Air, Detroit Steel Wheels Co., Wilwood, Borgeson, Dakota Digital, CORSA Performance, XS Power Batteries, HushMat, RainGear, Nu-Relics, PPG, Hydes Leather, Matco Tools, Airgas and TE Metal Works have donated products or services to help further the workshop's goals.

Information on the workshop can be found at kustombuiltcars.org. ***TS***



The workshop annually gives young builders real-world experience and an exclusive look inside the restoration business.



Restoring Vintage Carbureted Engine Performance, Part II

Tuning begins by analyzing the air/fuel mixture & accounting for today's unleaded gas blends.

ARTICLE & PHOTOS BY HENRY OLSEN



Henry Olsen of Performance Motorsports in Millbrae, California, specializes in tuning vintage carburetor-equipped engines for today's reformulated gasoline. Reach him at olescarb@yahoo.com.

EDITOR'S NOTE: *This is the second installment of a two-part series addressing carburetor tuning issues in vintage vehicles using today's unleaded gasoline blends. Part I appeared in the April 2026 issue of THE SHOP.*

FINE-TUNING THE FUEL SYSTEM

In Part I of this article on tuning a carburetor-equipped engine for today's gasoline, we covered how we set the spark advance systems so the engine can properly burn the fuel. A properly tuned carburetor-equipped engine should perform just as well as—or maybe even better than—the day it was driven off the new car dealer's lot, even with today's unleaded reformulated gasoline.

The proper tuning of an engine's ignition spark advance and air/fuel mixture(s) can make the difference between a strong-performing engine and one that runs and sounds like it needs a tuneup.

A carburetor-equipped engine can only be expected to run its best when the carburetor supplies the engine with the correct amount of fuel. Proper idle, cruise and power air/fuel mixtures allow the engine to supply the driver with the best performance while getting as many miles as possible from a tank of fuel.

An overly lean air/fuel mixture (too little fuel for the amount of air in the cylinder) will cause a rough idle and a surge while cruising and will feel as if the vehicle lacks power. It may also cause the engine to run too hot.

Meanwhile, an overly rich air/fuel mixture (too much fuel for the amount of air in the cylinder) will cause an engine to "load-up" at idle, foul the spark plugs and reduce performance.

The misfires that result from an overly lean or overly rich air/fuel mixture (seen on an exhaust gas analyzer as HC/hydrocarbons) will cause the engine's exhaust to be unpleasant to breathe and make your eyes water.

Engines can be tuned to run as well as, or even better than, they did when they were new by using modern tools such as an exhaust gas analyzer and/or a digital air/fuel meter for tuning.

Today's best and most accurate method to determine if the engine's air/fuel mixture is correct for its needs is analyzing or "reading" the content of the engine's exhaust gases. New advances in infrared exhaust gas analysis and wide-band oxygen sensor-based digital air/fuel meter technology have made it possible to "read" and/or record the actual air/fuel mixture under almost any driving condition.

READING THE AIR/FUEL MIXTURE

There are two modern methods in common use to read the air/fuel mixture:

1. The easiest and most accurate method we've found to read the air/fuel mixture is using an infrared exhaust gas analyzer. This method has you place the sample probe into the tailpipe, where the analyzer samples and analyzes the content. The CO (carbon monoxide) reading is used to observe the air/fuel mixture, and the HC (unburned hydrocarbons) is an indicator of engine misfire. The CO2 and NOx readings from

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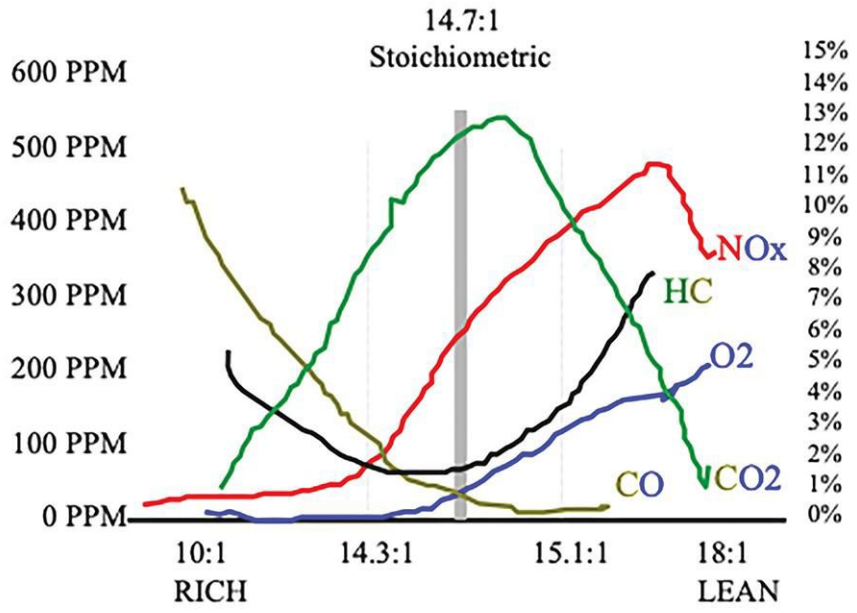
The 1965 Corvette that is the tuning subject of this article.

the exhaust gas analyzer can be used as a method to determine if the ignition timing is what the engine needs for maximum power and efficiency.

