DECEMBER 2026

THE SHOP

For performance, restyling & customization professionals

TOWING

CIRCLE TRACK

PERFORMANCE & RACING

Insights & trends from high-speed markets

CROSSOVERS



JEEP'S TWELVE 4 TWELVE

THESHOPMAG.COM

Boost Your Car Count.
Boost Your Reputation.
Boost Your Business.

A Brand in Demand

Expansive Product & Package Selection

Pain-Free Logistics

Increase Sales per Ticket

Personalized Marketing Support





Learn more about installing AMSOIL products at your shop.

AMSOIL®

REALTRUCK

BRING YOUR TRUCK TO LIFE













meyer® DISTRIBUTING

Meyer Distributing is a complete international wholesale distributor specializing in Automotive, RV, Powersports, Towing products and more! With over 1000 product lines, Meyer has a large inventory of parts to service their customers. With strategically positioned warehouse facilities, Meyer Distributing can offer next-day delivery to most locations.

MEYERDISTRIBUTING.COM | 800.639.3787

CONTENTS

THESHOP // DECEMBER 2026 // Volume 29 Number 7

FEATURES

BUSINESS

6
STANDARDS OF EXCELLENCE
How shop owners can improve customer treatment for a competitive advantage.
By Jhan R. Dolphin

PERFORMANCE



12
PREFERRED LANE
How to become the shop of choice for local circle track racers.
By John Carollo

20
PERFORMANCE & RACING
Recent news from the world of motorsports, car shows & automotive culture.

28
CITY AUTO PARTS: THE WAY PARTS BUYING SHOULD BE
The big chains can't match the knowledge & experience of Tom Peterson & his team.
By Tony Thacker

32
PERFORMANCE PRODUCTS
Stock your shelves with these go-fast goodies.



ON THE COVER
From opportunities in the circle track market to the latest happenings in the world of performance, there's always something new for speed shops to discover.
Coverage begins on page 12.
(Main photo courtesy Nissan; inset photo courtesy Jeep)

RESTYLING

34
GET IT TOGETHER
Tips for building strong connections with aftermarket towing customers.
By Jef White

44
MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE
Consumers love CUVs for their versatility & go-anywhere attitude.
By Jef White



52
BLACK OPTIX TINT: BUILDING A NATIONAL BRAND
Repeatable processes have helped grow this window film & PPF franchise.
By Maura Keller

58
WRANGLER PACKAGES BY THE DOZEN
Jeep Brand's Twelve 4 Twelve program introduced 12 Wrangler special editions in 12 months.

65
RESTYLING PRODUCTS
Parts to accessorize any ride.



DEPARTMENTS

DRIVER'S SEAT 4
AFTERMARKET ALLEY 66
AD INDEX 67
ONE MORE THING 68

TRI-STATE ENTERPRISES, INC.
Automotive Parts & Accessories

BILSTEIN

BILSTEIN B8 8100

NOW AVAILABLE FOR FORD SUPER DUTY



8100
DSA Front



8100
DSA Rear

BILSTEIN B8 8100

BILSTEIN B8 8100: BILSTEIN B8 8100 reservoir shock absorbers are a direct fit solution for lifted trucks and SUVs. Constructed from aerospace quality billet components, the large 2.65" shock body paired with a unique remote reservoir offers a higher oil volume capacity to control heat while tackling rough road surfaces over long distances. ZoneControl R technology eliminates harsh suspension top-out events and the need for an external limit strap. The DSA version also features fully adjustable high and low speed compression settings. Whether rugged trails or asphalt roads, the 8100's monotube design and 60mm piston with digressive valving offers consistent comfort and control so you can tame the terrain in style.

FEATURES & BENEFITS:

- 2.65" OD shock body and reservoir
- 60mm large bore digressive piston offers a greater range of tunability and delivers exceptional comfort without sacrificing control
- ZoneControl R technology eliminates harsh suspension top-out events and the need for an external limit strap by incorporating a double piston design offering 2 stages of rebound valving
- 8100 (ZoneControl R DSA) features fully adjustable high and low speed compression settings with click adjuster knobs to tailor your ride.
- Vehicle specific shock tuning provides an optimum ride and handling experience
- Direct fit for an easy installation
- 60mm remote reservoir with billet mount offers increased oil capacity for consistent performance over rough terrain
- 18mm piston rod provides brute tensile strength and reduces internal gas force ramp-up providing a smoother ride
- Billet rod end with vulcanized mounts for an exact OE fit and long-term durability
- Owner rebuildable and revalvable
- Made in the USA
- Limited 2-year warranty

FIND YOUR PRODUCT
bilstein.com

www.eTristate.com (800) 442-8831 @etristateinc @tri.state.enterprises *HQ:* 5412 S 24th St. Ft Smith, AR 72901

At Tri-State, our team of knowledgeable and courteous salespeople brings years of training and experience in both truck accessories and hard parts. Our mission is to provide the products our customers need quickly and efficiently. We proudly offer one of the largest selections of OEM and aftermarket parts in the South-Central Region, stocking more than 100,000 SKUs from over 480 trusted Vendor Partners.





Jef White
Editor in Chief
theshopmag.com

Enormous Numbers Show US Aftermarket Still Going Strong

It's sometimes good to remember that the specialty automotive aftermarket we operate in every day is actually part of the much larger general automotive aftermarket, which encompasses vehicle repair and replacement services and not just upgrades.

Just how much is "much larger"? Well, the global automotive aftermarket was expected to grow to $2.65 trillion in 2026—a $35 billion gain compared to the same assessment last year. The U.S. aftermarket, including light- and heavy-duty vehicles, accounts for $599.7 billion of that $2.65 trillion worldwide, which works out to about 1.9% of the current forecast for the full U.S. gross domestic product (GDP).

The statistics come courtesy of the most recent media guide published by the Automotive Aftermarket Products Expo (AAPEX), which runs concurrently with the SEMA Show in Las Vegas every year.

"The aftermarket is defined as the products and services that safely maintain or repair vehicles after the initial sale," says Liz Goad, MEMA Aftermarket Suppliers vice president of events. "It is an enormous market known for slow but reliably steady growth, because there are 1.61 billion vehicles in operation around the world—and all of them require maintenance and repairs."

The 2026 AAPEX Media Guide is packed with statistics, such as:

- ***Aftermarket size.*** The U.S. aftermarket for light-duty vehicles was expected to grow 5.2% in 2026 to $457 billion. The aftermarket for heavy-duty vehicles is valued at another $142.9 billion, for a combined total of $599.7 billion.
- ***Vehicular miles traveled.*** U.S. residents operated 294 million light vehicles in 2025 and drove 3.32 trillion miles. That's a little more than one vehicle and 13,700 miles traveled per each of the 242.3 million U.S. licensed drivers. There are an additional 9.8 million heavy-duty vehicles in operation (VIO) that were driven for 329.6 billion miles.
- ***The average age of vehicles in operation.*** The average age of U.S. vehicles continues to grow as new car prices rise. As we've previously reported, the combined average age of light vehicles in the U.S. is 12.94 years—up from the 12.8 calculated last year. When considered separately, light trucks average 11.9 years of age and cars average 15 years.
- ***The aftermarket's contribution to employment.*** The automotive aftermarket provided more than 4.87 million jobs in 2025 across suppliers, manufacturers, retailers, independent repair facilities and more. That's about 3.6% of the total U.S. labor force, which the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics puts at 163 million people, ages 16 and older. Wages in many of these jobs grew in step, or even outpaced, the rate of U.S. inflation, the report notes.
- ***Automotive repair capacity.*** Independent repair facilities accounted for 72% of the available repair capacity in the U.S. in 2025. Dealerships accounted for the other 28%. In terms of dollars, aggregate sales from independent repair facilities totaled $312.7 billion in 2025, compared with $121.4 billion at dealerships.
- ***Strong M&A market.*** There were 354 aftermarket merger and acquisition (M&A) transactions in 2025, compared with 337 in 2024 and 306 in 2023.

"These statistics demonstrate just how dependent the world is on the automotive aftermarket, which is especially true for the U.S., given the paucity of public transportation," says Mark Bogdansky, Auto Care Association vice president of trade shows and community engagement. "Whether for work, play or business, almost everything in this country moves on a vehicle that relies on the aftermarket to keep it operating safely."

As 2027 quickly approaches, these big numbers show the aftermarket is going strong. Learn more at https://www.aapexshow.com/press-release/aapex-2026-media-guide/. ***TS***

THE SHOP

EDITORIAL

EDITOR IN CHIEF: Jef White
jwhite@cahabamedia.com

MANAGING EDITOR: Chris Main
cmain@cahabamedia.com

EXECUTIVE EDITOR: Jennifer King
jdking@cahabamedia.com

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS:
John Carollo, Jhan R. Dolphin, Maura Keller, Tony Thacker

CREATIVE SERVICES

ART DIRECTOR: Elizabeth Chick

DIGITAL PROJECT MANAGER: Greg Ragsdale

WEB DEVELOPER: Greg Caudle

CIRCULATION

SUBSCRIPTION CHANGES & INQUIRIES:
customercare@cahabamedia.com

ADVERTISING

SENIOR ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE WEST COAST
Krystal Franklin
kfranklin@cahabamedia.com

ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE EAST COAST
Luke LaValle
llavalle@cahabamedia.com

CLIENT SERVICES COORDINATOR:
Holly Strickland
hstrickland@cahabamedia.com

CAHABA MEDIA GROUP

PUBLISHER: Matthew G. Conroy

VP OF FINANCE: Brandon Whittemore

DIRECTOR OF CONTENT: Elizabeth Manning

DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS: Laurie Tisdale

DIRECTOR OF SALES: Stacy Marshall

P.O. Box 530067
Birmingham, AL 35253

PRINTED WITH SOY INK · BPA WORLDWIDE · CERTIFIED AUDIENCE · TORA TRUCK & OFF-ROAD ALLIANCE · CAN MEMBER · PRO PROFESSIONAL RESTYLERS ORGANIZATION

THE SHOP (ISSN 2380-7415) is published monthly (in January, February, March, April, May, June, July, August, September, October, November and December) by Cahaba Media Group, 221 Rele Street, Suite 530067, Mountain Brook, AL 35223.Periodicals postage paid at Birmingham, AL and additional mailing offices. Free to qualified recipients within the United States and U.S. Possessions. Publisher reserves the right to determine qualifications. Annual Subscription Prices: U.S. – one year, $45; two years, $80; three years, $108. Canada – one year, $76; two years, $142, three years, $201 (U.S. Funds); All other countries – one year $98, two years $186, three years, $267 (U.S. funds). Customer Service, call 800-256-2785. POSTMASTER: Please send address changes to THE SHOP, PO Box 271, Lincolnshire, IL 60069-9835. All items submitted to THE SHOP become the sole property of THE SHOP and Cahaba Media Group and cannot be reproduced without the written consent of the publisher. Advertisers and/or their agencies, jointly and severally, assume all liabilities for printed advertisements in THE SHOP. Opinions expressed in THE SHOP may not necessarily reflect the opinion of the magazine, its management or its advertisers. Letters, photographs and manuscripts welcome. VOLUME 29 ISSUE 7

FUELING PASSION

Motor State DISTRIBUTING



WE OFFER THE FULL LINE OF QA1

FOR OVER 60 YEARS, MOTOR STATE DISTRIBUTING HAS FUELED THE PASSION OF RACERS. AT ITS CORE, RACING AND THE PARTS THAT SUPPORT THE RACING INDUSTRY HAVE BEEN AT THE HEART OF WHAT WE DO. SINCE 1964, OUR FOUNDER, GEORGE LANE, UNDERSTOOD THAT THIS WAS MORE THAN JUST A BUSINESS; IT'S ABOUT PASSION.

WWW.MOTORSTATE.COM 800.772.2678 @MOTORSTATEDISTRIBUTING

Standards of EXCELLENCE

How shop owners can improve customer treatment for a competitive advantage.



BY JHAN R. DOLPHIN
PHOTOS COURTESY PREFIX CORPORATION



Jhan R Dolphin is vice president of Prefix Corporation, a Michigan-based company responsible for creating many of the auto industry's high-profile concept vehicles and prototypes for OEMs across the globe. Jhan has spent much of his career training and speaking to industry groups on the topics of sales, customer service and marketing. He can be reached at jrobertmarketing.com

"Don't get me started."

I catch myself saying those words far more often than I'd like—usually while talking with other business owners, managers and executives in our industry.

The topic is almost always the same: people. The never-ending quest to find those rare individuals who "get it." The ones you can trust to show up with enthusiasm, care and professionalism—the same way you try to show up every day.

Whether you're the customer standing in a local retail store or the shop owner managing a small team, the struggle is real. Getting employees to genuinely "show up"—mentally, emotionally and professionally—has become one of the biggest challenges facing businesses today.

This crisis (and, yes, I believe it is a crisis) is widespread. But here's the good news: shop owners who understand the problem and take deliberate steps to train their staff gain a massive competitive advantage. The basics—manners, respect, communication, follow-through—may feel like Business 101, but they're becoming increasingly rare. And that means the shops who invest in them will stand out instantly.

So, the question becomes, "What should shop owners actually do?" Here are some suggestions:

SET THE STANDARD & MAKE IT VISIBLE

Customers can feel the culture of a shop within the first 10 seconds of walking in. That culture starts with the owner.

When owners and managers demonstrate excellence, it becomes contagious.

- Define your expectations in writing, not just verbally.
- Show your team what "great" looks like through real examples, not vague pep talks.
- Model the behavior every single day. Employees will eventually mirror what they see.
- When owners tolerate mediocrity, mediocrity becomes the norm. When owners demonstrate excellence, excellence becomes contagious.

TRAIN FOR SKILLS, NOT JUST TASKS

Most shops teach what to do. Very few teach how to treat people while doing it. Here's the difference: Tasks are mechanical; treatment is emotional. Customers remember the

APEX by BendPak

APEX™ WHEEL SERVICE. BUILT SMART. PRICED RIGHT.

APEX by BendPak delivers dependable wheel service performance built for daily shop use, with tire changers that provide consistent clamping, smooth bead breaking, and controlled operation, paired with wheel balancers engineered for accurate, repeatable measurements and fast cycle times. Every APEX wheel service machine is designed for stability, precision, and durability, giving technicians reliable results vehicle after vehicle without unnecessary complexity or wasted features.

NEW

AT26A
TIRE CHANGER
SKU **5140350**
$3,595*

FREE SHIPPING**

SHOP NOW

Wheel not included.

AT26
TIRE CHANGER
SKU **5140351**
$3,195*

AB28
WHEEL BALANCER
SKU **5140352**
$2,695*

BENDPAK.COM/APEX ◆ 1-800-253-2363

©2026 BendPak Inc. All rights reserved. *Price valid thru December 31, 2026. **Free shipping to direct shipping points within the 48 contiguous United States only.



Customers can feel the culture of a shop within the first 10 seconds of walking in.



emotional part. Effective training should include:

- Greeting techniques that feel warm, not robotic
- Listening skills that uncover real needs (needs analysis)
- Conflict resolution that de-escalates instead of inflames
- Follow-up habits that build trust

If you don't teach these things, employees will default to whatever habits they brought with them—and those habits are often the problem.

BUILD A CULTURE OF ACCOUNTABILITY...

...without becoming a drill sergeant. Accountability isn't about punishment. It's about clarity. Employees should know:

- Exactly what's expected
- What's acceptable
- What's not acceptable
- What happens when standards aren't met

The shops that struggle the most are the ones where owners see problems but avoid addressing them. Accountability is uncomfortable, but inconsistency is worse.

A simple weekly rhythm helps:

- Quick check-ins
- Micro-coaching moments
- Clear feedback on how staff handled situations

These small corrections can prevent big problems.

HIRE FOR ATTITUDE, TRAIN FOR SKILL

You can teach a person how to use a point-of-sale (POS) system. You can teach them how to install a part. You can teach them how to follow a process. But you cannot teach someone to care.

The best shop owners hire people with:

- Curiosity
- Warmth
- Work ethic
- Pride in their reputation
- A natural desire to help

Then they train the technical side. If you hire the opposite (someone who is technically strong but emotionally indifferent),

DISC BRAKES
wilwood



AERO6-DM
DIRECT MOUNT

Brake kits for Ford, Chevy/GMC, Toyota, Jeep, RAM and MBZ 2500 Sprinter Van

Better Braking Performance for Heavy-Duty Vehicles

FITS MOST 17" AND LARGER WHEELS

NEW! COLOR OPTIONS
*Additional charges may apply.

2022 FORD RAPTOR
Ryan Hoegner

wilwood.com
805.388.1188

DESIGNED · TESTED ★★★ USA ★★★ MANUFACTURED

DISC BRAKES
wilwood
ESTABLISHED 1977



Most shops teach employees what to do, but very few teach how to treat people while doing it.

you'll spend your days putting out fires.

REWARD THE BEHAVIORS YOU WANT TO SEE

Employees repeat what gets rewarded. Not just money—recognition, praise, opportunity, responsibility and trust.

Examples:

- "I saw how you handled that frustrated customer, great job."
- "Thanks for jumping in to help work the front counter."
- "Your follow-through with customers this week was excellent."

These micro-rewards cost nothing, but they build a culture where good behavior feels noticed and valued.

DISCUSS CUSTOMER TREATMENT DAILY

Customer service shouldn't be a once-a-year training topic. It should be part of the daily language of the shop.

Techniques to try:

- Morning huddles
- End-of-day wins
- Weekly customer stories
- Role-playing scenarios

When customer treatment becomes a constant conversation, it becomes a constant priority.

A BUSINESS TO REMEMBER

Customers don't compare you to other shops—they compare you to every experience they have. Your shop isn't competing only with other competitor shops. You're competing with:

- The restaurant that treated them well
- The hotel that remembered their name
- The online store that shipped fast
- The brand that made them feel valued

Customers carry those expectations everywhere. If your shop feels cold, chaotic or indifferent, they'll notice. If your shop feels warm, organized and attentive, they'll notice that, too.

THE BOTTOM LINE

The crisis is real. The shortage of people who "get it" is real. But the solution isn't waiting for unicorn employees to magically appear at your front door.

The solution is leadership. Shop owners who intentionally train, coach, model and reinforce great customer treatment will outperform those who simply hope their staff figures it out.

Customers don't need perfection. They need care, clarity, respect and follow-through. And the shops that deliver those things—consistently—will win. **TS**



Employees repeat what gets rewarded.

SERIOUS PERFORMANCE.

SERIOUS WHOLESALE POWER BY ATECH MOTORSPORTS.

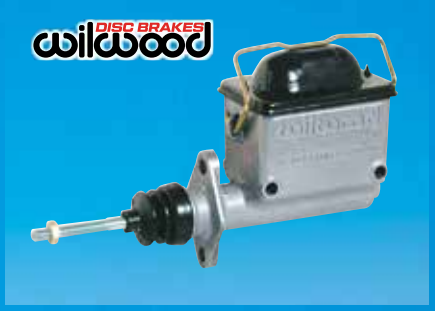
- Access to Over 1,500 Brands
- Unbeatable Service and Satisfaction
- Huge Inventory—We Stock it so You Don't Have to
- Four National Warehouses
- FAST, FREE Shipping
- We Export at Competitive Rates



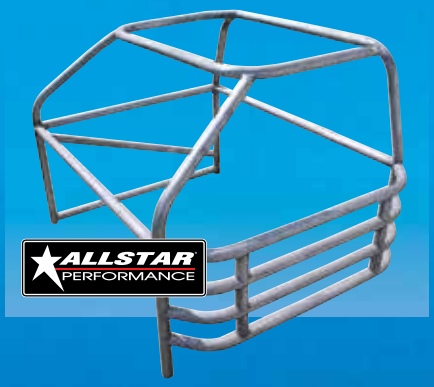
PRI BOOTH #3349
12/10-12/12













APPLY TODAY!

SHOP THESE BRANDS AND MORE
ATECHMOTORSPORTS.COM

TALLMADGE, OH • MCDONOUGH, GA • SPARKS, NV • ARLINGTON, TX
800.517.1040 • 1.330.630.0888 • FAX: 1.330.630.5365

ATECH MOTORSPORTS

GLOBAL WHOLESALE DISTRIBUTOR | POWERED BY Summit

Some parts are not legal for sale or use in California or other states with similar laws/regulations. Please check your state and/or local laws/regulations. Typographical errors and errors in description or photography are subject to correction. ©2026 AUTOSALES, INC.

WHSE26TS

PERFORMANCE

Performance & Racing p. 20 | City Auto Parts p. 28
Products p. 32



Preferred Lane

How to become the shop of choice for local circle track racers.

BY JOHN CAROLLO

Circle tack racers want results—from their cars and their local speed shop. Businesses looking to partner with this no-nonsense crowd need to deliver the products, service and expertise that provide a winning edge.

With a mix of events, series, tracks and regulations that always seem to be changing, the circle track market demands professionals who are all-in in support of their customers' success. Establishing trust and then overdelivering are hallmarks of top shops and builders.

To gain the preferred lane with these competitors, businesses will want inside information. Suppliers are ready to share, offering insights on the latest trends, sales techniques and hot products needed to become a lasting performance partner with the local circle track crowd.

RACERS IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

When forming a game plan to serve local circle track racers, shops should think locally.

"The strongest opportunities tend to be services that combine technical expertise, quick turnaround and recurring customer relationships," says J.R. Granatelli, president of Granatelli Motor Sports. "In a world full of 'What have you done for me lately?' and keyboard cowboys, strong customer service and a live person answering the phone goes a super-long way. Racers continue to want speed, durability and value simultaneously."

The circle track market rewards professionals who are all-in in support of their customers' success. (Photo by Casey Calhoun on Unsplash)

Shops can check the rules and the trends for the tracks and series operating locally to identify the parts they need on their shelves.

"For instance, some regional dirt tracks and modified classes have adapted the GM LS engine platform in recent years," says Michael Zeranski of Canton Racing Products. "Despite the dominance of the early pushrod small-blocks in circle track, the LS continues to gain ground."

Here in the off-season, a good place to

ACT

ADVANCED CLUTCH TECHNOLOGY®

ACT GR86 & SUBARU BRZ SFI-APPROVED
SINGLE CLUTCH KIT FOR:

2022-2026 TOYOTA GR86 & SUBARU BRZ
2.4L (FA24D) 6-SPEED

TORQUE CAPACITY
366-556 FT/LBS

SEARCH FOR SB14/SB15/SB16 CLUTCH KITS



206 EAST AVE K4, LANCASTER CA 93535
ADVANCEDCLUTCH.COM | 661-940-7555

CIRCLE TRACK PRODUCTS

HOT PRODUCTS:
GM9-HDR6 Clutch Kit Paired with the 600585 Prolite Flywheel
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Popular circle track combination for LS-series V-8 engines equipped with a 26-spline transmission; particularly well-suited for 1/4- to 3/8-mile dirt tracks, where quick throttle response and strong acceleration coming out of the corners are critical.

Advanced Clutch Technology
Rich Barsamian
Vice President of Sales & Marketing

HOT PRODUCTS:
Circle Track Oil Pans
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Designed specifically for circle track racing with a baffling system and tray that direct the oil to the right side of the pan for the circle track-specific oil pickup to collect; small-block Chevy applications particularly popular.

Canton Racing Products
Michael Zeranski

HOT PRODUCTS:
Edelbrock VRS Performance/Race Carburetors
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Perform right out of the box with little more than a jet or air bleed change; 500cfm two-barrel version coming soon.

Edelbrock/COMP Cams
Jay Adams
Performance Account Manager

HOT PRODUCTS:
Granatelli 0-ohm Ignition Wires
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Easy to sell and install; make vehicles more responsive; can be paired with ignition coils as a consumables package at the end of the season; serve as a reliability and ignition-performance upgrade that racers understand and justify.

Granatelli Motor Sports
J.R. Granatelli
President

HOT PRODUCTS:
LS 7.25-Inch Clutch Kits with Aluminum Flywheel
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
The aluminum flywheel limits the amount of rotating mass while still allowing the use of a traditional bellhousing setup.

McLeod
Bob Scheid
Vice President

HOT PRODUCTS:
Sportsman Series Rocker Arms
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Designed to deliver performance-engineered features at an attractive price point; incorporate an oil-deflector shield to help manage lubrication around the rocker assembly.

PRW Power Inc.
Cary Redman
VP Sales & CRO

HOT PRODUCT:
Premium Quick-Change Rear End Lower Shaft
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Made from high-strength domestic 300M steel with special attention to critical areas; stress relieved.

Strange Oval
Mike Rhoades
Technical Sales & Product Development Manager

HOT PRODUCTS:
XRZ Zero-Drag Calipers
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Applications for pavement late model racing; designed as a stress-flow forged aluminum body that is lighter and stiffer; unique center X-bridge strengthens the caliper body without adding mass or obstructing airflow to the brake rotor or pads.

Wilwood Engineering
David Brzozowski
Motorsports Manager



Shops can check the rules and trends of their local tracks and series to identify the important parts they need to stock. (Photos courtesy Canton Racing Products)

start is with products racers use throughout the year.

"Ancillary items are sometimes overlooked, but they are the ones that every race team can use," says David Brzozowski, motorsports manager for Wilwood Engineering. "These include a variety of brake pad plates and compounds, brake fluids and bleed bottles, brake lines of different lengths, dry-break/quick-disconnects used for faster caliper swaps, etc."

Combining complementary products will help racers avoid issues before they occur.

"Sell the entire valvetrain—not just the rocker arm," says Cary Redman, vice president of sales and chief revenue officer for PRW Power Inc. "When a circle track customer comes in for rocker arms, use the opportunity to review the complete valvetrain system: rocker ratio, pushrod length, valve springs, retainers, studs, guide plates and fasteners. Racing customers are already investing in performance, so positioning complementary components as a matched system increases average ticket value while helping prevent expensive failures."

Shops that take budgets into account are also preferred, says Bob Scheid, vice president of McLeod.

"Local racers are looking to gain every advantage they can while at the same time limiting their investment," he says. "Share your knowledge regarding which parts will



If you're upgrading one valvetrain component, make sure everything around it can handle the upgrade as well. (Photos courtesy PRW Power Inc.)

live longer and provide better performance for the car."

With horsepower increasingly restricted by class rules, racers are often looking for any competitive advantage, says Rich Barsamian, vice president of sales and marketing for Advanced Clutch Technology.

"This creates opportunities for shops to offer specialized suspension tuning, chassis setup, data analysis, drivetrain upgrades and preventative maintenance," he explains. "Shops that help racers improve performance and reliability and reduce downtime can build long-term customer relationships and generate additional revenue beyond simply selling parts."

As much as top products, racers also turn to local shops for advice and recommendations from the sales staff, says Mike Rhoades, technical sales and product development manager at Strange Oval. And when those salespeople and installers need assistance, "lean on manufacturers frequently for training and product knowledge."

That knowledge and experience can even transfer to race day, with opportunities to help racers take advantage of changing track conditions

"There's always been a focus on more power and always will be. That being said, we are looking more closely at the layout of the actual events," says Jay Adams, performance account manager at Edelbrock Group/COMP Cams. "For example, specifically in the instance of dirt tracks, how many classes does the promotor typically







Get involved with local tracks, understand the different classes and rules and become a resource for racers. (Photos courtesy Advanced Clutch Technology)

run on a race night, and how does it affect track surface conditions by feature time? Are there any rules concerning running the same tire(s) all night? Does the track tend to take rubber or slick off, etc. Is the driver typically a bottom feeder or will he get up and run it on the cushion against the fence? Knowing these things can become increasingly more valuable in helping the driver go faster."

FOCUS AREAS

Regardless of track type or vehicle model, there are some universal truths shops can focus on to help racers year-round.

"Sell quality parts to minimize DNFs or unnecessary frequent purchases, instead of selling whatever is trendy for the day," says Rhoades. "We need to have the customer's best interests in mind."

Also recognize that circle track racers have specialized needs, says Scheid.

"If you are a shop that also sells to other racing markets, do not treat them alike. Know what that specific form of racing needs to be successful," he says.

Brzozowski recommends asking customers exactly what they are doing with the components needed for their specific vehicle.

"You can never ask too many questions," he says. "'What type of oval or circle track racing are you doing?' 'Is it on pavement or dirt?' What is the size of the tracks they run on primarily? Also, what type and class of car are they running, since there are usually numerous divisions involved."

Shops will benefit from a systematic approach to each project, says Granatelli.

"A very common mistake is selling or installing a component in isolation instead of treating it as part of the entire chassis setup," he notes. "A shop may sell a customer a stiffer spring, different shock, control arm or sway bar because the customer says, 'I need more grip,' but the component may not address the actual cause of the handling problem. Circle track setups depend on the interaction of springs, geometry, shocks, weight distribution, ride height and tires. Changing one component can alter ride height, corner weights, suspension geometry or handling balance. A good



Get to know local racers and teams in order to anticipate their product needs. (Photo courtesy Wilwood Engineering)



Racers turn to local shops for advice and recommendations. (Photo courtesy Strange Oval)

installation should be followed by measurements and, ideally, a baseline setup sheet."

Engines also work as complete systems, says Adams, with budget and activity both playing a role in finding the customer's sweet spot.

"Inevitably, if you ask a racer—and some engine builders—'How much power do you want to make?' they'll nearly always say, 'As much as we can.' But, more often than not, that's not really the case, because they don't have the budget to maintain the components. Rockers, pushrods, lifters and valve springs will all take substantially more abuse when doing an all-out cam grind. Taking the time to get to know more about the teams' budget constraints will usually lead you to finding more dependable speed, focusing on reliability and longevity."

Zeranski offers an example of how shop experience can save racers a major headache.

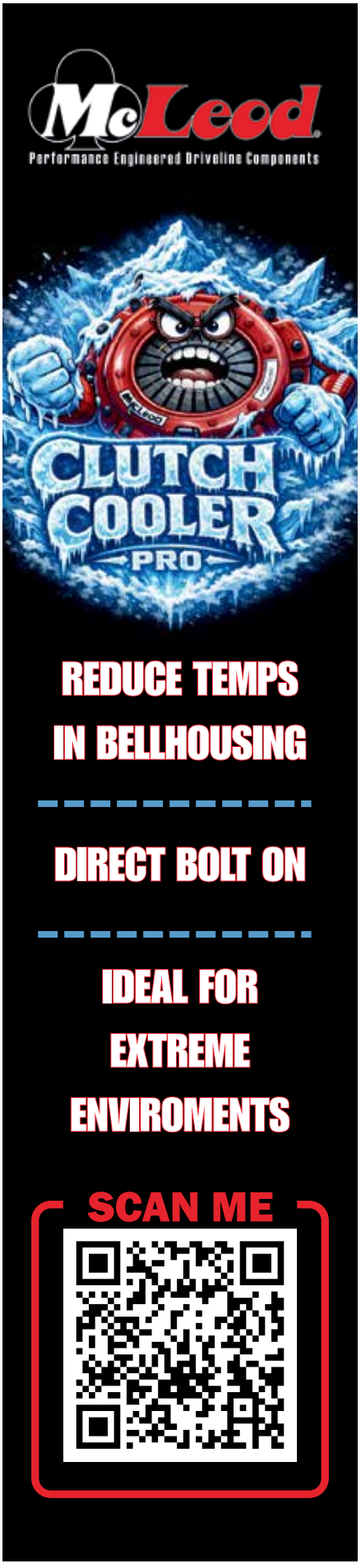
"Our circle track oil pans are among the shallowest pans we make due to the ground clearance demands of circle track cars. Our shallowest wet sump pan is a 6.5-inch-deep circle track pan that can only be used with a regular-volume pump unless a modification is done," he says. "Racers trying to install 6.5-inch-deep pans onto engines with high-volume pumps will experience pan-to-pump interference. If customers are not comfortable taking out a block of wood and a hammer to clearance that application, it's best they stick with a regular-volume pump."

Avoiding overly technical solutions is appreciated by racers who just want to go race.

"One common mistake is selling racers more technology or adjustability than



Local racers are always looking to maximize performance while reducing costs. (Photo courtesy McLeod)





Businesses looking to partner with circle trackers need to deliver the products, service and expertise that provide a winning edge. (Photo by Casey Calhoun on Unsplash)

they know how to use," says Barsamian. "Advanced components can improve performance, but without a proper baseline setup and an understanding of how to make adjustments, racers can actually hurt their performance. Shops should focus on matching products to the racer's experience level and providing the guidance needed to get the most out of their investments."

Then, when it's time to formulate a plan, Redman advises against choosing racing components by catalog specification alone.

"Build the system, measure the system and verify the system," he says.

IN THE KNOW

It's no surprise that getting involved with local racers and tracks is the clearest path to business success in the circle track market.

"Maybe help by sponsoring a certain event or night race that might include banners and PA announcements letting everyone know about your shop and location," suggests Brzozowski from Wilwood. "Most important, however, is getting to know your local racers and race team owners on a more personal level."

Barsamian from Advanced Clutch Technology identifies 1/4- to 3/8-mile grassroots dirt track racing and classes including Street Stock, Hobby Stock and Modified as areas of growth.

"Shops that provide knowledgeable recommendations build customer loyalty and generate repeat business," he says. "Shops can expand their customer base by offering performance clutches, lightweight flywheels, suspension components and drivetrain upgrades, and should get involved with their local tracks, understand the different classes and rules and become a resource for these racers. It's an opportunity to generate new sales, build customer loyalty and create repeat business throughout the racing season."

The highest value for businesses in today's fast-paced, high-demand racing environment is to be a one-stop shop for inventory and rebuild services, says Rhoades from Strange Oval.

"The demand for rebuild-related service for transmissions, power steering boxes and transmissions is increasing, as fewer customers are willing to take on these projects themselves," he observes.

Circle track is a unique market with different needs and a different feel than street performance, drag racing or other motorsports, says Zeranski from Canton Racing Products.

"Target your circle track market with circle track-specific offerings. With demanding weekly racing schedules, circle track racers have little time between races to make fixes or upgrades. So, they will appreciate having parts available when they need them."



The strongest opportunities tend to be services that combine technical expertise, quick turnaround and recurring customer relationships. (Photo courtesy Granatelli Motor Sports)

Just as important, notes Granatelli from Granatelli Motor Sports, is strong customer service.

"All too often, customers get lost in phone mail jail or are being forced to text or email," he says. "When a racer has a question, they want to speak to other racers who have firsthand knowledge."

It pays to show customers you have their best interests in mind.

"Tell them, 'If you're upgrading one valvetrain component, let's make sure everything around it can handle the upgrade,'" says Redman from PRW Power. "This approach turns a $200-plus rocker arm sale into a broader performance package while giving the shop an opportunity to demonstrate technical expertise and create repeat customers."



Selling racers on power and reliability, along with a package of performance parts that fits within their maintenance regime, is a proven formula for success.
(Photos courtesy Edelbrock Group/COMP Cams)

Then lean on suppliers to fill in any gaps.

"Build great relationships with manufacturers," says Scheid from McLeod. "Even if you don't buy direct from them, build relationships so you can get the latest product information. Know one of the inside tech associates. Don't rely just on a secondary source for what you need to be an expert on that product line."

Ultimately, shops that use their knowledge, experience and connections to anticipate racers' needs will find the most success.

"Keying-in customers to things they should really watch is a value-add that not everyone offers. Selling them on power and reliability, along with a package of performance parts that fits within their maintenance regime, is crucial," says Adams from Edelbrock Group/COMP Cams. "Doing so shows the customer that you are partnering with them for the long haul—not just until you get the motor loaded up and the 16 digits of their credit card number processed. Residual sales and developing long-term relationships are the keys." ***TS***





PERFORMANCE & RACING

Recent news from the world of motorsports, car shows & automotive culture.









HONDA RACING DOCUSERIES CELEBRATES GIL DE FERRAN'S SPEED RECORD

A new documentary series by Honda Racing Corporation USA celebrates the life and achievement of the late champion driver Gil de Ferran, who set the all-time closed-course lap record at 241.428 mph. Available on the HRC US YouTube channel, the docuseries "241.428" is presented by the HRC Heritage Racing Program.

Analyzing the record run and featuring interviews with motorsports legends including Roger Penske, Zak Brown, Rick Mears, Helio Castroneves, Dario Franchitti and Tony Kannan, the four-episode presentation focuses on how de Ferran recorded an average speed of 241.428 mph during qualifying for the 2000 CART IndyCar Series race at California Speedway in Fontana, driving Team Penske's Reynard 2KI powered by a 2.65L Honda HR-0 turbocharged V-8.

More than a quarter-century later, de Ferran's closed-course lap record still stands across all forms of circuit racing, including Formula 1, IndyCar and NASCAR—a testament to the driver, machine and engine that worked together to achieve it.

"Gil de Ferran was a big part of the Honda racing family and he holds a special place in our hearts beyond his major championships and race victories, but 241.428 was an extraordinary achievement," says Kelvin Fu, president of HRC US. "Hearing Gil recount his record-setting run raises the hair on the back of my neck—a powerful reminder of who Gil was and what makes '241.428' such a special documentary."

Developed and directed by motorsports journalist Marshall Pruett, with creative direction by motorsports agency CoForce, "241.428" celebrates de Ferran's legacy, the Honda engine that powered his record-setting run and the Penske-modified Reynard chassis that carried him into the history books.

A four-part documentary series by Honda Racing Corporation USA celebrates Gil de Ferran's all-time closed-course lap record of 241.428 mph. (Images courtesy Honda Racing Corp.)

The series also follows the recent restoration and return to the track of de Ferran's 2001 Reynard 01I-Honda, now owned by Brown, CEO of McLaren Racing, and restored with the help of the HRC Heritage Racing Program.

The championship-winning race car was driven by Brown at the 2026 Rolex Monterey Motorsports Reunion at Laguna Seca in an emotional tribute to de Ferran chronicled in the final episode of "241.428."

Ferran was a two-time CART Series champion with Team Penske and Honda power, winning the titles in 2000 and 2001. In 2003, he also won racing's biggest event, the Indianapolis 500, driving for Penske.



STEERING YOU
IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION®





TILT STEERING COLUMNS

With Floor or Column Shift Columns available, these columns can come in Polished, Mill Finish, Black Powder Coat, or Custom Powder Coat options that can make your column truly your own. **Made in the USA!**

VISIT OUR WEBSITE TO SEE OUR FULL SELECTION



RACK & PINION CONVERSION KITS

Flaming River's Rack & Pinion Cradle Kits deliver modern steering performance with a precision fit for classic vehicles. Engineered for strength and durability, these kits feature laser-cut cradle mounts and a direct bolt-in design.

Direct fit options for Mustang, Camaro, Chevy, C10, & more!

CHEVY C1500 CRADLE KIT
P/N: FR371KTPWNC



MADE IN THE USA!