2 The second method involves using a wideband oxygen sensor installed into the exhaust header or exhaust pipe with a tailpipe probe (we use one from Innovate Motorsports). The oxygen sensor is then "read" by a digital air/fuel meter. This method determines the air/fuel mixture by looking at the oxygen/unburned combustibles content of the engine's exhaust. These readings can be very accurate, but false lean readings can be created by an exhaust leak, engine misfire or a high-overlap cam at lower rpms (these false lean readings are caused by the oxygen sensor misreading the extra oxygen in the exhaust from the misfire, exhaust leak or high-overlap cam).

The digital air/fuel meter method requires installing a bung in the exhaust system to mount the wideband oxygen sensor within about 40 inches of the closest exhaust valve for the most accurate readings. Or Innovate Motorsports offers a tailpipe probe to allow





This chart from Bridge Analyzers shows how the five main gases in the exhaust change as the air/fuel mixture changes.

temporary mounting of the oxygen sensor in the exhaust system.

The infrared exhaust gas analyzer and/or the digital air/fuel meter method allows a partial-throttle air/fuel mixture to be checked, which otherwise is almost impossible. The readings from either method can be read in real time or recorded and later played back. It is important to note that any changes other than jet swaps and other basic adjustments should be done by a proficient carburetor "expert."

A good starting point for the air/fuel mixtures for most carburetor equipped engines is:

- **Idle:** 1% to 3% CO or a 14.1- to 13.4-to-1 air/fuel mixture.
- **Cruise rpm:** 1% to 3% CO or a 14.1- to 13.4-to-1 air/fuel mixture.
- **Power mixture and acceleration:** 6% CO or 12.25-to-1 air/fuel mixture.

USING AN INFRARED EXHAUST GAS ANALYZER

The reading from an infrared exhaust gas analyzer will indicate air/fuel ratio, engine misfire, engine combustion efficiency and excessive combustion chamber heat (detonation) by looking at the following exhaust gases:

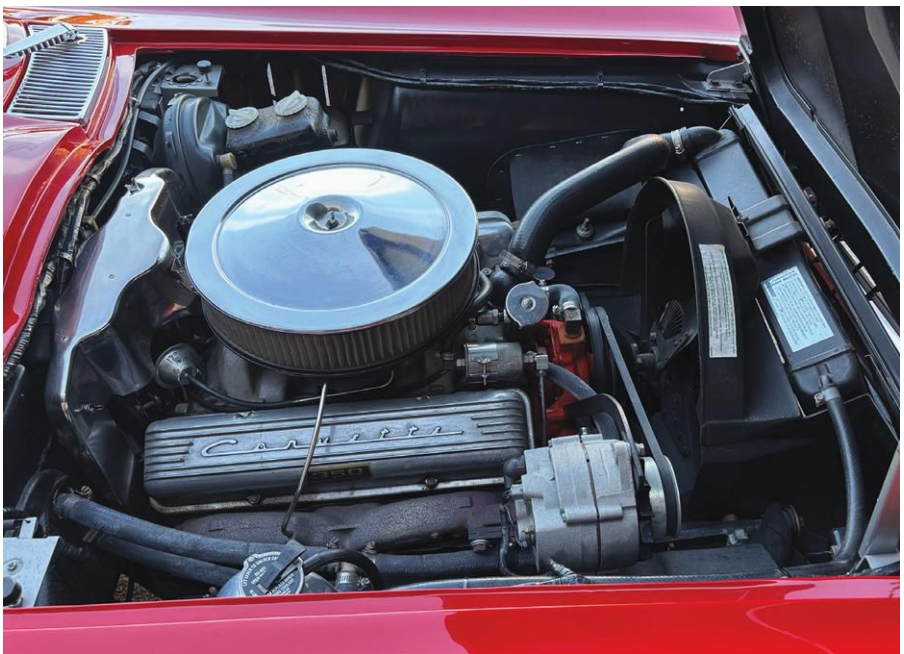
- **CO (carbon monoxide):** The reading from an infrared gas analyzer is the reading that we use to determine the air-to-fuel ratio (note: CO is partially burned fuel).
- **HC (hydrocarbons):** The amount of unburned fuel or an indicator of an engine misfire, the best mixture gives you the lowest HC.
- **CO2 (carbon dioxide):** A product of complete combustion, the best air/fuel mixture along with the best ignition spark timing will give you the highest CO2 reading.
- **O2 (oxygen):** A high O2 reading indicates a lean mixture, an exhaust leak or that the engine has a "hot" cam. Note: If O2 is above 2% to 3%, the CO readings may not be accurate.
- **NOx (oxides of nitrogen):** A gas created by excessive combustion chamber heat. In many cases, a high reading may be related to excessive ignition timing creating detonation that can result in engine damage.