SWIPEE DELUXE COLUMN

Designed and engineered with an upgraded turn signal switch, this pre-airbag column includes the ability to control wiper speed, windshield spray, and cruise control. Underneath the turn signal switch is a user-friendly push-button for headlight dimmer. **Made in the USA!**

CUSTOM COLUMN FORMS AVAILABLE AT WWW.FLAMINGRIVER.COM



THE VDOG®

VARIABLE ANGLE GEAR

The ultimate solution to tight firewall clearances. **Made in the USA!**

PART SHOWN: FR20303



FLOOR MOUNTS

The machined aluminum ball swivels for easy positioning of the column at virtually any angle. **Made in the USA!**

PART SHOWN: FR20101C10



POWER RACK & PINIONS

Rack & Pinions are sold with lifetime serviceability! Visit our website to see our full selection!

MADE IN THE USA!



PART SHOWN: FR40001

BILLET-JOINT® U-JOINTS

Find the U-Joint to fit your steering linkage needs. Our U-Joints provide strength and reliability in order for your ride to perform exactly how you want it to! Over 100 variations and **Made in the USA!**



THE MICROSTEER

ELECTRIC POWER ASSISTED STEERING

Can be easily fitted to virtually any vehicle with a manual rack or steering box system

PART SHOWN: FR40200



BE SURE TO VISIT US THIS YEAR AT SEMA SHOW

BOOTH #: 22486

FLAMING RIVER

VISIT: FLAMINGRIVER.COM OR CALL: 800-648-8022

BATTLE OF THE BUILDERS DOCUSERIES DEBUTS

The Specialty Equipment Market Association (SEMA) and RACER Network take automotive enthusiasts behind the scenes of four special vehicle builds in "SEMA Battle of the Builders Presented by Mothers"—a four-part docuseries that premiered in October on RACER Network.

Each approximately 25-minute episode follows one of the four class champions from the 2025 SEMA Battle of the Builders Presented by Mothers, revealing the ideas, challenges and craftsmanship that transformed four distinctive vehicles into award-winning builds. The series gives viewers a closer look at the builders, their creative processes and the countless decisions that shaped their vehicles before they competed on the industry's biggest stage, according to officials.

The featured builders and vehicles are:

- **Thomas Dickerson**, winner of the BFGoodrich Young Guns category, and his 1967 Chevrolet C10
- **Tim Franklin** and **Pete Jackson**, winners of the Sport Compact/Import Performance/Luxury/Exotics category, and their 1960 Porsche Custom 356
- **Ron Jones**, winner of the 4WD/Off-Road category, and his 1973 Volkswagen Thing
- **Troy Trepanier**, winner of the Hot Rod/Hot Rod Truck category and the overall Best of Show for the 2025 competition, and his 1936 Ford-inspired Roadster

"SEMA Battle of the Builders captures the passion and commitment required to create truly exceptional vehicles. Across diverse categories, these four builders demonstrate what is possible in car customization," says CJ Olivares, RACER Group CEO. "This series gives viewers rare access to the vision, obsession and problem-solving it takes to become a champion. Partnering with SEMA to bring these stories to more audiences is an extension of our commitment to celebrating everyone who makes this community special, from the racetrack to the fabrication shop. Whether you turn wrenches or just love great cars, you'll want to watch."

SEMA Battle of the Builders Presented by Mothers is the aftermarket's premier vehicle-building competition, providing SEMA Show builders with an international platform to showcase their craftsmanship, creativity and technical expertise. The competition celebrated its 13th year at the 2026 SEMA Show.



SEMA Battle of the Builders winners Pete Jackson, left, Thomas Dickerson, Troy Trepanier and Ron Jones. (Photo courtesy SEMA)



Troy Trepanier's 1936 Ford-inspired Roadster. (Photo courtesy SEMA)



Tim Franklin and Pete Jackson's 1960 Porsche Custom 356. (Photo courtesy SEMA)



Thomas Dickerson's 1967 Chevrolet C10. (Photo courtesy SEMA)



Ron Jones' 1973 Volkswagen Thing. (Photo courtesy SEMA)

GT40 SPORTS CAR CHAMPIONSHIP SEASON SERIES

Superformance and Safir Engineering are honoring the 60th anniversary of the GT40's famed 1966 racing achievements with the exclusive Championship Season Series. The MKII series GT40s continue the original chassis numbers and will wear one of the liveries seen on the Shelby American, Holman Moody or Alan Mann Racing teams.

For the 1966 season, Ford asked Shelby American, Holman Moody and Alan Mann Racing to work in parallel on the GT40 sports car program in pursuit of a Le Mans victory and the campaign secured three overall major race wins.

Key vehicle features include eight liveries available from Shelby American, Holman Moody or Alan Mann Racing; special 60th Anniversary badges and interior with sound deadening and heat-dissipating trim; gauges with special logos; 15-inch Halibrand-style wheels with aluminum spinners and high-performance tires; Ford 427FE engine installation kit; a Shelby engine available with an aluminum or iron block; twin 10-gallon fuel tanks; front and rear Quick Jacks; and a signed letter or certificate, depending upon the chosen livery. The car's serial number will be etched in the aluminum block



Superformance and Safir Engineering honor the 60th anniversary of the GT40's famed 1966 racing achievements with the Championship Season Series. (Photo courtesy Superformance)

"1966 was a milestone motorsports year when the GT40 sports car finally broke Ferrari's stranglehold on endurance racing," says Lance Stander, CEO of Superformance. "Three teams battled the European powerhouses worldwide that year with the mighty Ford-powered mid-engine car. Our new Championship Season Series is a tribute to those incredible cars. An enthusiast can choose from one of the eight liveries that raced in 1966 with some very special anniversary touches. This is a rare opportunity to own a car with such high potential collectability, which makes the ownership experience even more enjoyable."



ITALIAN POLICE LAMBO USED FOR MEDICAL DELIVERIES

Automobili Lamborghini recently presented a new Temerario destined for the Italian State Police at its Sant'Agata Bolognese headquarters in a ceremony attended by Minister of the Interior Matteo Piantedosi, chairman and CEO Stephan Winkelmann and the company's board of directors.

The super sports car will be used for important services including the emergency transport of organs and medical supplies, joining the Lamborghini cars already in service with the Italian State Police, according to a press release.

With the new model, Automobili Lamborghini and the Italian State Police renew a collaboration that began in 2004. The journey began with the first Gallardo, which as early as September of that same year carried out its first organ transport.

The relationship continued with the Gallardo LP 560-4 and the Huracán, deployed over the years along the country's main motorway arteries, and joined by the Urus Performante, in service since 2023. In total, six vehicles have entered the fleet of the Italian State Police over more than 20 years, playing a part in more than 200 organ transport missions across Italy.



Lamborghini recently presented a new Temerario to the Italian State Police to be used for important services including the emergency transport of organs and medical supplies. (Photo courtesy Automobili Lamborghini)

"With the Temerario, the bond between the House of Sant'Agata Bolognese and the police enters a new phase, confirming a vision in which technological excellence is placed at the service of the community," Lamborghini officials stated in press release. "The Temerario delivers a combination of performance and efficiency which, in the hands of the police, translates into a tool capable of accomplishing the most delicate missions in the shortest possible time."

The Temerario Polizia is powered by an all-new, 4.0L twin-turbo V-8 engine paired with three electric motors for a total output of 920 CV.

PETERSEN MUSEUM LAUNCHES DIECAST SOCIAL EVENT & SUBSCRIPTION



Diecast Social is a subscription and community created by the Petersen Automotive Museum to celebrate diecast collecting with social gatherings and exclusive drops. (Photos courtesy Petersen Automotive Museum)



The Petersen Automotive Museum in Los Angeles has launched Diecast Social, a subscription and community created to celebrate automotive-related diecast collecting with social gatherings and exclusive drops.

The first Diecast Social event took place in October at the museum, featuring exclusive limited-edition releases from vendors including Jada, Spark Models, Bburago/Maisto, AO Racing, LeenCustoms, Greed-Light, IXO, Tarmac Works, Car Tuned, BM Creations, Welly and more.

Diecast Social's initial phase features a limit of 500 subscriptions, providing collectors with early access, exclusive opportunities and benefits including:

- Access to purchase all event-exclusive diecast releases
- 1-hour early admission before general spectators
- Credentials and lanyards for an exclusive event
- Entry into the event raffle
- 10% discount at the museum store on the day of the event

"Diecast collecting is one of the most accessible entry points into automotive culture, and the passion and creativity within this community are equal to any level of the automotive industry," says Terry L. Karges, Petersen Automotive Museum executive director. "There is no better place than the Petersen to serve as its focal point, bringing collectors of all ages together and inspiring the next generation of automotive enthusiasts."

BARRETT-JACKSON EXPANDS SCOTTSDALE AUCTION TO NINE DAYS

Collector car auction company Barrett-Jackson is expanding its flagship Scottsdale Auction in 2027 to nine full days of live action. Set for Jan. 23-31 in Arizona, the shift directly addresses heightened global consignment demand and fully maximizes the premier facilities at WestWorld of Scottsdale across two consecutive weekends.

The schedule change officially begins with the high-energy Rock The Block concert on Jan. 21, followed by the exclusive invitation-only Opening Night Gala on Jan. 22. Vehicles will officially start crossing the auction block on the morning of Saturday, Jan. 23.

"This historic expansion not only allows us to meet unprecedented global demand for our dockets, but it also drives a massive economic boost for Scottsdale and the greater Phoenix area through extended tourism and hospitality revenue," says Craig Jackson, chairman and CEO of Barrett-Jackson. "Adding a second full weekend also creates more opportunities for kids and families to experience the excitement of the auction, which is vital to cultivating the next generation and growing the collector car hobby. Most importantly, anchoring our flagship event across two high-traffic weekends provides a powerful platform to elevate our charity sales, giving us prime-time visibility to raise millions of additional dollars for deeply important causes."



The flagship Barrett-Jackson Scottsdale Auction has been expanded to nine days for 2027. (Photo courtesy Barrett-Jackson)

The strategic vision behind the extended calendar marks a significant step in Barrett-Jackson's evolution from a traditional collector car auction into a premier global lifestyle destination, officials state in a press release.

"The sheer volume of world-class vehicle consignments applying for lot numbers required expanding the event's physical footprint and schedule," the release states. "By opening the block a full weekend earlier, Barrett-Jackson aims to increase its vehicle docket to well over 2,000 collectible vehicles, allowing the team to showcase an even wider variety of exceptional consignments and collections. Additionally, more operational days will accommodate a significantly larger automobilia docket to feed the growing collector demand for rare automotive memorabilia."

Opening weekend kicks off with Coca-Cola Family Day, featuring immersive STEM programming for young enthusiasts alongside high-stakes prime-time bidding.



GM RELEASES NEXT-GEN 350 & 400 SMALL-BLOCK V-8S

General Motors has unveiled two new V-8 engines featured in its light-duty pickup portfolio, including the 2027 Chevrolet Silverado 1500 and GMC Sierra 1500. Offering increased capability and performance from GM's sixth-generation small-block architecture, the new L76 5.7L and L78 6.6L V-8s join the LS6 6.7L V-8 developed for the 2027 Corvette Stingray, Grand Sport and Grand Sport X.

As with the LS6, which brought the 409-ci displacement back to the Chevy small-block engine family, the L76 and L78 herald the return of the 350- and 400-ci displacements, respectively. The new engines were developed with advanced modeling and simulation toolsets, plus proven hardware efficiency and durability testing, according to GM officials.

"GM's small-block expertise extends far beyond the road. For decades, this engine architecture has been adapted for production vehicles, endurance racing, marine propulsion and customer-built performance applications," the company noted in a press release announcing the new offerings. "GM Powered Solutions applies small-block engineering to marine-specific applications, while Chevrolet Performance continues to offer a broad portfolio of small-block, LS/LT and racing crate engines."

The layout of the new engines begins with an architectural element shared with more than 100 million small-block engines dating back to 1955: cylinder bore centers spaced at 4.40-inch intervals. To generate more horsepower and torque from the new light-duty truck V-8s, GM engineers applied several key enablers:

- Increased displacement from 5.3L and 6.2L to 5.7L (350 ci) and 6.6L (400 ci), respectively, by increasing piston stroke 6mm.
- Higher compression ratio for more efficient combustion.
- More airflow via larger throttle diameters.
- New intake manifolds with tuned runners to manage the additional airflow.

The 5.7L V-8 delivers 402 hp and 428 pound-feet of torque. The 6.6L V-8 delivers 481 hp and 501 pound-feet.

"These new V-8 engines advance GM's legendary small-block architecture with greater capability, more advanced technology and the strength of GM's manufacturing footprint behind them," says Tom Bishop, chief engineer for small-block engines. "They're engineered to provide truck customers the confidence and performance they expect from a GM V-8."

Additional features include a dual-fuel system that combines direct injection and port fuel injection, and a new lubrication system featuring a continuously variable oil pump, on-engine oil cooler and reworked oil feed locations for additional oil pressure consistency.



A worker at GM's Flint Engine Operations facility, where the all-new Gen-6 5.7L and 6.6L V-8s are assembled. (Photo courtesy General Motors)



An all-new Gen-6 6.6L V-8 continues down the assembly line at GM's Flint Engine Operations facility. (Photo courtesy General Motors)



An all-new Gen-6 6.6L V-8 during assembly. (Photo courtesy General Motors)

NISSAN Z KAZE OPEN-TOP CONCEPT UNVEILED

The Nissan Z Kaze concept was revealed earlier this year at ZCON, the annual enthusiast convention of the Z Car Club Association. Designed around nostalgia, heritage and driving enjoyment for Nissan's seven generations of Z sports cars, Z Kaze dramatically lifts the lid on the Nissan Z1.

Named for the Japanese word for wind (kaze), the concept's defining feature is its custom-engineered T-top roof. The build is a passion project conceived and developed by a team of Nissan product planners and designers who sought to showcase the open-top roots of the Z sports car.

A Pacific Teal paint scheme reflects 1990s sports car culture. The team also enhanced the lines and shape of the Nissan Z with subtle modifications that nod to the import tuner car scene of that period—a lightweight, vented carbon fiber hood; fender flares; and a custom carbon fiber aerodynamic body kit.



The Nissan Z Kaze concept pays tribute to 1990s import tuner culture. (Photo courtesy Nissan)

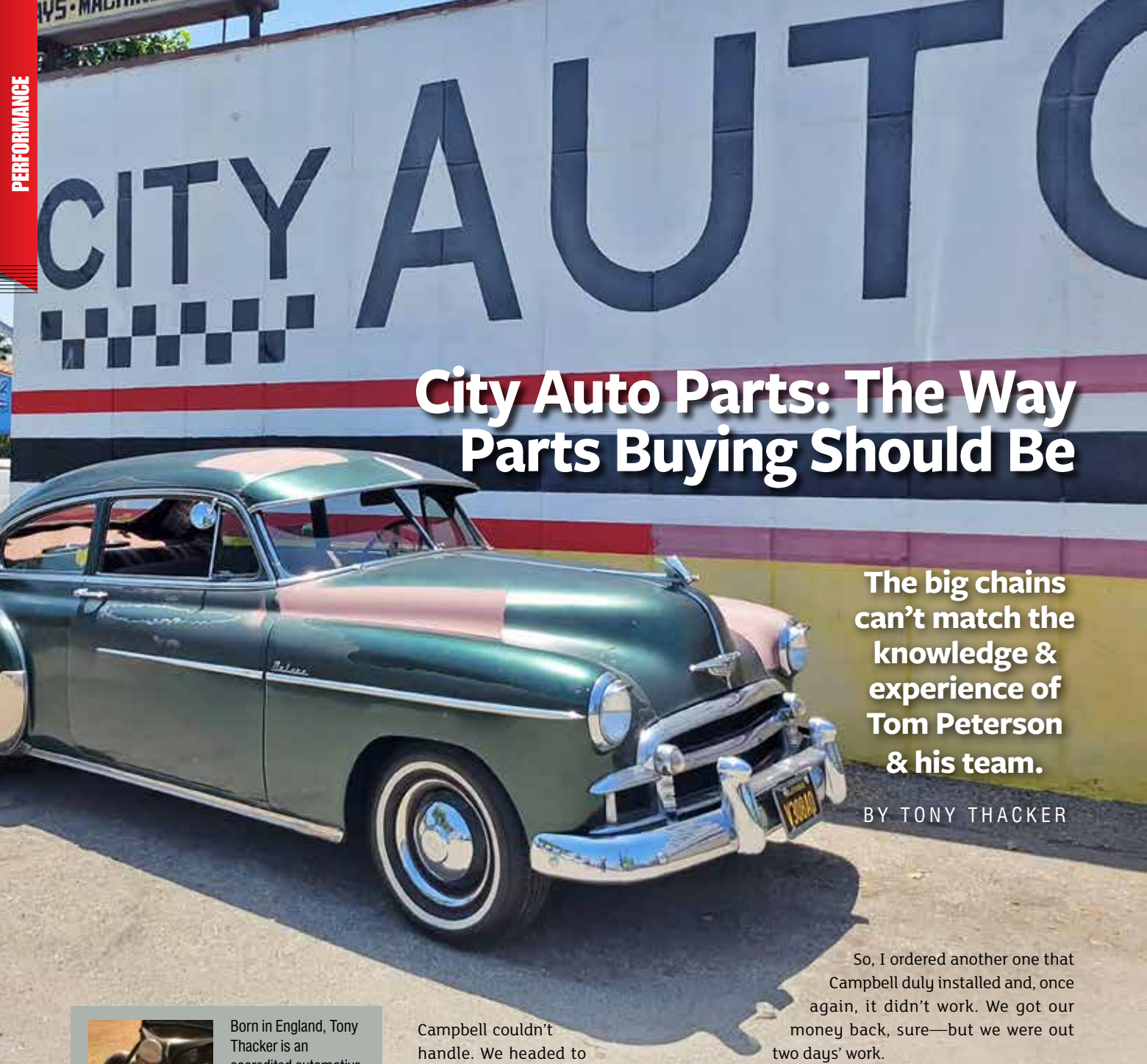
"The Z Kaze concept celebrates some of Nissan's most iconic open-top sports cars, while recognizing the '90s tuning culture that helped put Nissan and NISMO on the map," says Ponz Pandikuthira, senior vice president, chief product and planning officer, Nissan Americas. "This passion project combines Nissan's engineering excellence, creativity and celebration of the brand's heritage."

The concept rolls on authentic, restored 18-inch NISMO LMGT2 wheels, and inside is custom white leather-appointed seating featuring Bose Personal Plus headrest speakers.

Performance comes from a twin-turbo 3.0L V-6 paired with select GReddy components including a SUPREME SP exhaust system, front mount air-to-air intercooler kit and Airinx air filter kit. The power flows through a suspension upgraded with NISMO components. ***TS***

PSC
PERFORMANCE STEERING COMPONENTS
STEERING PROBLEMS?
We Build the Solution
On-road & off-road steering systems engineered to last. Proven to perform.
Dealer Inquiries Welcome
PSCSTEERING.COM





City Auto Parts: The Way Parts Buying Should Be

The big chains can't match the knowledge & experience of Tom Peterson & his team.

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.

I'm wondering if it's time to see a return of the local parts store.

My daily driver is a 2017 Mazda 3 that has been totally reliable, requiring only service items and tires for 100,000 miles. Recently, however, the alternator went out. My buddy Scott Campbell said, "I have an account at 'O'Crikey'—we can replace it."

We watched the videos and while it looked like a task, it wasn't anything Campbell couldn't handle. We headed to our local big chain store, which didn't have the alternator in stock, so they sent us to another big chain store 30 minutes away.

Once acquired, we duly installed the remanufactured alternator and, lo and behold, it didn't work. So, we removed it and went back to the store, where they refused to test it but said they could order another one.

"It'll be here Friday."

I couldn't get there Friday, so I went on Monday and the salesperson said, "You didn't come in Friday, so we returned it to the warehouse, but we have one in stock." He brought out the alternator and I said, "But that's the faulty one I returned last week."

"Oh," said the salesperson. "We can order one."

So, I ordered another one that Campbell duly installed and, once again, it didn't work. We got our money back, sure—but we were out two days' work.

I had no choice but to head to the dealership, which charged me $864. The fix worked and I've had no subsequent problems, but I learned something: People working in big chain parts stores sometimes don't know and often don't care.

TIP OF THE CAP

Luckily, near where I hang out there is an old-style auto parts store called City Auto Parts (CAP) operated by 59-year-old Tom Peterson. Tom's dad, Fred, and his brother-in-law, Ted, bought an existing store that had been around since the 1950s.

City Auto Parts in California is a shining example of the benefits of visiting a local auto parts store.



Tom Peterson took over the business founded in the 1950s by his dad, Fred, and Fred's brother-in-law, Ted.

Tom Peterson worked there as a boy, "sweeping floors and playing with spiders." In 1983, Fred built the current building comprising a traditional retail store fronting Mission Boulevard in Pomona, California, with a machine shop in the back.

Along the way, one of the big chains opened just down the street, threatening to put them out of business. Not unexpectedly, however, the big chain soon folded, leaving CAP as the go-to place for locals.

The reason we go there is because Peterson has been there for 50-plus years. He knows what you are looking for—he doesn't just ask, "What's the make, model and color?" You tell him it's not stock and he understands.

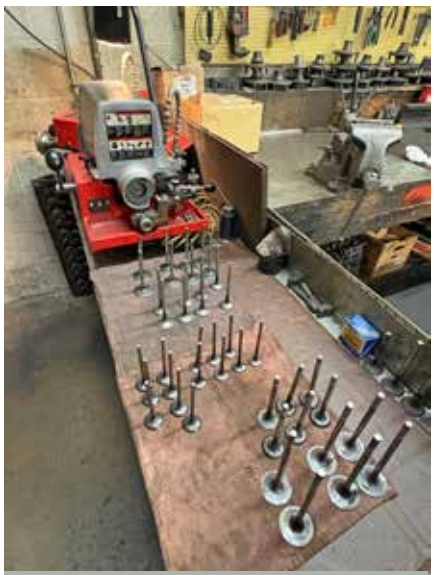
I looked up CAP on Yelp and a recent review said, "The gentleman that owns the company was very helpful and respectful and helped me find the best brake pads for my daughter's Kia. Today, there's not a lot of honest and truthful business owners who are concerned about the actual customer."

Peterson, who's bilingual, is the kind of parts man who recommends the right parts for the job, can usually explain how the part is installed and often gives you the option of the cheap part or the more reliable and expensive alternative. (Incidentally, the store hired its first Spanish-speaking counterman in 1974.)

GIVING CUSTOMERS OPTIONS

I recently needed an electric fuel pump for my hot rod that requires only 2 pounds of pressure. Peterson let me try a couple that ultimately had too much pressure and allowed me to return them. (His WDs allow him a percentage of returns.)

"I like to give customers the option of good parts compared to cheaper parts and mostly they opt for the more expensive, reliable part," he reports. "But I must be careful to



CAP also does valve jobs, flywheel grinding, brake rotors and more.



The company has enjoyed a long history of serving California drivers, offering customers choices when it comes to replacement components. (Photo courtesy City Auto Parts)



A machine shop in the back handles the usual block services such as cleaning, Magnafluxing, boring and decking.

buy right so that I can make a profit. However, if I get a discount, I will often pass that on to the customer."

Do you remember the coronavirus pandemic in 2020? The way it regulated the supply chain was actually a benefit for CAP.

"For me, the pandemic was good," Peterson says. "Before COVID, there were perhaps 100 warehouses each stocking 100 of each part. COVID put an end to that, as many of the WDs closed and now there might be only one of those parts in 100 warehouses. If I can find that part, then I have a captive customer."

Peterson tells the story of an employee from a local big chain auto parts store calling CAP looking for small-block Chevy header gaskets.

"I looked them up on the computer and they were available at the very store that was calling me," Peterson recalls, chuckling. "I told the caller and he just laughed. They had no idea how to look them up, and I made the sale. In another instance, a customer went to a big chain looking for a feeler gauge and, again, they had no idea what that was, whereas I had it on the shelf."

INDUSTRY EXPERIENCE

Count Peterson among the many of us who believe knowledge and experience are just as important to auto parts sales as the components themselves. Disinterested minimum-wage workers just can't bring that type of know-how and industry information.

"The chains have also brushed off the old car market, leaving it wide open for guys like me," Peterson adds. "While they concentrate on generic items for throwaway cars, I specialize."

One of the niches he's discovered is a local affinity for Chevrolet inline-6 engines.

"There's a surprisingly robust market in California for those old Stovebolts," he reveals. "I know what parts are needed. For example, water pumps—I source them and I have them in stock, along with many other items."



Customers receive the benefits of the store's knowledge and experience to track down parts for all types of vehicles, including classics.





In-house inventory mixes with the know-how to locate hard-to-find parts.

As crazy as it sounds, at the very moment Peterson was telling me this, a customer who needed a part for a Chevy 6-cylinder entered the store. His name was Alex Cipres, who, with his 12-year-old son, David, operates The Six Life in Rialto, California, where they rebuild Chevy 6s (it was a 50-mile round trip for Alex).

The key to CAP's success, says Peterson, is, "I pay attention to the market and I use my three resources: my brain, my old rack of parts catalogs and my computer, so if a customer doesn't know exactly what they need, I can figure it out."

While initially slow to adopt social media and the benefits of advertising on platforms like Instagram, "I get it now," he notes.

It's not all classic parts at CAP, though. The local market recently experienced a shortage of Mass Air Flow Sensor cleaner.

"I found a bunch online, bought all I could and did OK," says Peterson. "I'm constantly looking for things I can buy and sell. For example, I recently had a customer looking for a 1971 Ford Torino wiper switch. It took me four months to find one, but I did, and that customer will return happy."

Also, CAP (cityautopartspomona.com) has a machine shop out back.

"We offer the usual block services," says Peterson, "cleaning, Magnafluxing, boring and decking. We do valve jobs, flywheel grinding, brake rotors, etc. We do a lot of pressing and we do a lot of broken bolt and stud removal. We don't really have a rate for that—we just try to be fair. I learned long ago to pay attention, give good customer service and try to stay competitive."

As I was leaving our visit, I suddenly remembered I needed a rear window wiper for my Mazda 3 and asked Peterson if he could order one.

"I've probably got it in stock," he said, checking. "Yes, I do and I can install for you."

That's why City Auto Parts is still thriving after more than half a century. **TS**

GAME CHANGERS
FOR SHOP OWNERS & AUTO MANUFACTURERS
> Precision Manual Cold Saws.
MADE IN USA
> Precision Semi-Auto Cold Saws.
> Precision Cold Saws for Steel, Ferrous & Non-Ferrous. Optional Auto feed.
> Genuine Scotchman Cold Saw Blades. Don't settle for cheap knockoffs.
www.scotchman.com
Scotchman
Place your order today: 605-859-2542

PERFORMANCE **PRODUCTS**

Stock Your Shelves With These Go-Fast Components



Wheel End Kit

East Coast Gear Supply, Louisburg, North Carolina, presents its ECGS KP540 Wheel End Kit. The kit features 40-spline 1550 U-joint-compatible inner Cs (end forgings), plus knuckles, spindles and hubs. The 1550 joint axles are developed for strength and serviceability.

Subaru Exhaust Suite



AWE, Horsham, Pennsylvania, presents Vapor Blue Exhaust Suites, available for a variety of Subaru performance applications. Featuring an integrated clamping system, the exhausts include double-walled, slash-cut 304 stainless tips with Vapor Blue finish. Dual 5-inch-diameter systems are available for BRZ/86/FRS applications, and quad 4-inch-diameter offerings are available for WRX/STI applications, all with a stamped AWE logo. The suites are individually adjustable, allowing depth into the bumper to be set as desired.

Race Springs



Eibach, Corona, California, presents a line of precision-engineered Race Springs, offering customization and performance optimization across many motorsports applications. Coil-over, XT Barrel, Platinum, Conventional and Off-Road lines are offered, featuring high-tensile, cold-wound chrome silicon wire. The springs are designed with maximum block stability and rate linearity for consistent performance and reduced setup time race after race.



Tacoma Bolt-On Brake Kits

Wilwood, Camarillo, California, presents its expanded Aero6-DM "Direct-Mount" Bolt-On Brake Kit lineup, now with applications for 2024-25 Toyota Tacoma 2WD and 4WD trucks. Developed specifically for ease of installation and reduced cost, the kits are designed to work with most 17-inch and larger wheels and be fully compatible with factory master cylinders, ABS and all electronic controls. Forged aluminum 6-piston Aerolite front direct-mount calipers are engineered to bolt directly to the Tacoma's spindles/hubs, simplifying installation.



Diesel Exhaust Fluid

Hot Shot's Secret, Mt. Gilead, Ohio, introduces Ultra Premium DEF, a next-generation diesel exhaust fluid with patent-pending additive technology that stabilizes the fluid, helps clean the Selective Catalytic Reduction (SCR) system and protects against crystal buildup. The diesel exhaust fluid improves reliability, provides long-term protection and can clear many SCR-related trouble codes including P20EE, P20EF, P204F, P207F, P20E8 and P218F. It can be used with any diesel vehicle or equipment with an SCR system, including trucks, cars and vans.

BMW Clutch Kits



Advanced Clutch Technology (ACT), Lancaster, California, presents its ACT 225mm Mod-Twin Clutch Kits, available for 2007-18 BMW 3.0L Turbo (N54) and (N55) applications. The modular 225mm twin-disc clutch systems include a Mono-Drive hub design that helps reduce input shaft spline wear. Sprung and rigid hub configurations are available, as are organic street and 6-puck race disc options. The kits feature a forged aluminum cover assembly and a precision-balanced complete assembly. Torque increases reach up to 314% over stock.

EFI Top-End Kits



Holley, Bowling Green, Kentucky, presents its new Holley EFI Top End Kits, providing enthusiasts and engine builders with a complete, matched induction and fueling solution in one package. Designed for LS, LT, small-block Chevy, big-block Chevy and small-block Ford engine platforms, the kits take the uncertainty out of upgrading an intake system by pairing carefully engineered components that are designed to work together. Each kit includes an intake manifold, throttle body, fuel injectors (choice of three flow rates) and the correct throttle cable bracket.



3.5L EcoBoost Exhaust Manifold

Full-Race Motorsports, Phoenix, presents its Full-Race Formline Exhaust Manifold for Ford 3.5L EcoBoost applications. Having earned the CARB E.O. D-898 designation, the Formline manifold is emissions-legal on street-driven vehicles in all 50 states. It is made of 347 stainless steel with OEM-location fitment, making it a direct bolt-on replacement for the factory cast manifold. Covered trucks include 2011-20 Ford F-150, 2017-20 F-150 and Raptor, and 2015-17 Expedition and Navigator.

HD Pickup/SUV Caliper



Brembo, Plymouth, Michigan, presents its new BOLDIKA six-piston, fixed-aluminum, cast-iron Brake Caliper designed to improve the braking performance of electrified and internal combustion engine (ICE) heavy-duty pickups and SUVs. With more than 8,500Nm of braking torque, the caliper is the most powerful the company has ever built for a passenger car application, combining muscular performance with a distinctive style. Its three-piece construction offers increased stiffness for large, heavy, high-horsepower vehicles.



In-Shop ECU Unlocks

AutoTuner USA, Auburn, Alabama, offers new in-shop ECU Unlock Capabilities through its AutoTuner Tool. The new unlocks include BMW, MINI and Toyota models equipped with BMW's DME8 engine-control platforms. Tuners can now unlock systems at their own facilities without shipping ECUs across the country. The unlocks are included with the AutoTuner Tool at no additional cost, with no subscription or per-unlock fees. ***TS***

IDIDIT®
AMERICAN MADE STEERING COLUMNS

Driven By Quality,
Steered by You
Since 1986!



Universal Series

IDIDIT Universal Series steering columns can easily be installed in your street rod, hot rod, kit car, or any application. Our Universal columns are sold by length rather than by application. We offer Straight, Tilt, and Tilt with Telescoping columns in this series.



Retrofit Series

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



Performance Series

IDIDIT Performance Series steering columns are light-weight, and designed for autocross, road course, off-road, street to strip, or any other competition racing. These columns come in two different styles, both are available in model specific or universal options.

Available Finishes



Paintable Steel | Chrome | Black Powder Coat

610 S. Maumee St, Tecumseh MI
517-424-0577 | ididit.com

Restyling
AFTERMARKET ACCESSORIES

CUVs p. 44 | Black Optix p. 52 | 12 Wranglers p. 58 | Products p. 65

get it TO↔GETHER

BY JEF WHITE

Tips for building strong connections with aftermarket towing customers.



The right products allow shops to help new and experienced customers with their towing needs. (Photo by Abhinand Venugopal on Unsplash)

Today's towing market offers opportunities for shops to build strong connections with customers.

Professional installation and experienced recommendations are highly valued, allowing the chance to earn trust and repeat business.

Meanwhile, packaged products proven to work together allow drivers to tow with confidence, whether they're headed to the worksite or the campsite. Convenient accessories can then make trips easier and more efficient, while strengthening relationships and building your shop's reputation.

MonoMax™ 1000 SERIES

LIFT YOUR RIDE
KEEP THE CONTROL



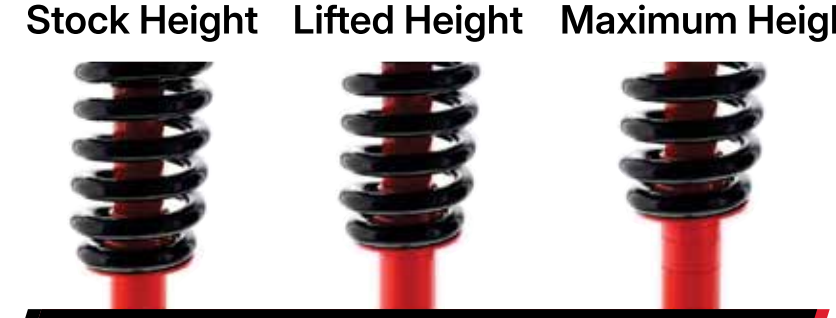
Performance suspension engineered for off-road capability and confident on-road control.

MONOTUBE PERFORMANCE SUSPENSION LIFT KIT

ADJUSTABLE HEIGHT

Provides up to 3 inches of lift, depending on the application.

The patented collar system used on certain part numbers offers stock, lifted, or maximum ride height.



UP TO 3" OF LIFT Application Dependent

Up to 46MM Monotube Design

Delivers consistent, fade-resistant damping and responsive control.



Patented Digressive Valving

Provides precise, application-specific control on and off the road.

Increased Suspension Travel

Helps maintain traction and control over uneven surfaces.

Direct Fit

Uses stock front springs and OEM mounting hardware.

*Shown with OEM spring & top mount components

OE QUALITY
HIGHER PERFORMANCE

KYB engineering for drivers who demand more.

Engineered in Japan. Developed in California.



KYBOFFROAD.COM

KYB®
World Class Shocks & Struts

TOWING PRODUCTS

■ **HOT PRODUCT:** AMSOIL Signature Series 100% Synthetic Automatic Transmission Fluid
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Engineered to withstand the rigors of heavy towing, elevated temperatures and challenging terrain; protects against thermal breakdown and helps prevent sludge and varnish deposits; high film strength; premium anti-wear additives to help prevent wear during severe service.

AMSOIL Inc.
Jamie Prochnow
Director, Retail & Commercial

■ **HOT PRODUCT:** SwayPro Weight Distributing Hitch
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Sway prevention; noise-free weight distribution; interchangeable bars allow the hitch to be used on many different types of trailers.

Blue Ox
Alex Walker
Vice President of Sales & Customer Service

■ **HOT PRODUCTS:** CURT StowPro Adjustable Ball Mounts
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Made in the USA; durability for heavy towing; adjustability allows users to change the height to match the trailer, switch between two ball sizes and tuck the ball away when done towing.

CURT
Matt Dybedahl

■ **HOT PRODUCT:** MEGA-DUTY Hitch
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Made in the USA; heavy-duty, versatile, fully adjustable hitch; available in towing capacities from 10,000 to 32,000 pounds; can be used in both drop and rise positions; dual-ball options with 2- and 2-5/16-inch balls, plus pintle capabilities; stacked-tube design.

GEN-Y Hitch
Donna Schmucker
Marketing Director

■ **HOT PRODUCTS:** Rough Country Air Spring Kits
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Offer a versatile solution for everything from weekend camper towing to the day-to-day demands of hauling heavy equipment; versatile and adjustable; compressor and wireless remote/compressor upgrades tailor the system to specific needs.

Rough Country
Lyle Willis
Business Development Representative

■ **HOT PRODUCTS:** HD Trailer SumoSprings
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Kits fit 2-, 2.5- and 3-inch-wide leaf springs; help reduce bounce, vibration and sway without adding maintenance; microcellular polyurethane provides progressive support as it compresses; delivers 68% average reduction in G-forces.

SuperSprings International
Alex Hodschayan
Director of Marketing



Towing systems include a variety of parts and mechanisms that benefit from pro-level knowledge. (Photos courtesy Blue Ox)

When it's time for your towing customers to get it together, suppliers are ready with advice and guidance on recent market trends, sales techniques and hot new products. Put it all together and you'll serve an important role for clients looking to take it all with them.

SERVING SPECIFIC NEEDS

Today's towing market is about serving defined needs by

Today's towing market is about serving defined needs by offering versatile solutions designed to improve the entire towing experience. (Photo courtesy GEN-Y Hitch)



offering versatile solutions designed to improve the entire towing experience.