TUNING WITH A DIGITAL AIR/FUEL METER

A digital air/fuel meter uses a wideband oxygen sensor to supply the user with an air/fuel mixture reading. While this method requires you to know what air/fuel mixture your engine needs for each driving condition, this data should be available from your engine manufacturer, or you can use an infrared exhaust gas analyzer to help you determine what air/fuel mixture your engine needs to run its best.

The digital air/fuel meter method uses a wideband oxygen sensor to determine the fuel mixture by analyzing the unburned combustibles in the exhaust gas. An extended-range oxygen sensor can read air/fuel mixtures as rich as 9-to-1 or as lean as 19-to-1 or leaner (a standard oxygen sensor is only accurate at an air/fuel mixture at or near 14.7-to-1).

This method has the advantage of extremely



This 350-hp, 327-ci engine is equipped with a 600cfm Holley 4-barrel carburetor.



A 5-gas exhaust gas analyzer is a great tool to determine the carburetor's air/fuel mixture and how well the engine is burning unleaded gas.

fast reaction times for the readings, but false lean readings can be caused by engine misfires or anything that exposes the sensor to outside oxygen such as an exhaust leak. The wideband oxygen sensor-based air/fuel meter that we use is the LM-2 Digital Air/Fuel Meter from Innovate Motorsports.

The use of an infrared exhaust gas analyzer, while slower in reaction time, has the advantage of not only reading the oxygen/unburned combustibles content of the exhaust, but also allowing users to determine the air/fuel mixture by observing the CO reading (carbon monoxide); the engine's rate of misfire by observing the HC reading (hydrocarbon); engine efficiency by observing the CO2 reading (carbon dioxide); and detonation caused by overly advanced ignition timing by observing the NOx reading (oxides of nitrogen).

READING THE AIR/FUEL MIXTURE

The first step in achieving a proper reading of the air/fuel mixture of an engine is to confirm the basic engine condition is good and a proper tuneup has been performed (new, properly gapped spark plugs; clean air filter; proper fuel pressure and volume; proper ignition timing curve). The next step is using a tool such as an exhaust gas analyzer to read the air/fuel mixture at 250-rpm intervals from idle through 3,000 rpm.

If the 2,500-3,000-rpm cruise mixture is off, first change the jets in order to get the air/fuel mixture correct at the 2,500-3,000 cruise rpm range. Once the 2,500-3,000 rpm cruise mixture is correct, check and reset the idle mixture.

If the air/fuel mixture is too lean at idle or partial throttle and the idle mixture screws do not provide enough adjustment, the correction may involve enlarging the idle jet. Once the idle mixture is correct and if the



A digital air/fuel meter allows you to look at the air/fuel mixture.