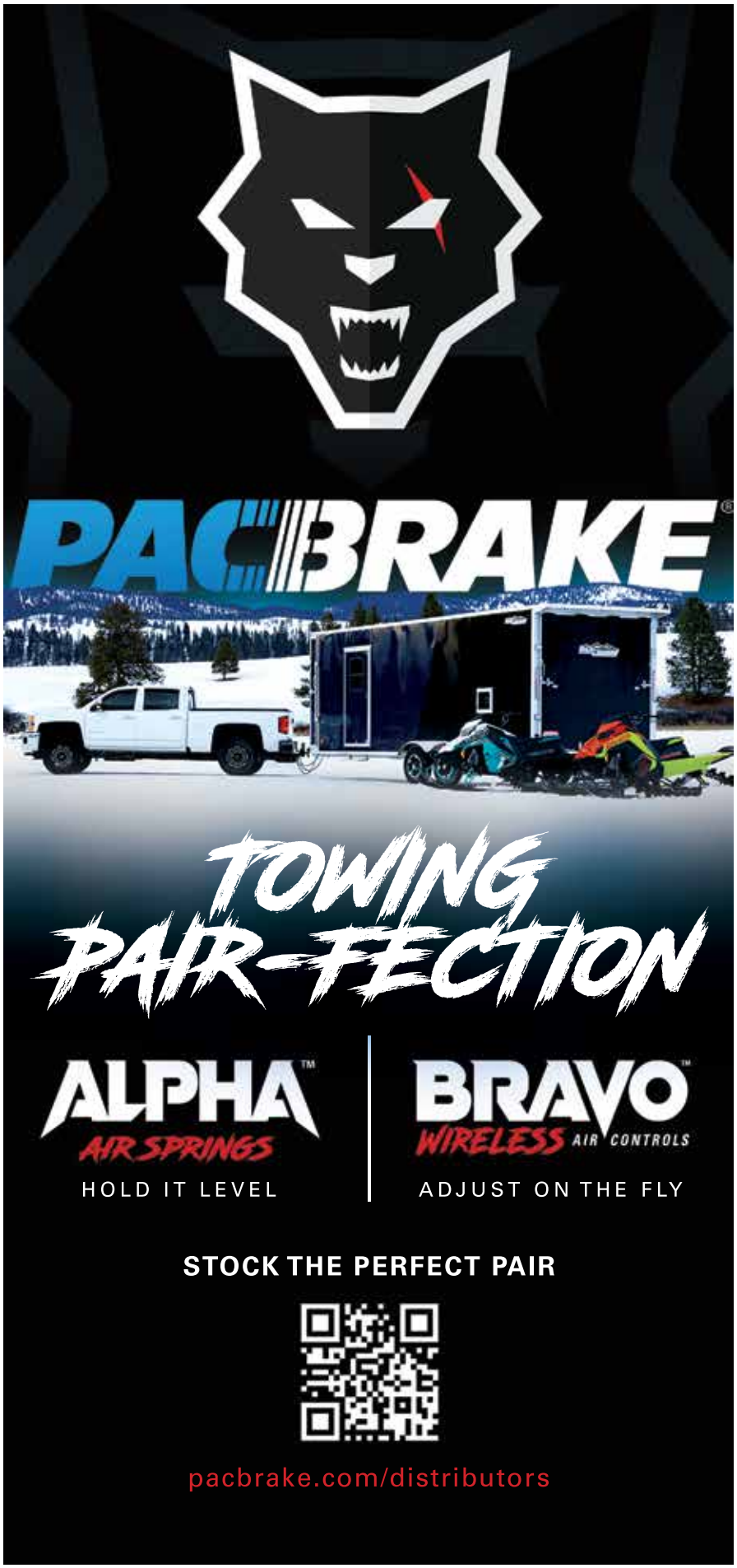
"Modern trucks are more capable and technologically advanced, while consumers are more educated and expect products that solve specific problems, offer greater convenience and integrate with their vehicles," says Donna Schmucker, marketing director for GEN-Y Hitch. "E-commerce, YouTube, social media, reviews and online research have also transformed how customers discover and purchase towing products. At the same time, the growth of RVing, outdoor recreation and lifestyle towing has expanded the customer base beyond traditional towing markets. With more brands competing for attention, companies now need to differentiate through product innovation, education, strong branding, customer experience and content that demonstrates not just what a product is, but why it makes towing better."

Alex Walker, vice president of sales and customer service for Blue Ox, highlights the "many new technologies within vehicles in all types of towing. It has become increasingly important to understand the nuances of each vehicle and its limitations."

There's a lot to think about when setting up a modern vehicle for towing, says Matt Dybedahl of CURT.

"More trucks are coming in with factory tow packages, there's more wiring and electronics involved and brake controllers have gotten quite a bit more advanced," he says. "One thing we hear quite a bit from





SOLAR-POWERED CAB LIGHTS

A nontraditional vehicle lighting option for towing applications involves solar-powered cab lights that attach with adhesive. The lights are vibration-activated at night and turn off with a timer or when they sense daylight.

For drivers not looking to invest in a permanent lighting installation, the option "gives the look customers want without any downside, in 30 minutes or less," says Luciano Hernandez Jr., co-founder of Spirit Fire Lights. "Give your customers factory-looking cab lights without drilling or wiring."

The solar-activated cab lights don't interface with a vehicle's electronics, he notes, avoiding any risk of wires getting crossed or damaged.

"Show customers one more thing before they leave the shop," he recommends, "and turn a profit without unexpected wiring issues or delays."





A tow vehicle lighting option involves solar-powered cab lights that attach with adhesive. (Photos courtesy Spirit Fire Lights)



Asking about the customer's towing goals often uncovers needs they may not have considered. (Photos courtesy AMSOIL)



installers is how important fitment has become. Nobody wants to get a truck up on the lift only to find out something doesn't fit quite right or the instructions are unclear. Shop time is valuable and installers want products they can easily install without a bunch of headaches."

Increasingly capable trucks and SUVs allow consumers more options when towing for recreation, including camping, boating or trailering powersports applications, says Keith Montgomery, product marketing manager – automotive for AMSOIL Inc.

"With the advanced technology in modern transmissions, these trends have emphasized the importance of premium synthetic fluids that deliver reliable performance and protection under the demanding towing conditions created by heavier loads and higher temperatures," he says.

AJ Tate, business development representative for Rough Country, has seen improvements in the market through three key developments: "New products, new technology and user-friendly designs."

Knowledgeable shops have the advantage of recommending the proper equipment and towing setups for specific vehicles and use cases.

"There's been a lot of attention on making trucks comfortable for everyday driving, but a softer suspension that feels great on the commute can squat under trailer tongue weight," explains Alex Hodschayan, director of marketing for SuperSprings International.



Towing upgrades can be aspirational goals for serious campers and haulers. (Photo courtesy Rough Country)

"That can affect handling and headlight aim, so suspension support deserves a place in the towing conversation. Our rear Rebel SumoSprings help address that by providing progressive support under load to reduce squat and improve stability. Pair them with Trailer SumoSprings, and you're supporting both sides of the hitch."

COMEBACK KINGS

Towing products can create repeat business beyond the initial installation.

"A customer who comes in for a hitch may later need a different ball mount, wiring, controllers, accessories, replacement parts or an upgraded towing setup as their needs and trucks change," notes Schmucker. "A quality towing installation can also build trust and credibility, making the shop the customer's go-to resource for future truck and trailer needs."

Treating people right is the first step.

"A customer might come in for a hitch, but chances are they'll need other things for their truck at some point," says Dybedahl. "Take a contractor who uses his truck for work during the week and pulls a trailer on the weekends. He might be back looking for a toolbox, running boards or additional lighting. Or maybe they're pulling a heavy camper and need weight distribution or sway control. If you do a good job on that first installation and earn their trust, they're more likely to come back the next time they need something."

RC
AIR SPRINGS
Whether you're towing a trailer or hauling heavy loads, this kit helps ensure your vehicle remains level, alleviating the strain on your trailer's tongue weight.
Integrated Bump-Stops
Built In Bump-Stops prevent bottoming out during braking and steering for a smoother, safer ride.
LEVEL YOUR RIDE
Supports up to 5,000 lbs to level your truck for safer towing and hauling.
EASY INSTALLATION
Easy, quick setup with all necessary components and 1/4" push-to-connect air fittings for a secure, fast installation.
HEAVY-DUTY DESIGN
Double convoluted air bags and DOT approved airlines for lasting strength.
ROUGH COUNTRY
Become a Rough Country Dealer Today! https://www.roughcountry.com/dealer-program
800-222-7023 | ROUGHCOUNTRY.COM
SCAN THIS CODE
To view full line-up of Air-spring kits, Air Compressors, Hitches, & More!
WWW.ROUGHCOUNTRY.COM

JEEP NAMED THE OFFICIAL 4X4 OF MOAB





The Jeep brand was named the Official 4x4 of Moab by city officials in October, marking a new chapter in the decades-long relationship between the 4x4 sport-utility brand and one of the world's most celebrated off-road destinations.

The partnership, approved by the city council, establishes a two-year collaboration between Jeep and the city of Moab focused on community investment, trail stewardship, local events and responsible recreation.

"Moab is more than a destination—it's an integral part of the Jeep brand story," says Branden Coté, Jeep CEO. "The trails, landscapes and community have helped define off-road adventure for generations of Jeep owners. Designating the Jeep brand as the Official 4x4 of Moab recognizes that shared history while creating opportunities to invest in the people, places and experiences that continue to inspire Jeep enthusiasts around the world."

For decades, Jeep 4x4 vehicles have been tested and celebrated on Moab's iconic trails. Annually, the Red Rock 4-Wheelers club hosts Easter Jeep Safari in Moab, drawing thousands of enthusiasts to southeastern Utah each year. As part of the 2027 Easter Jeep Safari, the Jeep brand—in collaboration with the Red Rock 4-Wheelers, the Bureau of Land Management Moab Field Office and Tread Lightly!—will focus its official stewardship project on the Chicken Corners trail corridor.

"This sponsorship agreement is about turning a longstanding relationship between Moab and Jeep into tangible benefits for our community," says Michael Black, Moab city manager. "The partnership brings new resources through advertising, sponsorship of trail maintenance and Moab city events, as well as support for responsible use and stewardship of the environment. The city is excited to formalize this relationship and partner with Jeep, the Official 4x4 of Moab, to provide meaningful benefits for our community."

The Jeep brand was named the Official 4x4 of Moab by the city in October—a partnership that will promote local off-roading and trail stewardship. (Photos courtesy Jeep)

The enjoyment customers get from successful towing trips can lead to repeat business and positive feelings for the shop that helped with their setup, says Montgomery.

"Many towing customers are highly engaged vehicle owners who enjoy upgrading and personalizing their vehicles. While the installation of towing components may occur on a truck or SUV, these customers often own multiple vehicles within the household, creating opportunities that extend well beyond the initial sale," he says. "Once a shop earns their trust through the installation of a hitch, brake controller or other towing accessory, it can become their go-to source for future upgrades, maintenance and accessories across several vehicles."

Many towing product manufacturers and suppliers offer tools and support to help attract that repeat business.

"Shops that sell our air spring kit can access our full catalog of bed covers, steps, running boards and suspension," says Tate.

Towing systems include a variety of parts and mechanisms that require pro-level knowledge, says Walker.

"Towing components are not just metal, but include electrical, locks, plastic levelers and more," he says. "Towing packages

offer a great benefit for installers, with the opportunity for add-on sales and increased labor hours."

The right product mix allows shops to help experienced customers as well as those new to the market.

"You don't have to wait for someone to buy a new truck or trailer. Customers who already have their hitch and brake controller installed may still be unhappy with how their setup tows. That's an opportunity to solve a problem they might have assumed they just had to live with," says Hodschayan. "It also opens the conversation with contractors and businesses hauling equipment every day. Ask how their trailer rides and you may uncover a need that never came up when they were buying their other towing components."



Suppliers offer tools and support to help attract repeat business. (Photo courtesy Rough Country)

PACKAGES DELIVER

A strong approach for improving towing-related sales is to focus on complete towing solutions.

"When a customer comes in looking for a hitch, your team can ask a few simple questions: 'What are you towing?' 'How much does it weigh?' 'What vehicle are you towing with?' 'How often do you tow?' The answers can create opportunities to recommend the right ball mount, hitch ball, wiring, brake controllers, safety chains, weight distribution solutions, locks and other accessories," says Schmucker from GEN-Y Hitch. "The key is to make it feel like education rather than upselling. A knowledgeable recommendation can increase the average sale while helping the customer leave with a safer, more functional setup."

Walker from Blue Ox advises shops to





Today's tow vehicles often include sophisticated features and options. (Photos courtesy CURT)



"be sure to offer a full package for each towing-related sale. Include needed and wanted accessories in the quote to ensure the customer will get what they need on the initial install. This will also help to keep sales and profits with the shop and not lose those sales to e-commerce."

Hodschayan from SuperSprings recommends looking at the whole setup—truck and trailer—and then explaining how the suspensions work together and how the hitch transfers forces between them.

"A bouncing trailer can be felt inside the truck, while tongue weight loads the truck's rear suspension. Addressing one side may leave the customer dealing with problems on the other," he says. "Start by asking what they haul and what bothers them on the road. Then check the truck application, trailer leaf spring width, axle rating, suspension configuration and required clearances. Explain what each product addresses and recommend the kits that fit. You're giving the customer a reason to buy by solving a problem they recognize."

Start by asking customers how they plan to use their vehicle instead of what product they want, advises Jamie Prochnow, director – retail and commercial for AMSOIL.

"When a shop understands whether the customer pulls a fishing boat, enclosed trailer, camper, race trailer or equipment trailer, it's easier to recommend a complete solution rather than a single component," he says. "Asking about the customer's towing goals often uncovers needs they may not have considered, such as brake controllers, weight distribution systems, suspension support products, transmission protection, lighting upgrades or trailer accessories. The most successful shops focus on solving the customer's towing challenge and not simply selling a hitch. By understanding how the vehicle will be used, shops can deliver a safer, more complete solution while increasing customer satisfaction."

On the sales staff, inquisitive minds will be rewarded.

"The biggest thing is taking the time to understand what the customer actually



Knowledgeable shops have the advantage of recommending the proper equipment and setups for specific vehicles and use cases. (Photo courtesy SuperSprings International)





Towing products can create repeat business beyond the initial installation. (Photos courtesy GEN-Y Hitch)

needs before recommending anything," says CURT's Dybedahl. "Ask what they're towing, how heavy the trailer is, how often they tow and what equipment their truck already has. You'd be surprised how often those questions go unasked, and how much you can learn about what the customer actually needs. The last thing you want is to get halfway through an installation and realize the customer needs something you didn't account for. A few extra questions upfront can save everyone a lot of time and trouble."

Finally, towing upgrade options create aspirational goals for serious campers and haulers, says Lyle Willis, business development representative for Rough Country.

"Upgrade options for items like our air spring kits are great products for shops, allowing them to offer solutions across a wide range of customers, uses and budgets," he reveals. ***TS***

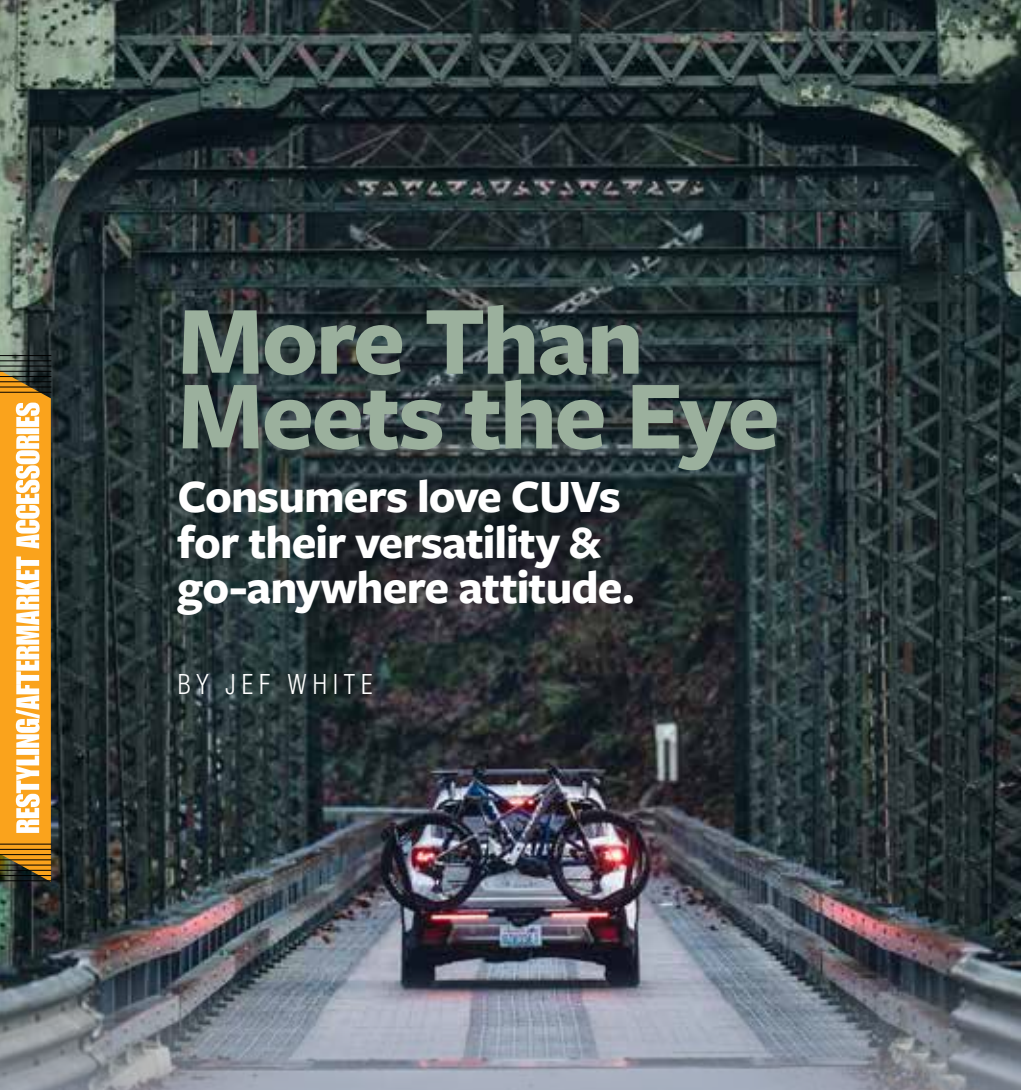




More Than Meets the Eye

Consumers love CUVs for their versatility & go-anywhere attitude.

BY JEF WHITE



It's easy to think today's commuter-oriented crossover vehicles might not play a big role in today's specialty aftermarket. But, when you realize that CUVs are often the preferred choice for active individuals and on-the-go families, the segment becomes much more appealing.

Accessory manufacturers offer three observations to help get customer relationships off on the right foot:

1 CUV DRIVERS WANT TO CAPITALIZE ON THEIR VEHICLES' VERSATILITY.

Crossovers have become the go-to choice for many active families and on-the-go explorers.

"As the popularity of compact sedans fell and CUVs took over that segment of the market, we've seen more of them being used as the commuter vehicle and the weekend activity vehicle," says Todd Scott, senior category manager – TOC and truck for Yakima Products Inc.

Outdoor enthusiasts seem particularly fond of the smaller, more agile vehicles that can nonetheless handle bigger adventures.

Outdoor enthusiasts are favoring smaller, more agile vehicles that can handle bigger adventures. (Photo courtesy Küat)

"One of the biggest changes for Küat has been the increased availability of 2-inch hitch receivers for CUVs," says Craig Metcalf, automotive manager. "This opens the door for more bike rack options, including heavier-duty racks designed to carry e-bikes. CUV owners now have more ways than ever to equip their vehicles for their outdoor adventures."

2 CUV DRIVERS HAVE A LOT ON THEIR PLATES.

One promising trend for shops is that many on-the-go crossover drivers continue to seek out new efficiency and convenience items, season after season.

"A customer who comes in for a hitch-mounted bike rack could also be interested in rooftop cargo solutions, ski racks or additional carrying accessories," Metcalf observes. "These products create opportunities for repeat business, particularly as customers discover new ways to use their vehicles throughout the year."

Crossovers' naturally limited interiors tend to lead active drivers to aftermarket accessories.

"The smaller cargo space in the vehicle means more opportunities to sell products to haul your gear, like roof racks and hitch racks," says Scott.

3 CUV DRIVERS WANT TO KNOW MORE.

Taking an interest in your customer's interests helps build the relationship.

"Sell the lifestyle, not just the accessory," says Metcalf. "Ask customers what activities they enjoy and what they're trying to carry. A customer purchasing a CUV might not know what's possible until someone shows them. Having a bike rack, rooftop cargo box or ski rack on display helps customers visualize the possibilities. Shops that understand vehicle fitment, demonstrate products and offer professional installation have a great opportunity to turn a simple accessory purchase into a long-term customer relationship."

Once they're in-store, greet them with interesting displays and then wait for their questions.

"Have go-to solutions ready for customers looking to carry e-bikes, SUPs and general cargo," says Scott.

UNDERHOOD UPGRADES ARE ALSO A THING

Well-known for their accessorization opportunities, it's easy to overlook the potential for CUV power upgrades. Companies like

Tuners and related power upgrades put a little more pep into a crossover's step. (Photo courtesy COBB Tuning)



Discover Air Lift



Air Lift® Digital Portable Compressor



Wireless Control Systems



ProSeries Adjustable Air Suspension

Whether navigating winding blacktop or traversing open country, Air Lift offers a full line of load support kits and on-board air compressor control systems to help your customer tow, haul, and play with safety and comfort. And with over 75 years of experience, you can be sure Air Lift offers the products and support that you can stand behind.

Go to: **airlift.com/TS** or scan the code to discover more about Air Lift.

©2026 Air Lift Company



Many platforms share the same engine, opening up an in-demand tuning service to a wider audience. (Photo courtesy COBB Tuning)

CUV PRODUCTS

HOT PRODUCT:
COBB Accessport Tuner
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Particularly effective as part of Stage 1 Power Packages for turbocharged Subaru and Ford crossovers; delivers real, noticeable power and performance on vehicles people drive every day; street legal; built-in gauges; supports custom tuning.
COBB Tuning
Kirstin Backes
Sales & Marketing

HOT PRODUCT: Küat Piston ION Hitch-Mounted Bike Rack
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Premium heavy-duty rack fits traditional bikes and e-bikes; 100-pound weight capacity per tray; robust construction; user-friendly design; optional integrated lighting system for added visibility.
Küat
Craig Metcalf
Automotive Manager

HOT PRODUCT: OnRamp LX Hitch-Mounted Bike Rack
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Carries conventional bikes as well as e-bikes of up to 80 pounds per bike.
Yakima Products Inc.
Todd Scott
Senior Category Manager – TOC & Truck



Crossovers have become the go-to choice for many active families and on-the-go explorers. (Photos courtesy Yakima Products Inc.)

COBB Tuning offer simple ways to put a little more pep into a crossover's step.

"The crossover has replaced the compact car as the enthusiast's starting point and Subaru shows that shift clearly," says Kirstin Backes from COBB's sales and marketing team. "A decade ago, the turbo Subaru most people knew was the WRX. Today, turbocharged power runs through Subaru's crossover and wagon lineup, from the Ascent to the Outback XT and Wilderness. The same pattern shows up at Ford with the Bronco Sport. The buyer who once tuned a hatchback is now tuning a turbocharged family hauler."

Shops that offer upgrades through products such as COBB's Accessport tuner will quickly find that many platforms share the same power plants, opening up an in-demand new service to a wider audience.

"One engine often powers several popular vehicles, so the same product knowledge and inventory serve a much larger customer base," she explains, noting how one Accessport part number covers the Subaru Ascent, Outback XT, Outback Wilderness and Legacy XT, all built on the same FA24 turbo engine. The same with Ford and its EcoBoost powertrain and ECU programming.

Backes encourages shops to train their staffs to recognize which vehicles share an engine and then lead the discussion to what customers will feel every day—peak horsepower, yes, but also quicker response, less hesitation and more confidence.

"Know the platforms, then sell the experience," she advises. "Packages make the



first purchase easy—a Stage 1 kit like the Subaru Ascent/Outback package pairs the Accessport with a high-flow filter and sets up the next upgrade."

Finally, she encourages counter displays and/or demo vehicles to build awareness.

"Seeing the live gauges and the interface turns 'Why would I tune my Outback?' into 'What can it do for mine?'" she says.



ELEVATE THE ADVENTURE.

The Eibach **PRO-LIFT-KIT** springs are designed to lift or level your Toyota RAV4 with the same spring technology found in our ERO Off-Road Race Springs. These block-resistant springs can be taken to the limit, mile after mile, ensuring consistent rate and ride height.



PRO-LIFT-KIT

Available for 2026 Toyota RAV4 AWD

Shop at eibach.com

EIBACH NORTH AMERICA • MADE IN THE USA •

SHINING EXAMPLES

CUV project vehicles and special editions on display at places like the SEMA Show, overland events and outdoor gatherings offer a glimpse at the aftermarket potential of these action-ready crossovers. For shops that might like to pursue jobs at a wholesale level, the following are a few of the new CUV models arriving soon at dealership lots.

2027 SUBARU FORESTER



All 2027 Subaru Forester trim levels are equipped with at least 8.7 inches of ground clearance, Subaru Symmetrical All-Wheel Drive and EyeSight Driver-Assist Technologies. (Photos courtesy Subaru)

The 2027 Subaru Forester is available in four trim levels: Base, Premium, Wilderness and Limited, while the 2027 Subaru Forester Hybrid will be available in five trim levels: Premium Hybrid, Sport Hybrid, Wilderness Hybrid, Limited Hybrid and Touring Hybrid.

Meanwhile, the gas-only Forester Sport, Sport Onyx Edition and Touring trim levels have been discontinued.

All 2027 Subaru Forester trim levels are equipped with at least 8.7 inches of ground clearance, Subaru Symmetrical All-Wheel Drive and EyeSight Driver-Assist Technologies. A Subaru 11.6-inch Multimedia touchscreen with wireless Apple CarPlay and Android Auto compatibility is standard on most Forester models, while a 12.3-inch full digital gauge cluster is standard on Forester Wilderness and all Forester Hybrid trim levels, including the new Forester Wilderness Hybrid.

As the newest entry in the Forester lineup, the Wilderness Hybrid pairs Subaru's next-generation series-parallel hybrid powertrain with 9.3 inches of ground clearance. With Subaru Symmetrical All-Wheel Drive, X-MODE Dual-Mode off-road traction system and Yokohama GEOLANDAR all-terrain tires, it is designed to hit the trail and keep going.



Gas-powered Subaru Forester models feature a 2.5L Subaru BOXER engine that produces 180 hp. Forester Hybrid models are powered by a specially developed Atkinson/Miller-cycle 2.5L BOXER engine paired with electric motors and a high-capacity lithium-ion battery, producing 194 combined hp and up to 597 miles of range on a single tank of fuel. All Forester trim levels are equipped with a Lineartronic CVT (Continuously Variable Transmission).

2027 TOYOTA COROLLA CROSS



For model year 2027, the Corolla Cross hybrid lineup simplifies from three to two grades—the SE and XSE models. (Photos courtesy Toyota)



The 2027 Toyota Corolla Cross blends utility, capability and a stylish design that hits a sweet spot for everyday living. Heading into its sixth year in the Toyota lineup, Corolla Cross gives customers a versatile compact CUV interior, with an elevated seating position and folding rear seats to maximize cargo space.

Its choice of gas or hybrid powertrains and available front- or all-wheel drive (FWD or AWD) make it ready for the daily commute and weekend adventures alike. Style is also in the mix, with unique looks for gas or hybrid models, seven single- and four two-tone colors, and an interior with thoughtfully designed storage and user-friendly tech.

For model year 2027, the Corolla Cross hybrid lineup simplifies from three to two grades, dropping the S grade and going to a choice of well-equipped SE or XSE models. Built on the TNGA-C platform, the crossover's exterior design brings together the familiarity of the Corolla family with the elevated ride height and utility of an SUV.

Depending on grade and powertrain, available features such as LED lighting, available two-tone exterior paint and different wheel treatments give Corolla Cross an approachable, modern appearance. The interior emphasizes comfort, usability and smart packaging with an intuitive cockpit design focused on ease of use with console, center and door storage; folding 60/40 rear seating; flexible rear cargo space; and available technology including a 10.5-inch touchscreen, wireless Qi charging and 12.3-inch digital gauge cluster.

The Corolla Cross gas grades are available with FWD or AWD, providing an efficient and accessible configuration for many drivers. For Corolla Cross Hybrid models, the e-AWD system has the capability to deliver added traction for slippery road conditions. Towing capacity is 1,500 pounds on both front- and all-wheel drive models.



REESE® GOOSE BOX™

TAKE THE HEAVY EQUIPMENT OUT OF YOUR TRUCK AND GET YOUR BED BACK!

Created with fifth wheel comfort and dual-purpose trucks in mind, the REESE Goose Box is specifically designed for RV owners who want to tow with a gooseneck hitch. No more swapping heavy equipment every time you change trailers. Just tow with a lightweight goose ball.

BUILT ON TRUST. BACK TO EARN IT.

REESE®

2027 CHEVROLET TRAX

The 2027 Chevrolet Trax features fresh designs, additional safety and driver assistance features and upgraded technology. Along with its Trailblazer counterpart, Trax has streamlined its trim offerings and will be available in entry-level Trax, RS and ACTIV models.

Upgraded electrical and software architecture enables more than 20 standard safety and driver assistance features, including recently introduced Reverse Automatic Braking, Safety Seat Alert, Side Bicyclist Alert, Rear Cross Traffic Braking, Front Park Assist, Rear Seat Belt Indicator and Intersection Automatic Emergency Braking.

Trax also adopts a more premium look and feel, highlighted by a new grille, new wheel designs, all-LED taillamps and a power liftgate available on Trax for the first time, plus distinct trim level details that reinforce each model's individual character.

The entry-level Trax features wheels with a higher-contrast finish for a more urban look.



The 2027 Chevrolet Trax features fresh designs, added safety and driver assistance features and upgraded technology. (Photos courtesy Chevrolet)



RS further emphasizes its sporty personality with 19-inch wheels, while ACTIV maintains an adventure-inspired aesthetic including a unique front-end design.

Inside, distinctive hexagonal side vents give the instrument panel a fresh, modern appearance. Storm Sky Gray is an all-new interior color.

2027 LEXUS NX



The Lexus NX compact crossover will move to a 100% electrified lineup for 2027. (Photo courtesy Lexus)

Lexus debuts the new and greatly enhanced Lexus NX compact crossover for the 2027 model year. Since its debut in 2014, the NX has earned acclaim for its agile urban driving performance, stylish design and distinctive qualities.

Lexus NX moves to a 100% electrified lineup for 2027 with a choice of hybrid or plug-in hybrid grades. The redesigned hybrid system features enhanced battery power management with greater use of battery power during acceleration that suppresses excessive engine speed, allowing engine rpm to rise more in sync with vehicle speed for a more linear acceleration feel.

Highlights include upgraded interior and exterior design elements, improved structural rigidity and driving dynamics, next-generation hybrid technology and the inclusion of Sensory Concierge on select grades.

Meanwhile, the always-on AWD system delivers more stable, confidence-inspiring handling with an enhanced sense of road contact, while also improving stability on snow and other low-traction surfaces. Four grades are offered: Premium, Premium+, F SPORT and Luxury.

2027 HYUNDAI TUCSON

The all-new 2027 Hyundai Tucson combines the company's "Art of Steel" design philosophy with hybrid performance enhanced by intelligent efficiency and the advanced Pleos Connect next-generation infotainment system.

Available in gasoline, hybrid and plug-in hybrid models, the crossover is designed to seamlessly transition from sophisticated daily commutes to rugged weekend getaways. Officials say it combines muscular exterior styling with a purposeful, tech-forward interior.

Alongside the standard model, the debut of the rugged Tucson XRT PRO further elevates its off-road capability.

New nature-inspired exterior colors include Ranger Green Pearl/Matte, Kodiak Blue Pearl, Driftwood Gray Metallic/Matte and Red Rock Orange Pearl/Matte. Inside, the cabin features a two-layered instrument panel design with a horizontal upper layer that provides visual comfort and clarity, while a deep open tray below provides storage space.



The 2027 Hyundai Tucson combines the "Art of Steel" design philosophy with hybrid performance. (Photos courtesy Hyundai)

2027 KIA SELTOS

Officials say the all-new 2027 Kia Seltos is designed for drivers whose days can begin with a commute and end with an adventure. The crossover looks to deliver enhanced capability, elevated comfort and intuitive technology in a confident, right-sized CUV package.

Larger than its predecessor, the 2027 Seltos brings in new features that elevate the crossover segment, such as flush door handles, an available panoramic sunroof, available Surround View Monitor and nearly 30 inches of total combined screens.

These features, as well as the available memory power seats, Multi-Mode AWD and Forward Collision Avoidance Assist with Junction Turning have all trickled down from Kia's Telluride flagship SUV.

In addition to carrying over the normally aspirated 2.0L and turbocharged 1.6L engines, the 2027 Seltos also offers a new hybrid powertrain that combines performance and hybrid efficiency, including a Kia first electric-AWD (e-AWD) on a hybrid SUV.

Amber daytime running lights frame the front fascia, while bold angles and clean lines combine with the flush door handles to deliver a strong, distinctive presence. Standard wheels are 16-inch alloys, and the Seltos X-Line S comes with larger 18-inch alloy wheels. All-black 19-inch wheels are included on the X-Line SX and X-Line EX HEV.

The X-Line trim also features unique bumpers and side sills with Piano Black trim and dark gunmetal accents. New colors include Terrain Brown, Frost Blue and Snow White Pearl with a distinctive black roof. Ground clearance has increased from 7.5 inches to an available 8.1 inches. ***TS***



Kia officials say the all-new 2027 Seltos is designed for drivers whose days can begin with a commute and end with an adventure. (Photo courtesy Kia)





Black Optix Tint: Building a National Brand

Repeatable processes have helped grow a window film & PPF franchise.

BY MAURA KELLER

PHOTOS COURTESY BLACK OPTIX TINT

When Black Optix Tint opened its first location in Richmond, Virginia, in 2014, the company saw an opportunity to approach automotive tinting differently—not simply as an installation service, but as a professional retail experience in which customers could understand their options, compare products and feel confident about the work being performed on their vehicles.

The window and paint protection film (PPF) shop quickly demonstrated there was demand for that approach, providing the foundation for a business model that could eventually be replicated in other markets.

"The original Richmond shop proved that there was room in the market for a more professional, customer-friendly approach to window tint," says Andrew Titus, president of Black Optix Tint and president of United Franchise Group. "At the time, many shops operated more like installation bays than retail businesses."

Customers, Titus says, often had limited information about available films, warranties or what they should expect from the installation process. Black Optix Tint built its operation around product education, trained installation, consistent service and a showroom designed to help customers understand their choices.

As the original location grew, the company began to see that the opportunity extended beyond a single successful shop. "It was a model that could work in other markets," Titus says.

That realization eventually led Black Optix Tint toward franchising and a national growth strategy.

BUILDING A REPEATABLE MODEL

The company's evolution reflects a larger challenge within the automotive restyling industry, where independent operators have traditionally dominated tinting, PPF, wraps and related services. Many of those businesses have built strong reputations on years of hands-on craftsmanship, and Titus says Black Optix Tint recognizes that expertise as an important part of the industry's foundation.

Black Optix Tint is a national window film franchise operation with 30 locations in eight states.

BUILT TOUGH
PRICED RIGHT



XV95 WINCHES

Engineered for dependable performance without the red letter price tag, the TrailFX XV95 synthetic rope winch delivers on the details that truly matter to you and your customers - 9,500lb pulling capacity, 5.7hp motor, 218:1 gear ratio, automatic full load braking and IP67 rating for dust and moisture resistance. The XV95 winch is also backed by a limited lifetime warranty on mechanical components and a limited 3 year warranty on electrical components. Built tough, priced right, easy to sell.

TRAILFX®

Exclusively distributed by Keystone Automotive Operations, Inc.



Founded in 2014 in Richmond, Virginia, the company focuses on window and paint protection films, ceramic coatings and other vehicle protection services.

"Independent operators have set a high bar for craftsmanship," he says. "Some of the industry's best installers are people who have spent years mastering the work, and that focus on quality remains essential."

At the same time, Titus says, technical expertise is only one component of a business that wants to grow beyond a single location. Scaling requires repeatable processes for training, sales, follow-up and customer education, which became major focuses as Black Optix Tint began developing its franchise model.

"Craftsmanship alone does not create a business that can be repeated across multiple locations," he says. "Scaling also requires consistent training, a defined sales process, reliable follow-up and a clear way to educate customers about their options."

Black Optix Tint first began exploring franchising after coming onto the radar of Accurate Franchising, part of United Franchise Group, which helps existing businesses develop franchise systems. As the company examined the opportunity, it became clear that the practices that had helped make the Richmond location successful could be formalized into a system that other owners could follow, ultimately leading Black Optix Tint to join United Franchise Group.

Now with 30 locations in Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, Texas, Utah and Virginia, one of the biggest steps was breaking down how the business operated and creating the infrastructure necessary to support franchisees in areas ranging from training and marketing to sales, legal and accounting.

"The next challenge was formalizing the model: documenting how the business operates, building the training program and creating support across marketing, sales, legal and accounting," Titus says. "Those systems have to be in place before franchisees open; they cannot be built after the fact while new owners are waiting for help."

United Franchise Group's experience and existing infrastructure have helped Black Optix Tint establish that support structure while preparing the brand for expansion.

TRAINING FOR CONSISTENCY

Maintaining consistent workmanship and customer service across multiple locations is one of the fundamental challenges of any franchise-based restyling business, making training a critical part of Black Optix Tint's model. Each franchisee begins with two weeks of classroom and hands-on instruction at the company's West Palm Beach headquarters, followed by a tech week and a market week at the new location before opening.

Once a location is operating, Black Optix Tint's marketing, operations and support teams remain involved, while a standardized sales model and branded interactive



displays help create a consistent experience for customers, regardless of where they visit.

"Franchisees can tailor their local marketing and build relationships in their communities, but our quality and service standards stay the same," Titus explains.

That balance between standardization and local ownership also allows the franchise to appeal to people who may not have spent their careers in the automotive aftermarket. Many franchisees come from corporate or sales backgrounds and are interested in owning a business without having to develop every aspect of the operation independently.

"Many are former corporate or sales professionals who want to own a business without having to invent every part of it from scratch," Titus said.

TINT OPENS THE DOOR

Window film remains the core service at Black Optix Tint (blackoptixtint.com), but the company is increasingly focused on the opportunities that develop once customers enter the shop. Paint protection film and ceramic coatings have become important additions to the service mix, with tint often providing the initial reason for a customer to begin a conversation with the business.

"Tint is still the service that brings most customers through the door, but it often opens the conversation about PPF and ceramic coating," Titus says.

Rather than treating those additional services as traditional upsells, Black Optix Tint trains its franchisees to position them as complementary ways to protect a vehicle, particularly for customers who have already made an investment in its appearance.

"We train franchisees to introduce those services as a logical next step, not as a hard upsell," Titus notes. "If someone has invested in the appearance of a vehicle, protecting that investment tends to make sense."

That proposition has become increasingly relevant as vehicle prices have risen and consumers are keeping their vehicles longer. The average vehicle on American roads is now approximately 13 years old.



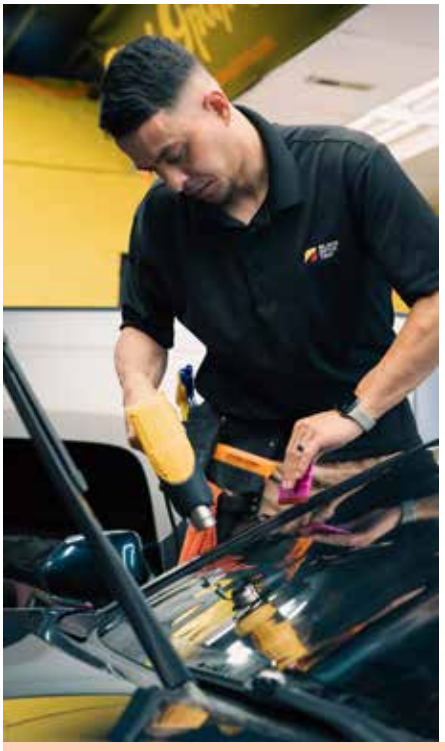
As drivers keep their cars longer, products that enhance and protect those investments become more valuable.