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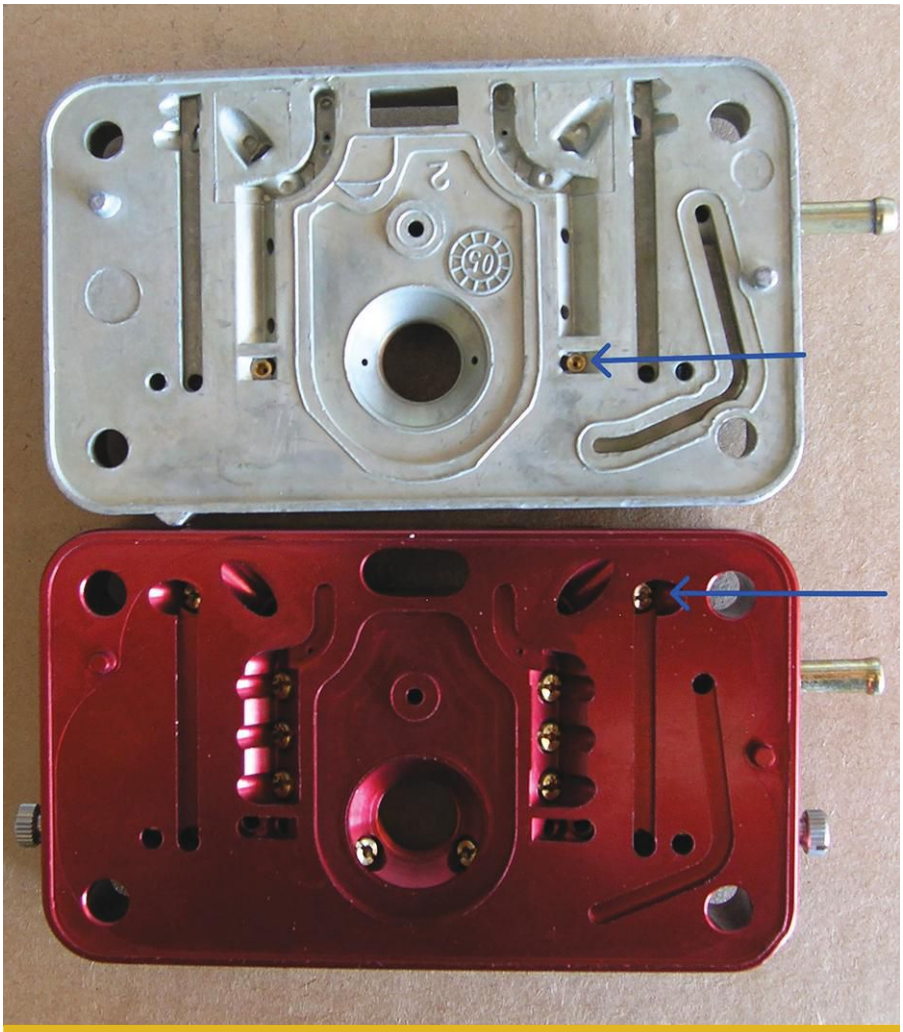
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The upper metering block has an arrow pointing to the idle jet in the preferred location that is below the fuel level in the fuel bowl. The arrow on the lower metering block points to the idle jet located near the top of the metering block, which can cause engines to run too lean at partial throttle.

mixture is still lean at 1,000-1,800 rpm, the idle channel restriction/economizer restriction on a carburetor such as a Rochester Quadrajet or Carter AFB/AVS (also the Edelbrock Performer or Thunder series) may have to be slightly enlarged to allow more fuel to be delivered at partial throttle.

This lean condition at partial throttle will cause the engine to miss or stumble on light acceleration and at 25-35-mph light cruising speeds. This lean-off-idle problem is also very common on many of the replacement and performance carburetors sold today.

If the air/fuel mixture is too rich at idle and/or partial throttle, the idle jet or partial throttle idle restriction may be too big and need to be replaced with a smaller one.

Once you have the idle, partial throttle and cruise air/fuel mixture curves correct, the next step is a road test. A road test using a portable infrared exhaust gas analyzer and/or a wideband oxygen sensor will allow you to check the cruise speed air/fuel mixture, followed by a check of the power air/fuel mixture under load.

This type of test allows you to see what the air/fuel mixture is when the vehicle is driven at cruise or wide-open driving conditions. If the air/fuel mixture shows readings that go lean at wide-open throttle (WOT), make sure the fuel pressure stays above 5 psi before increasing the jet size.

If the fuel pressure drops, the fuel pump may not be producing enough volume for the engine's demands, or the fuel tank vent system and vented gas cap may not be letting enough air into the tank to replace the fuel that is being pumped out of the gas tank.

TUNING THE CARBURETOR

Carburetors have an accelerator pump, idle, main jets and, in most cases, a power system that is designed to supply the correct air/fuel mixture for the engine's demands. An idle system will have an idle jet/restriction that must be changed to supply the desired fuel mixture for idle and off-idle engine demands.

The main jet size is what determines what air/fuel mixture is delivered to the engine at light load/cruise speeds (1,500 rpm and up), and the power valve restriction (under the power valve) is the determining factor in what the air/fuel mixture the carburetor will supply when the power valve is open.