Owners who plan to hold onto a vehicle for several more years may be more willing to invest in services that preserve its appearance and protect its surfaces, while advances





Each franchisee begins with two weeks of classroom and hands-on instruction, followed by a tech week and a market week at the new location.





Improvements in modern films and coatings are providing better heat rejection, UV protection and durability.

in film and coating technology have made those services more capable and easier to explain in terms of tangible benefits.

"The clearest trend is that people are keeping their vehicles longer," Titus says, adding that services such as tint, PPF and ceramic coatings increasingly can be viewed as practical investments rather than simply discretionary upgrades.

"Vehicles also cost more and owners are keeping them longer, so the value of protection services is easier for customers to see than it was 10 years ago," he adds.

Personalization is another area where Titus sees growth, particularly as color-change wraps, specialty films and newer products such as color-change PPF give consumers ways to change a vehicle's appearance while protecting its paint.

Meanwhile, improvements in modern films and coatings are providing better heat rejection, UV protection and durability, giving salespeople more benefits to communicate.

"The biggest opportunity is for shops that can meet both sides of that demand and clearly explain the value to customers," Titus says.

SELLING THE EXPERIENCE

The customer relationship increasingly begins online, where vehicle owners can compare shops, read reviews, research warranties and evaluate a company's overall professionalism before ever making an appointment. For Black Optix Tint, that makes branding and the customer experience important complements to installation quality.

"Customers compare reviews, warranties and the overall professionalism of a business before they ever visit," Titus says.

A professional storefront and showroom can reinforce that first impression, while warranties can help remove some of the perceived risk associated with choosing an installer.

"A strong storefront and a lifetime warranty on tint installations are no longer nice-to-haves; they help a location earn trust and make the shortlist," Titus says. "Our advantage is combining that level of craftsmanship with a consistent brand and customer experience across locations."

For independent restyling businesses considering expansion, Titus believes Black Optix Tint's experience demonstrates the importance of building systems before

adding locations. A profitable first shop may have the revenue and customer demand necessary for expansion, but if training, sales and marketing remain dependent on the owner, additional locations can bring more complexity without creating a truly scalable business.

"Build your systems before you build your second location," Titus advises. "A profitable shop may be ready to grow, but if training, sales and marketing are not documented and repeatable, expansion simply multiplies the owner's workload."

That lesson is also influencing Black Optix Tint's interest in converting established independent shops into franchises. Existing operators already bring industry knowledge, employees and local customer relationships, while the franchise model can add a tested operating system, training, marketing resources and ongoing support.

For the right independent owner, Titus believes conversion can provide a stronger platform for growth without requiring the business to abandon what it has already built.

The organization also looks for additional opportunities outside of the automotive market, investigating commercial and residential window tinting prospects along with its vehicle restyling and protection services.

THE SHOP OF THE FUTURE

Black Optix Tint's long-term goal is to establish itself as a recognizable national name in automotive restyling while expanding through both new franchise locations and conversions of existing independent businesses. Titus envisions a brand that consumers can trust, whether they are protecting a daily driver, personalizing a new vehicle or preserving a long-term investment.

"Our vision is for Black Optix Tint to become the national standard for professional automotive restyling," he says.

That vision also reflects where Titus believes the broader industry is headed, with operations that can address a wider range of vehicle protection and personalization needs.

"The successful shop of the future will not be a single-service tint bay," Titus predicts. "It will be a complete automotive restyling and protection destination, bringing tint, PPF, ceramic coatings, wraps and emerging products under one roof." ***TS***





WRANGLER PACKAGES BY THE DOZEN

Jeep Brand's Twelve 4 Twelve program introduced 12 Wrangler special editions in 12 months.



To mark its 85th anniversary in 2026, Jeep Brand introduced its Twelve 4 Twelve "Air Drop" celebration, introducing a special Jeep Wrangler package on the 12th of each month for 12 months.

"Each product release embodies the boldness, authenticity and unapologetic spirit that defines our brand," says Bob Broderdorf, Jeep CEO, regarding the Twelve 4 Twelve program. "It's an ongoing tribute to the capability, freedom and adventurous DNA that have shaped our brand for generations."

The final package, Switchback, dropped in October. Here's a look back at some of the special highlights of each offering.

2026 JEEP WRANGLER ROCKSLIDE

PACKAGE PRICE: $695

The fifth Twelve 4 Twelve drop was the 2026 Jeep Wrangler Rockslide, pairing bold Blue Agave, Jean Blue and Indigo Blue accents with an Anvil body-color roof and steel rock rails for a fresh, tonal take on the Wrangler's trail-ready capability.

Accent exterior elements include an Anvil body-color grille surround, Blue Agave side stripes, hood side decals and a classic "4 Wheel Drive" graphic. Inside, Rockslide introduced the first interior color space expansion of the Twelve 4 Twelve series, featuring an Indigo Blue instrument panel surround, center console and door armrest accents with contrasting silver stitching throughout, original Jean Blue cloth seats and unique Rockslide signature details, including a swing gate plaque.

The special edition is engineered to highlight the inherent strengths of both Wrangler Sahara and Rubicon models, with additional standard content including deep tint windows, Gorilla Glass windshield, heated mirrors, automatic LED headlamps, LED daytime running lamps, LED fog lamps and standard advanced safety technologies including adaptive cruise control, forward collision warning and advanced braking.



The Rockslide special edition is available for Wrangler and Gladiator, pairing bold Blue Agave, Jean Blue and Indigo Blue accents with an Anvil body-color roof and steel rock rails.



Also debuting is the Jeep Gladiator Rockslide special edition, which brings the same blue-forward design cues and capability-driven details to the industry's only open-air pickup, complemented by a 7,700-pound tow rating and up to 1,720-pound payload, available on Gladiator Rubicon and Mojave models.

2026 JEEP WRANGLER MOAB 392

VEHICLE MSRP: $79,995



The 2026 Jeep Wrangler Moab 392 is a Hemi-powered homage to Jeep's legendary heritage.



The first release in the Twelve 4 Twelve series was the 2026 Jeep Wrangler Moab 392 edition, a purpose-built powerhouse that delivers value and performance. Engineered with a no-frills, back-to-basics philosophy, it reflects Jeep's core legacy.

The build was inspired by the Jeep Brand's 85th anniversary and the 60th anniversary of the Easter Jeep Safari, hosted by the Red Rock 4-Wheelers based in Moab, Utah. It boasts high-performance muscle, modern tech and advanced 4x4 capability to handle the daily grind around town and easily transition to off-road terrain.

Power and performance start with a 6.4L, 470-hp Hemi V-8 engine delivering 470 pound-feet of torque. Highlights include 17-inch beadlock-capable wheels, 35-inch all-terrain tires, 4.56 axle ratio, 2.72:1 Select-Trac full-time transfer case, two-mode dual exhaust and a cold-air intake hood with water separator.

The exterior includes a body-color hardtop, rock protection sill rails, mold-in color fender flares and black tow hooks. Inside are heated black Nappa leather-trimmed seats, a premium Alpine audio system and a 12.3-inch radio with navigation. Available options include a Sky One-Touch PowerTop, 8,000-pound WARN winch and all-weather mats.

2026 JEEP WRANGLER 85TH ANNIVERSARY

PACKAGE PRICE: $710 WRANGLER/$1,005 GLADIATOR

The third Twelve 4 Twelve drop was the Jeep Wrangler 85th Anniversary special edition.

Designed to blend heritage with modern capability and premium touches created for adventure, it is a bold nod to Jeep Americana heritage.

Plaid takes the spotlight, channeling generations of hardworking tradition, outdoor freedom and classic style for modern adventure. Exclusive plaid seat inserts feature an "85th" seat tag, complemented by matching plaid accents on the instrument panel and mid bolster.

The heritage-inspired details are paired with exclusive touches, such as an "85th" shifter medallion and cupholder plaque, along with durable Berber floor and cargo mats. Exterior highlights include exclusive Steel Oxide-painted 17-inch wheels, bronze tow hooks, Blue Agave 85th anniversary badges and decals and body-color fender flares.

Highlights include Standard Convenience Group heated front seats; heated steering wheel; remote start and keyless passive entry; Alpine premium audio; deep tint windows; Gorilla Glass windshield; heated mirrors and automatic LED headlamps; LED daytime running lamps and LED fog lamps; advanced safety technologies including adaptive cruise control, forward collision warning and advanced braking; and optional upgrades including all-terrain tires and a black molded-in color hardtop or a body-color hardtop.



The 2026 Jeep Wrangler 85th Anniversary special edition proclaims it is "plaid with purpose."



2026 JEEP WRANGLER WILLYS 392

VEHICLE MSRP: $69,995



The new 2026 Jeep Wrangler Willys 392 pairs classic Willys heritage with a 470-hp Hemi V-8.

The fourth Twelve 4 Twelve drop was the 2026 Jeep Wrangler Willys 392. Blending the soul of the original Willys with the unmistakable growl of a 6.4L Hemi V-8, the limited-edition Wrangler was designed to prove that 85 years of off-road leadership can still shake the ground.

Pairing classic Willys character with an advanced off-road powertrain, the Willys brings 470 hp and 470 pound-feet of torque to confidently navigate dunes, rocky terrain and steep backcountry grades. A two-mode dual exhaust system further enhances performance, allowing drivers to select between a subdued tone and a distinctive, performance-oriented exhaust note.

Highlights include: 35-inch BFGoodrich KO2 tires on 17-inch beadlock-capable wheels (11.1 inches of ground clearance), Tru-Lok electronic locking rear differential, Selec-Trac full-time transfer case, third-generation Dana 44 heavy-duty solid front and full-float rear axles, 4.56 axle ratio, rock rails, winch-capable steel front bumper, steel rear bumper and cold-air intake hood with water separator. Additional standard equipment includes Willys hood decals and heritage 4WD rear graphics, LED exterior lighting, Nappa leather heated/power front seats, an Alpine nine-speaker audio system with subwoofer and 552-watt amplifier, a 12.3-inch touchscreen radio with navigation, four programmable auxiliary switches and the Trailer Tow Package.

The Willys 392 expanded its palette in March with the new Goldilocks color option.

2027 JEEP WRANGLER SWITCHBACK

PACKAGE PRICE: $2,870



The 2027 Jeep Wrangler Switchback brings vehicle personalization to life with contrasting hood-and-door combinations.

The 12th and final Twelve 4 Twelve drop was the 2027 Jeep Wrangler Switchback that brings the vehicle's inherent "building kit" philosophy to life through a deliberate mix of colors and components.

Black and Sting-Gray dual vented power dome hoods and doors are exchanged across complementary configurations, creating the impression of sibling Wranglers swapping parts, while the Gecko color shifts from exterior hue to high-impact accent on the grille surround, hood graphic and beadlock wheel rings, with a Gecko finish developed specifically for the wheel ring.

Exterior details include Gecko accents throughout, including the grille surround, beadlock wheel rings, hood graphic and swing gate decal; gloss black or Sting-Gray painted dual vented power dome hood and doors; Sting-Gray or gloss black "Switchback" hood graphic and Sting-Gray "'41" bodyside decal; gloss black or Sting-Gray three-piece hardtop; black "Jeep" and "Trail Rated" badging; and black tow hooks.

Inside, Switchback carries its contrasting design theme forward with a mix of color, materials and graphic details. Global Black and Sea Salt Nappa leather form the foundation, while Lime accent stitching connects to the Gecko exterior accents.

Highlights include Switchback cupholder plaque; a swing gate plaque featuring blueprint-style Wrangler illustrations, technical specifications, mapping elements and Detroit/Toledo callouts; Willys satin chrome shifter medallion; and unique HVAC vent graphics featuring the iconic seven-slot grille and Willys silhouette.



2026 JEEP WRANGLER AMERICA250

PACKAGE PRICE: $2,095



The seventh Twelve 4 Twelve drop was the 2026 Jeep Wrangler America250 edition. A powerful celebration of red, white and blue pride ahead of the country's 250th anniversary, it comes from the auto brand recognized consecutively for a quarter-century as "America's most patriotic."

Designed as a moving tribute to American heritage, the Jeep Wrangler America250 features classic color blocking and graphic elements influenced by decades of Jeep history and American roots. Patriotic graphics, Steel Oxide wheels, Jean Blue seats and soft-top, plus expressive red accents combine to create a visually striking Wrangler special edition.

Exterior features include an exclusive Bright White exterior highlighted by an America250 fender badge, 33-inch BFGoodrich All-Terrain tires with gray and black Willys-inspired wheel caps, steel rock rails and red front and rear tow hooks, body-color fender flares and gloss black fog lamp bezels integrated into the front bumper, and standard LED headlamps and fog lamps.

Interior highlights include Jean Blue cloth seats and an America250 Velcro seat-back patch; Jean Blue instrument panel mid bolster with tri-color red, silver (white) and blue accent stitching, echoed throughout the cabin; unique tri-color-stitched steering wheel, red seat belts and recline straps, and red-and-silver-stitched transmission and transfer case boots; anodized carbon vent and steering wheel bezels; Mopar all-weather floor mats; "America250" debossed leather key chain with American flag motif; and an "America250" swing gate plaque.

The Jeep brand and Marvel also joined forces to deliver a special design element that brings a heroic twist to the American icon—a Captain America shield tire cover. Additionally, a Marvel comic book with an exclusive limited-edition cover featuring Captain America and the Jeep Wrangler America250 edition comes with the purchase of each vehicle.



The 2026 Jeep Wrangler America250 celebrates America's most patriotic brand.

2027 JEEP WRANGLER JL-2A

PACKAGE PRICE: $4,995



The 2027 Jeep Wrangler JL-2A design cues are inspired by the original Willys CJ-2A, the first Jeep vehicle designed for civilian use.

The 11th Twelve 4 Twelve drop was the 2027 Jeep Wrangler JL-2A, honoring the July 1945 Willys MB adaptation for civilian life with the introduction of the Willys CJ-2A—the first Jeep vehicle designed specifically for civilian use and the beginning of the "CJ" (Civilian Jeep) legacy.

Built by Willys-Overland in Toledo, Ohio, the CJ-2A brought proven Jeep capability to farms, ranches and industry, adding practical features including a tailgate and rear power takeoff, along with larger headlights and the now-iconic seven-slot grille. The 2027 Wrangler JL-2A reaches back to 1945 for inspiration, including a modern salute to the original CJ-2A's color palette, led by the colors Gobi on the two-door and '41 Green on the four-door, with Bright White, Sting-Gray, Ghost and Joose also available.

Highlights include 17-inch retro wheels painted Joose, 33-inch BFGoodrich KO2 All-Terrain tires, body color fender flares, three-piece hardtop, front and rear orange tow hooks and Dark Metallic Grey grille accents.

Interior highlights include Nappa Heritage Tan leather-wrapped seats; Nappa PUR instrument panel mid-bolster; Bison Brown door panels, lower instrument panel and center console; Desert Orange accent stitching; Willys-Overland satin chrome shifter medallion and heritage-inspired HVAC vent graphics; rear swing gate plaque; standard Convenience Group package with remote start, auto-dimming rearview mirror and universal garage door opener; plus a front TrailCam with integrated washer.

2026 JEEP WRANGLER REWIND

PACKAGE PRICE: $1,900 ON COMPARABLY EQUIPPED WRANGLER & GLADIATOR WILLYS MODELS



The retro-inspired 2026 Jeep Wrangler and Gladiator Rewind special editions were immediate hits with off-roaders seeking a touch of nostalgia.

The sixth Twelve 4 Twelve drop was the 2026 Jeep Wrangler Rewind. Also available as the Jeep Gladiator Rewind, the package was originally unveiled as a one-off concept at the 2025 Easter Jeep Safari, making an immediate impression.

Jeep brand designers, many of whom grew up in the 1980s and '90s, approached Rewind as a nostalgia-soaked throwback to an era of brightly colored Wranglers, bold graphics and early gaming and digital design influences. Limited body-color combinations include Bright White, Granite Crystal, Anvil, Gloss Black, Hydro Blue, Joose, Earl (Wrangler only) and Reign.

Other exterior highlights include multi-color exterior graphics inspired by the bold hues and patterns of the mixtape and roller skate era; limited-run exterior color palette featuring vibrant, era-accurate shades; gold accent wheels and tow hooks; off-road tires and steel rock rails; and painted body-color fender flares.

Interior touches include bespoke Nappa leather seats with embossed patterns influenced by classic 8-bit arcade graphics; era-inspired accent stitching and color-matched painted interior details; a unique dot matrix-inspired shift knob cap paired with exclusive cupholder plaques for Wrangler and Gladiator, plus a swing gate plaque and spare tire cover for Wrangler; and all-weather slush mats.

Additional standard content includes a 7-inch driver information display, heated front seats and heated steering wheel, remote start, Keyless Passive Entry, LED headlamps and fog lamps, adaptive cruise control and forward collision warning, locking rear differential and Off-Road+ mode, trailer hitch and programmable auxiliary switches.



2027 JEEP WRANGLER LAREDO

PACKAGE PRICE: $1,995 OVER A WRANGLER WILLYS WITH XTREME 35 TIRE PACKAGE

The ninth Twelve 4 Twelve drop marked the return of the Jeep Wrangler Laredo, one of the most recognizable nameplates in the brand's portfolio. The 2027 Wrangler Laredo draws inspiration from the iconic trim that helped shape the brand throughout the 1980s, blending heritage-inspired style with the proven, trail-rated capability of Wrangler Willys.

Unveiled as a concept at this year's Easter Jeep Safari, Wrangler Laredo immediately captured the attention of Jeep enthusiasts with its distinctive character and unmistakable style. It makes a lasting impression through rich earth tones, purposeful graphics and distinctive accents, drawing inspiration from classic rodeo-era style and reinterpreting it for a new generation.



The ninth Twelve 4 Twelve drop marked the return of the Jeep Wrangler Laredo.

Key exterior elements include the standard Xtreme 35 Package with 35-inch BFGoodrich KO2 tires paired with bronze beadlock-capable wheels, tan soft-top, Sky One-Touch PowerTop available (four-door only), Black hardtop available (two- and four-door), Gobi accent grille, Laredo hood decals (center and side), distinctive bodyside decals, rear lasso-style "4WD" decal, bronze tow hooks and bronze-accented "Jeep" and "Trail Rated" badging, and available trailer hitch.

Inside, Wrangler Laredo delivers a warm, tactile environment with earth-tone colors, texture and craftsmanship anchored by a predominantly Bison Brown environment, plus Bison Brown Nappa leather seats with front heat and power adjust; Mayan Gold accent stitching; Global Black-wrapped instrument panel surround, grab handle, door armrests and center console; Laredo badging; rear swing gate plaque featuring the coordinates of Laredo, Texas; custom center console badge; and a subtle cowboy hat motif that appears in the HVAC pad prints.

2027 JEEP WRANGLER SARGE

PACKAGE PRICE: $500 ON COMPARABLY EQUIPPED WILLYS & RUBICON MODELS

The eighth Twelve 4 Twelve drop was the 2027 Jeep Wrangler Sarge, a tribute to the brand's military heritage reimagined for today's drivers. Also available as the Jeep Gladiator Sarge special edition, its design blends rugged off-road capability and enhanced approach and departure angles with a distinctive, military-inspired aesthetic to go along with a 7,700-pound towing capacity and a maximum payload of 1,720 pounds.