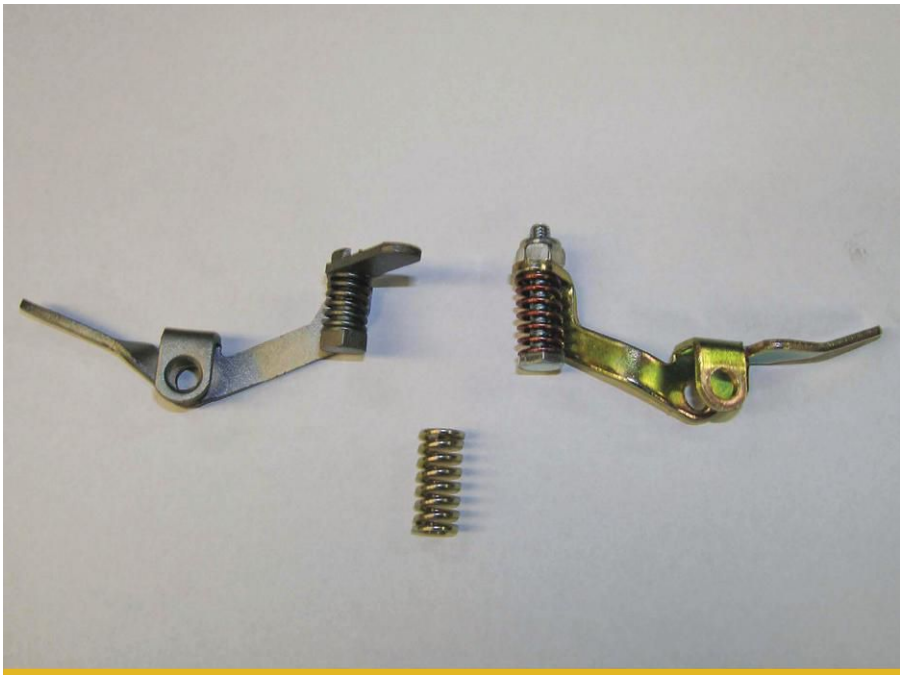
A 6.5-inch power valve will be open and supplying the richer air/fuel mixture needed under high power demands anytime the vacuum is below its 6.5 opening point. If the carburetor uses metering rods in the primary jets—such as a Rochester Quadrajet or a Carter AFB (sold by Edelbrock today as the Performer and Thunder Series)—they are there to change the air/fuel ratio for both the power and cruise mixture demands of the engine.

The accelerator pump system adds fuel as the throttle valves are opened, tuning the accelerator pump squirter volume and duration. Its tuning is mainly done by trial and error in order to obtain the best throttle response, but a 12.5-to-1 air/fuel mixture is a good place to start.

The problem we see most often with a Holley 4-barrel carburetor-equipped engine is hesitation on quick acceleration. The cure for this is to change the accelerator pump squirter size to 0.031-inch, along with a No. 330 "pink" pump cam.

My shop also uses an upgraded accelerator pump arm duration spring that is stiffer than the stock "red" spring found on most Holley-style carburetors. In many cases this stock "red" spring compresses too easily when the throttle is opened quickly—thus, the pump squirt is not as lazy, resulting in a hesitation on rapid acceleration.

The spring upgrade was something that engineers at Barry Grant/Demon carburetor company came up with several years ago and is still available through Allstate Carburetor. We use a stronger accelerator duration spring we source from Lee Spring (part No. 485269) on the Carter/Edelbrock AFB/AVS carburetors we tune.



The 1960s-era Holley pump arm on the left has a stronger spring rate than the new-style pump arm on the right. The spring in the center that we got from Allstate Carburetor can be used to improve throttle response.

Many of the carburetors that came on vehicles sold in the smog era (1960 or later) are calibrated on the lean side.

If you observe a lean or rich air/fuel mixture reading with either an exhaust gas analyzer or digital air/fuel meter at partial throttle that is not corrected with jets and/or metering rods, you may need to modify some of the internal passages inside the carburetor.

When we are tuning a Quadrajet carburetor designed for an engine built after 1969 that is running lean at partial throttle, we often refer to the book "How to Rebuild & Modify Rochester Quadrajet Carburetors" by Cliff Ruggles, because these carburetors are designed for the smog emission rules of the day. The first and second tuning recipes he mentions in the book show how to modify the air-bleed and jetting package most post-1970 carburetors came with, so it can supply the engine with the ideal air/fuel mixtures with today's reformulated gasoline.

Ruggles also sells accelerator pumps with stronger duration springs and ethanol-resistant pump cups, thus helping avoid any hesitation problems.

BACK TO OUR PROJECT

Since the carburetor on the 1965 Corvette we were working on had not been serviced in a long time, we chose to rebuild it. Since we already knew that the carb was rich at idle, lean off idle and that the owner was complaining about poor throttle response, we knew what changes we needed to do as we rebuilt the carburetor.

One of the first changes we made was to the accelerator pump system—the carburetor had a 0.025 pump squirter along with a weak pump duration spring and a pump cam that did not supply enough accelerator pump squirt. Our solution was a No. 330 "pink" pump cam along with a 0.031 squirter and a stiffer duration spring we got from Allstate Carburetor.

We also modified the idle well in the primary metering block in order to enrich the off-idle air/fuel mixture.

Once the carburetor was reinstalled on the engine, we adjusted the idle mixture using our 5-gas exhaust gas analyzer and checked the readings, which confirmed the air/fuel mixture was right where we wanted it to be, and the HC (unburned hydrocarbons) readings were much lower than they were when we started working on this car.

Once the owner took her Corvette for a test drive, she could not stop talking about how much better it ran and how the car's exhaust was no longer causing her eyes to burn. She also mentioned that she thought it ran as good or better than when she bought the car back in 1975. *TS*



ENGINE PRODUCTS

The Latest Under-Hood Offerings



Diesel Lubricants

AMSOIL, Superior, Wisconsin, and **Fleece Performance Engineering** present the Freedom Series, a jointly developed line of premium Diesel Lubricants engineered through a close technical partnership. The Freedom Series lineup includes 10W-30, 5W-40 and 15W-40 100% Synthetic Diesel Oil; 15W-50 100% Synthetic Racing Oil; and SAE 30 Break-In Oil. Freedom Series diesel products were codesigned through an iterative development process to deliver increased wear protection, improved oxidation resistance and reliable thermal stability.



Carbon Intake Manifold

Performance Design, Auburn Hills, Michigan, presents its new Carbon TRc (Tunnel Ram compact) Intake Manifold. Now available for the LS3, LS7, LT1/LT4, LT2, Ford Coyote, Chrysler Hemi and Ford Godzilla engine families, the TRc is a compact, under-hood, short-runner intake optimized for boosted applications while remaining suitable for naturally aspirated builds where packaging, fitment and aesthetics are prioritized over peak torque. It features a carbon fiber and billet aluminum construction and fits under most factory hoods.

LS & LT Swap Essentials Kits

Holley Performance Products, Bowling Green, Kentucky, presents Holley Swap Essentials, a modular engine kit platform designed to simplify and streamline the engine swap process for builders and enthusiasts. The offerings include engineering-validated components combined into application-specific kits that work together as a complete system. Initially launching for more than 50 GM applications, kits include core components such as engine and transmission mounts, and grow to include oil pans, headers or exhaust manifolds, accessory drives, exhaust and more.



Stainless Steel Locking Ties

Design Engineering Inc. (DEI), Avon Lake, Ohio, presents its LokJaw Stainless Steel Locking Ties. Designed to install quickly and easily, the ties combine gripping power and long-lasting hold for securing exhaust wrap and other high-heat components. A unique spring-wave design is engineered to flex as the tie is tightened, allowing it to maintain constant pressure for a secure, permanent lock that won't loosen, slip or fail. Constructed from high-grade 316 stainless steel, LokJaw ties deliver strength in a clean, professional installation that enhances fit and finish.





Diesel Products

K&N Engineering, Corona, California, presents its expanded line of Performance Diesel Products. NextGen Air Intake Systems, Dryflow Air Filters and additional filtration products are engineered specifically for modern Ford, GMC/Chevrolet and Ram diesel pickup models. NextGen Air Intake Systems feature a hybrid open-top design with an enlarged factory fresh air inlet that lowers inlet temperatures and optimizes airflow. With smoother, more consistent airflow at higher volumes, diesels see improved towing performance with no tune required.

Toyota SUV Supercharger Kits

VT Superchargers USA, Aurora, Colorado, presents new Supercharger Systems for 2018-24 Toyota RAV4 (2.5L gas) and Toyota RAV4 Hybrid models. The bolt-on RAV4 system delivers a 30%-50% increase in horsepower and torque, effectively dropping 0-60-mph times and providing low-end torque for towing and merging. Specialized tuning adds boost to high-compression engines, unlocking sports-car levels of acceleration while preserving reliability. The hybrid kit is tuned to complement the Atkinson cycle (A25A-FXS engine).





Gen 5 LT Valley Cover Engine Lift Plate Bracket

Speedway Motors, Lincoln, Nebraska, presents its BlockDock Valley Cover Engine Lift Plate Bracket. Now available for Gen-5 LT applications, the long-style engine lifting plate provides more surface area and mounting points for engine lifting while covering valley and intake ports to prevent entry of foreign objects. The BlockDock lift plate can be left in place as a block-off plate for engine storage and raised end caps allow tool and hardware storage without rolling off. Its 1,000-pound capacity supports iron blocks, transmissions and more.

Carbureted Fuel Pressure Regulator

DeatschWerks, Oklahoma City, presents its DWR550c Carbureted Fuel Pressure Regulator. Created for high-output fuel systems, the regulator delivers precise, stable pressure control for engines up to 1,400 hp. With a return-style design, multiple port configurations and broad fuel compatibility, it offers the flexibility and reliability needed for demanding carbureted applications, with an adjustable pressure range of 3-10 psi and a 145-gph flow rate at 6 psi. Specifically for racing applications, it is compatible with gasoline, ethanol and methanol.



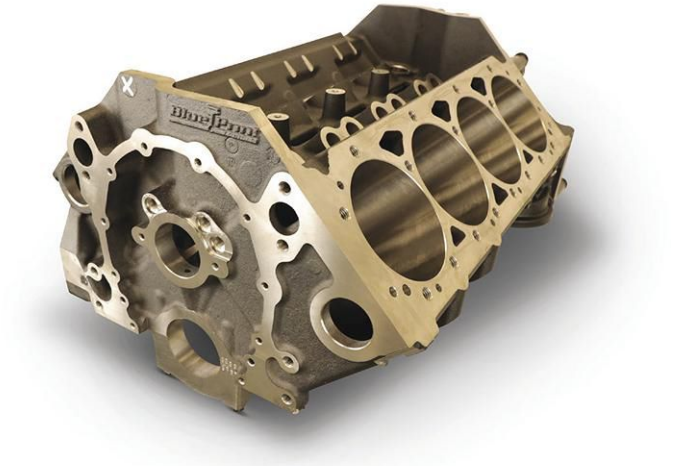


Fastener Catalog

Automotive Racing Products Inc. (ARP), Ventura, California, presents its 2026 catalog outlining its complete line of Automotive Fasteners. Offering nearly 6,000 SKUs, the publication includes comprehensive Engine & Accessory Fastener Kits that cover a variety of applications, from the intake system to the oil pan, as well as individual applications and 5-packs available by size (both SAE and metric). All fasteners are made in-house from premium-grade materials.

Iron Blocks

BluePrint Engines, Kearney, Nebraska, presents its new line of High-Strength Cast Iron Engine Blocks engineered for today's street/strip and race-inspired builds. Cast in Germany from premium-grade iron, the blocks are designed for durability, power and consistency. The first phase of the new block lineup includes GM small-block-compatible, GM big-block-compatible, GM LS-compatible and small-block Ford-compatible platforms. Optimized water jackets maximize cooling and priority main oiling improves lubrication under load. ***TS***



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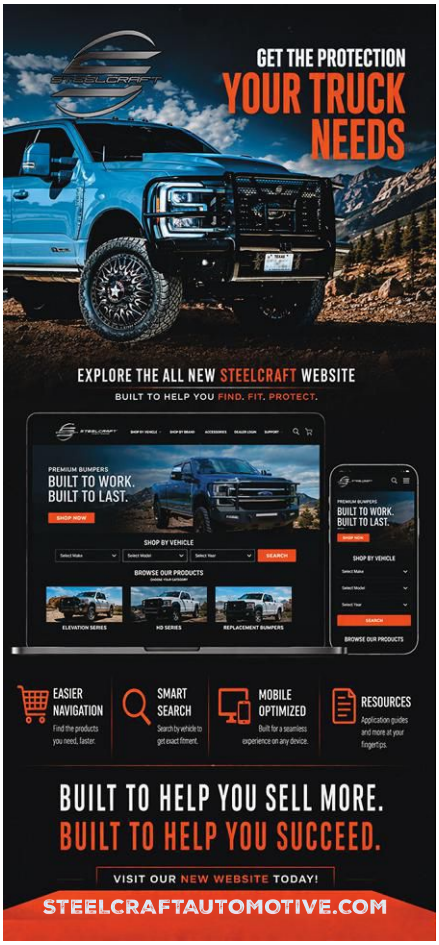
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Celebrating 75 Years of the Sacramento Autorama

The O'Reilly Auto Parts Sacramento Autorama, one of the world's longest-running indoor car shows, closed out its landmark 75th annual event in May by recognizing some of the country's finest custom creations. The milestone show featured over 500 world-class custom vehicles and presented hundreds of individual awards during its closing ceremony.

The show's prestigious Custom d'Elegance award was given to Nick Rogers and his 1936 Ford Coupe, built by South City Rod and Custom. He received $5,000 and a trophy presented by ARP Fasteners.

The West Coast Challenge Car Show Series presented by ARP also crowned its grand champion during the event. Charlie & Alanna Butts were presented with the Best of the West award for their 1957 Chevrolet Bel Air convertible, beating out competitors who participated in at least four select car shows across California, Oregon and Washington. The grand champion received a $12,500 prize, while the first and second runners-up received $6,500 and $3,500, respectively.

For the third consecutive year, the show also crowned the World's Most Beautiful Lowrider. The title and a $5,000 prize presented by ARP Fasteners were awarded to Juan Montero for his 1963 Chevrolet Impala Convertible.

"This weekend wasn't just a celebration of Sacramento's hot rodding roots—it was a statement about where the craft is today," says John Buck, owner of Rod Shows. "Seeing builds like Nick Rogers' '36 Ford Coupe take top honors made our 75th anniversary one of the most competitive and inspiring shows we've ever hosted. From the world-class customs to the lowrider community and our Builder of the Year tribute to Steve Santos, this year truly showcased the best of the best."

One of the world's longest-running indoor car shows, the O'Reilly Auto Parts Sacramento Autorama celebrated its 75th anniversary by recognizing some of the country's finest custom creations. (Photos courtesy Sacramento Autorama)



Other significant honors included the four historic "Big B Awards":

- ***H.A. Bagdasarian World's Most Beautiful Custom Award:*** Won by Homer Diaz's 1954 Chevrolet Bel Air
- ***Sam Barris Memorial Award:*** Selected by the Barris family for best metalwork, alignment and paint, awarded to Taylor Yager's 1937 Lincoln Zephyr
- ***Joe "Candy Apple Red" Bailon Memorial Award:*** Presented to Ernie Enriques' 1947 Dodge Coupe.
- ***Dick Bertolucci Automotive Excellence Award:*** Awarded to Steve Castellano's 1956 Ford Panel.

Sunday's popular Pinstriper Charity Auction raised nearly $7,000 for UC Davis Children's Hospital, which is dedicated to improving lives and transforming healthcare. ***TS***



1947 Dodge Coupe – Joe Bailon Memorial Award winner.



1956 Ford Panel – Dick Bertolucci Automotive Excellence Award winner.



1937 Lincoln Zephyr – Sam Barris Memorial Award winner.

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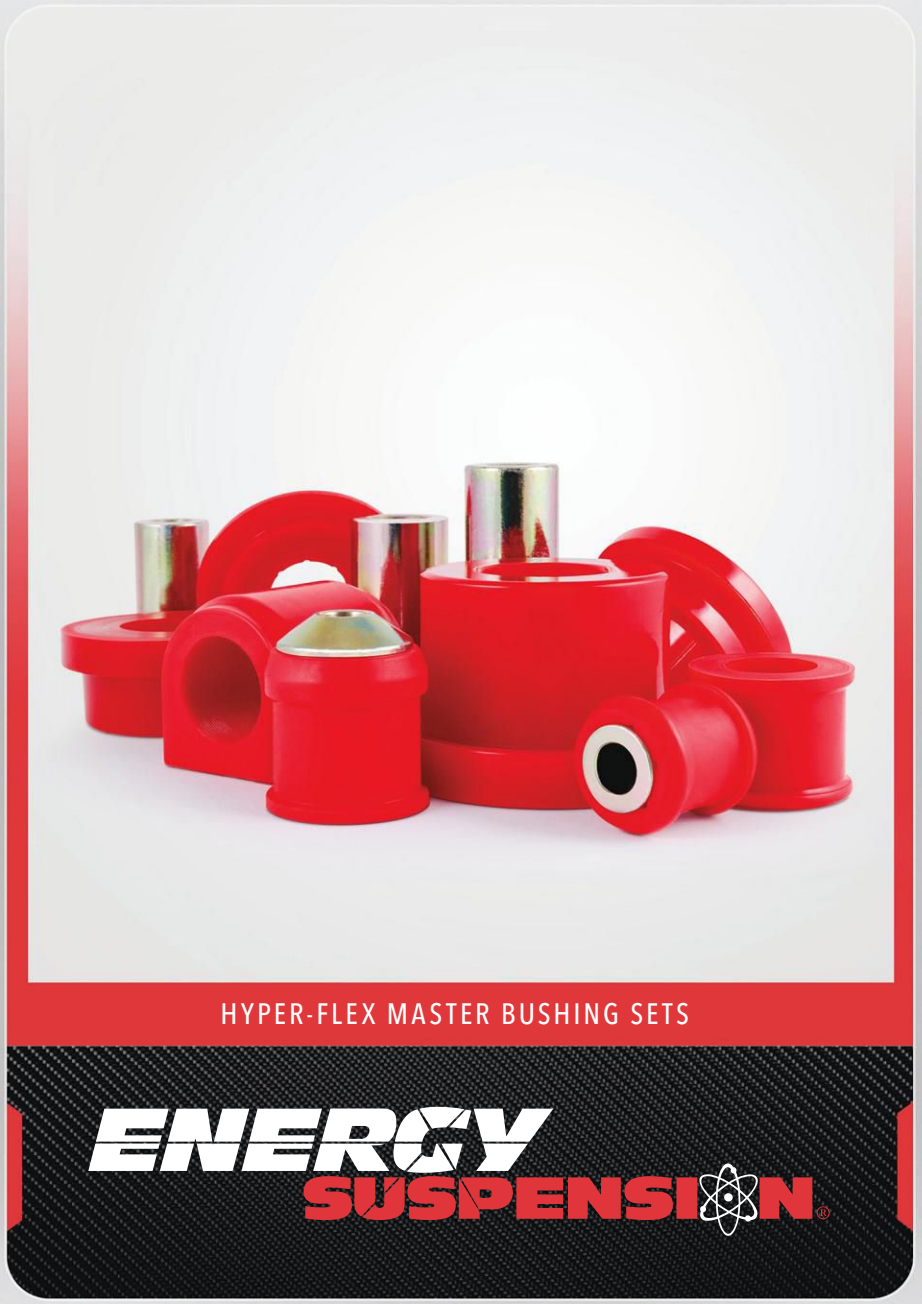
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