The bold exterior is inspired by the iconic Willys MB, brought to life through authentic "'41" accents. First introduced in 2020, '41 Green has grown from a limited-run color into a defining symbol of the Jeep brand. Key exterior elements include a '41 Green or white grille surround, a vintage-style 1941 center hood decal paired with military-inspired door star graphics, bronze tow hooks, 17-inch wheels painted '41 Green, BFGoodrich KO2 All-Terrain tires, steel Rubicon Rock Rails with body-color fender flares, a '41 Green or white Freedom Top hardtop and a rear swing gate plaque.



The 2027 Jeep Wrangler and Gladiator Sarge serve as a tribute to Jeep brand military heritage, fusing 1941 roots with modern capability, craftsmanship and refinement.

Inside, Wrangler Sarge is designed with a mission-ready interior that blends durable materials with elevated craftsmanship, creating an environment built for both resilience and comfort. Highlights include a new color space of Cattle Tan Nappa and Drab Green surfaces, hard-wearing Soul Cloth on seating surfaces and the mid-instrument panel, Mayan Gold accent stitching across the cabin and key touchpoints, "1941" cup holder plaque, star medallion shift knob and HVAC pad prints featuring the iconic seven-slot grille.

2027 JEEP WRANGLER SMOKY MOUNTAIN

PACKAGE PRICE: $80 ABOVE A POPULARLY EQUIPPED WRANGLER WILLYS

The 10th Twelve 4 Twelve drop was the 2027 Jeep Wrangler Smoky Mountain special edition, unveiled during the 14th annual Smoky Mountain Invasion in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee. Held each year in the shadow of the Great Smoky Mountains, Smoky Mountain Invasion draws thousands of Jeep owners for a weekend of scenic drives, custom vehicle builds, aftermarket innovation and community.

Built on the Wrangler Willys platform and available as a four-door model, the special edition features Smoky Mountain side-hood decals inspired by the rugged peaks and winding trails of its namesake.

Exterior highlights include 17-inch smoky black wheels, a gloss black seven-slot grille, body color hardtop and fender flares, available Sky One-Touch PowerTop, standard 33-inch and available 35-inch BFGoodrich KO2 All-Terrain tires, steel rock rails, Dana 44 front and rear axles, locking rear differential, 4:10 axle ratio and trailer hitch.

Inside, an exclusive interior creates an understated, rugged environment, while Terracotta stitching and metallic Blaze Orange accents provide subtle pops of color. Interior highlights include premium Black Ferndale cloth seats with rugged embossed texture and deeper, more aggressive side bolsters in Black Soulmate; upper seat bolsters embossed with a 1941 Willys parachute graphic; wrapped instrument panel with Addax technical pattern; anodized carbon trim rings with distinctive smoke finish; rear swing gate plaque showcasing the exclusive Jeep Wrangler "drop" motif with a 1941 Willys parachute graphic against a star-filled Smoky Mountain night sky; gray metallic and satin chrome shifter medallion featuring a mama bear and cub graphic; standard heated seats; heated steering wheel; automatic dual-zone temperature control; and universal garage door opener.

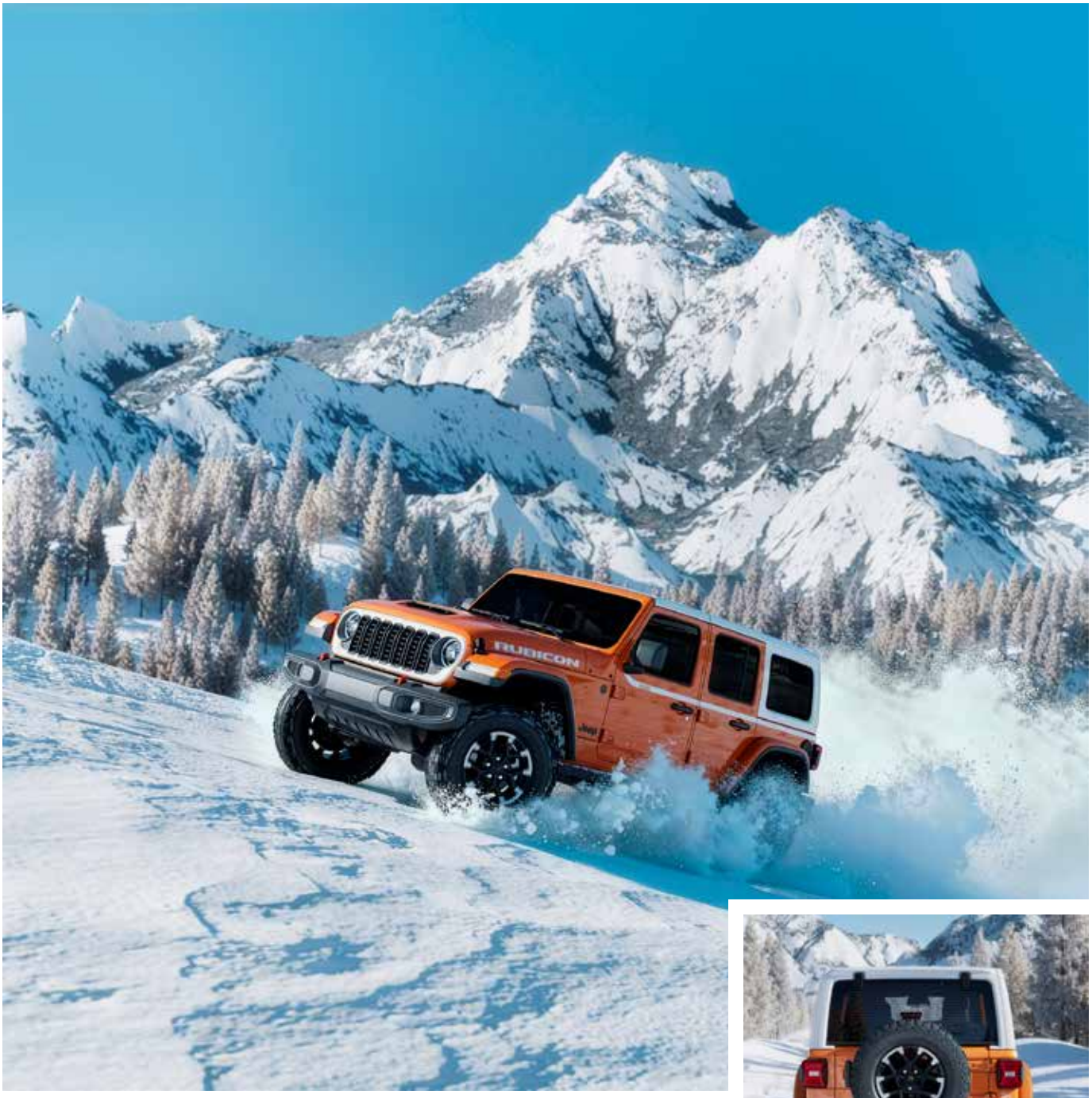


The new 2027 Jeep Wrangler Smoky Mountain special edition is inspired by the rugged beauty of the Great Smoky Mountains.



2026 JEEP WRANGLER WHITECAP

PACKAGE PRICE: $495 RUBICON X/ $2,690 SAHARA/$3,185 RUBICON



The 2026 Jeep Wrangler Whitecap is heritage-inspired with a Bright White hardtop and grille, available exclusively on Sahara and Rubicon trims.

The second Twelve 4 Twelve drop was the 2026 Jeep Wrangler Whitecap. Drawing inspiration from the classic CJ-Universal and its iconic Arctic White top, it represents a design that has long symbolized individuality and adventure.

The modern interpretation, offered exclusively on Sahara and Rubicon trims, combines advanced technology with 4x4 capability, built to conquer any terrain. Powered by either the 2.0L turbo or 3.6L engine, every Whitecap delivers authentic Jeep 4x4 performance through the brand-exclusive Select-Trac part-time or full-time transfer cases.

Other notable features include the Bright White painted hardtop roof, Bright White painted seven-slot grille, body-color fender flares (standard on Sahara and packaged on Rubicon), Bright White "1941" side stripe decal (Sahara and Rubicon) or Bright White hood decal on Rubicon, and optional Sky One-Touch PowerTop in Bright White accent. **TS**



Truck Racks

Yakima Products, Lake Oswego, Oregon, presents its OverHaul HD and OutPost HD Truck Racks. Paired with the company's tonneau cover kit, users can keep their truck beds covered and still carry bikes, kayaks, rooftop tents, ladders and more up top. The rack setups are built to handle real-world use, featuring heavy-duty construction, adjustable height on the OverHaul HD and wide crossbar compatibility.

Truck Tires

Cali Offroad, Ontario, California, presents its 9119 Evoke Wheel line. Built for trucks seeking a cleaner, more refined overall look without losing presence, the wheels feature 2,500- to 4,000-pound load ratings; premium bolt-on, two-piece caps; a deep concave mesh profile; and a modern, single-drill face. They are now available in gloss black finish in 20x10 and 22x10 sizes and 6- or 8-lug configurations.





Tire Carrier

GEN-Y Hitch, Nappanee, Indiana, presents its VENTURE Tire Carrier, developed in collaboration with **Grand Design Recreational Vehicles**. Designed to handle bulky spare tires, the carrier includes a built-in hydraulic lift system that raises and lowers tires up to 300 pounds. Integrated MOLLE panels transform the unit into usable on-board storage, with each panel rated to hold up to 45 pounds of tools, gear, or recovery equipment. The carrier is built from heavy-duty steel and designed to accommodate tires up to 43 inches with an F600 lug pattern.

Removable Bedliner

Husky Liners, Ann Arbor, Michigan, presents its Freedom Bed Liner, a durable, lift-out bed protection system built to give truck owners long-lasting defense against wear, rust and everyday damage. Made in the USA, the bedliner combines a rugged ProGard bed floor with heavy-duty interlocking side panels, delivering dependable protection in a non-permanent design that installs easily and lifts out when needed. Available for a variety of Chevrolet, Ford and Ram truck models, the liners include integrated cargo management features.





Forged Truck & SUV Wheels

ICON Alloys, Riverside, California, presents its FORGED Sentinel and Strat truck and SUV wheels, designed to combine aggressive styling with lightweight, high-strength forged alloy construction. Engineered for off-road use, the Sentinel and Strat both feature bold designs in 18-by-9-inch dimensions with application-specific bolt patterns and offsets. The wheels optimize vehicle dynamics and tire clearance while maintaining a purposeful stance. Monoblock forged construction adds strength.



Cooling Film

3M, St. Paul, Minnesota, presents its 3M Cooling Film, a reflective performance film that installs quickly on fleet vehicle roofs and uses proprietary technology to reflect solar radiation. The result is cooler cabs and interiors for more comfortable drivers, reduced heat exposure to temperature-sensitive goods and a positive impact on operating costs. The highly reflective film surface deflects more than 85% of incoming solar energy, limiting how much heat reaches the vehicle below while dissipating absorbed heat away from the roof surface. ***TS***

DISC BRAKES
wilwood
AERO6-DM
DIRECT MOUNT
BRAKE KITS
FOR SELECT TRUCKS AND SUVs
wilwood.com
805.388.1188
DESIGNED · TESTED 1977 USA MANUFACTURED
DISC BRAKES
wilwood
ESTABLISHED 1977

STEERING PROBLEMS?
Solutions are what we do
One stop for aftermarket steering solutions
PSC
PERFORMANCE STEERING COMPONENTS
Steering Re-Engineered
PSCSTEERING.COM

LEADING THE HEARD SINCE 1978
Borla
EXHAUST
1.877.GOBORLA | borla.com/installer

APEX by BendPak
APEX™ WHEEL SERVICE.
BUILT SMART.
PRICED RIGHT.
NEW
SHOP NOW
Wheels not included.
BENDPAK.COM/APEX
1-800-253-2363
©2026 BendPak Inc. All rights reserved. · TS3/26

INTRODUCING
Dynamat DaiA
AI-POWERED ASSISTANT
SEARCH
ASK
ANALYZE
DIAGNOSE
We pioneered vehicle sound control.
Now we're reinventing it... Again!
Dynamat
#1 IN SOUND DEADENING & HEAT CONTROL
DynamatAi.com

HOOVER Products
PRES-N-SNAP
INSTALLS SNAPS & GROMMETS
Installs snaps and grommets easily into canvas and vinyl
Versatile and easy to use Pres-N-Snap
Capable of setting numerous brands of fasteners simply by changing dies
Heat-treated cast aluminum makes it both lightweight and durable
Pres-N-Snap and all components are proudly made in the USA
951-654-4627 • HooVerproducts.com

ADVERTISER INDEX

ADVERTISER	PAGE #
Advanced Clutch Technology Inc	13
aFe-Advanced FLOW Engineering Inc	29
Air Lift Co	45
American Autowire	57
AMSOIL	IFC
ATECH Motorsports	11
BendPak Inc	7, 66
Borla Performance Industries	66
Canton Racing Products	19
COBB Tuning	51
Dynamat Inc.	66
Eibach Inc	47
Exedy Globalparts Corp	23
Flaming River Industries Inc	21
Highline Warren	55
HooVer Products	66
Horizon Global	49
IDIDIT LLC	33

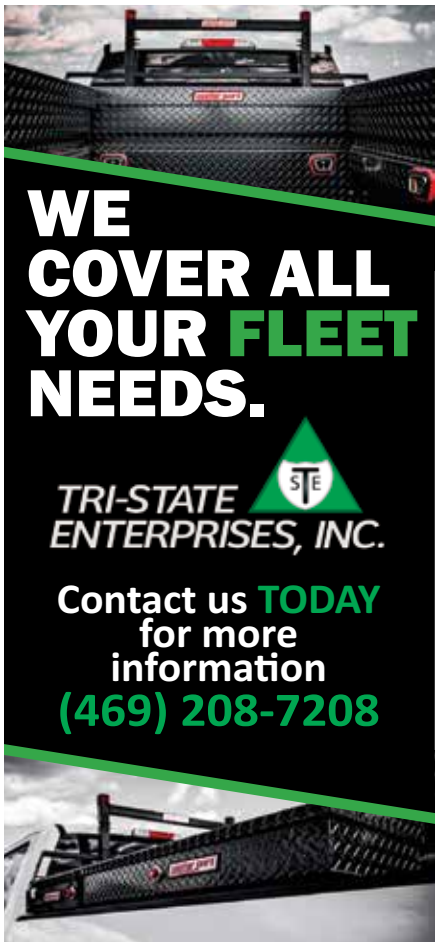
ADVERTISER	PAGE #
KYB America LLC	35
McLeod Racing LLC	17
Meyer Distributing	1
Motor State Distributing	5, 15
North	Insert
Pacbrake	37
PSC Motorsports	27, 66
RANDYS Worldwide	41, 67
Rough Country	39
Scotchman Industries	31
Steelcraft Group	67
SuperSprings Intl Inc	43
The Wheel Group	IBC
TrailFX	53
Tri-State Enterprises Inc	3, 67
Trim-Lok Inc	57
Turn 14 Distribution	BC
Valvetronic Designs	25

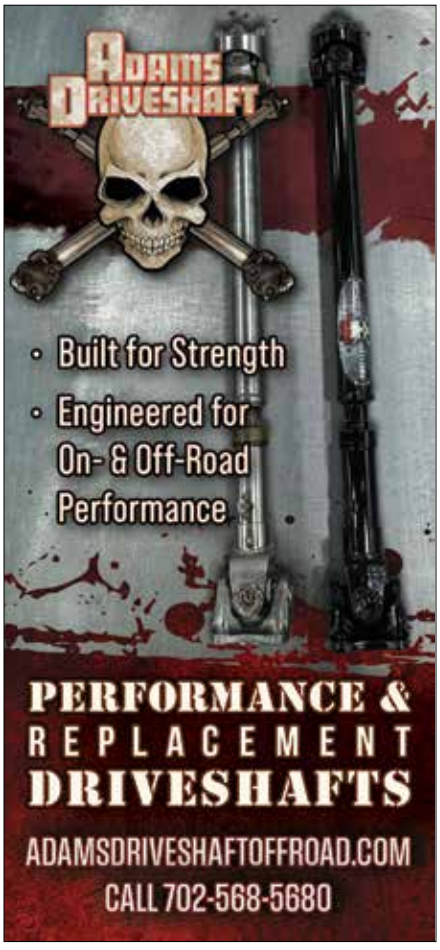
ADVERTISER	PAGE #
Wilwood Disc Brakes	9, 66

PRODUCTS	PAGE #
3M	65
Advanced Clutch Technology	32
AutoTuner USA	33
AWE	32
Brembo	33
Cali Offroad	65
East Coast Gear Supply	32
Eibach	32
Full-Race Motorsports	33
GEN-Y Hitch	65
Holley	33
Hot Shot's Secret	32
Husky Liners	65
ICON Alloys	65
Wilwood	32
Yakima Products	65

The Advertiser Index is intended solely as a convenience for our readers and is not a written or implied part of any advertising commitment. As such, THE SHOP assumes no liabilities for unintentional errors or omissions.







Students Challenged to Create 2027 SEMA Ford F-350 Build



Build IV is the latest grassroots effort by Northern Tool + Equipment to introduce the next generation to opportunities in the skilled trades.



A group of 14 CTE students from Flandreau Indian School in South Dakota is transforming a 1976 Ford F-350 utility truck into "America's Ultimate Trades Toolbox"—a project that will ultimately end up at the 2027 SEMA Show. (Photos courtesy Northern Tool + Equipment)

A group of 14 Career & Technical Education (CTE) students from Flandreau Indian School in South Dakota have accepted a challenge from national retailer Northern Tool + Equipment to tackle a school-year project transforming a 1976 Ford F-350 utility truck into "America's Ultimate Trades Toolbox."

The students have until May 5, 2027, to complete the build before its first reveal. Then, in November, their work heads to Las Vegas as a featured vehicle at the 2027 SEMA Show.

Known as "Build IV," the project is the fourth student build organized by Northern Tool + Equipment. It is the program's first build hosted at a tribal school, and the first time half of the student build team members are females, according to company officials.

"We are grateful to be approached by a company that wants to invest in our school and growing CTE program without asking for anything in return," says Everall Fox, superintendent of Flandreau Indian School. "No endorsement of products; it's just about the kids and creating a better future for them."

Throughout the school year, students will take on the transformation of the 1976 Ford F-350—gaining hands-on experience in welding, fabrication, automotive repair, paint and bodywork, design and more as they work alongside industry professionals. The truck's six utility compartments and bed will become America's Ultimate Trades Toolbox, with each compartment showcasing tools, craftsmanship and career pathways representing the skilled trades.

Students will work alongside build mentor Keaton Lee, a renowned custom painter and builder.

"This is going to be an amazing experience for the students," says Lee. "I'm excited to get to work with this group and provide them with knowledge that will change their lives."

The team at Einspahr Ford in Brookings, South Dakota, is also participating. Its trained Ford technicians and vehicle experts will work alongside students throughout the project, helping them understand the truck, diagnose problems and gain exposure to professional automotive work.

As part of the project, Northern Tool + Equipment is partnering with DEWALT to equip the shop with thousands of dollars' worth of professional-grade tools. Additionally, House of Kolor will help reopen the school's shuttered paint booth and provide paint.



"No one company can solve the skilled trades gap alone, but together we can give young people a much clearer view of the incredible opportunities waiting for them," says Frank Crowson, chief commercial officer, Northern Tool + Equipment. "We're proud to bring together some of the best brands and people in the industry for Build IV—not to build this for the students, but to give them the tools, expertise and opportunity to build it themselves."

Viewers can see monthly updates on Northern Tool's YouTube channel. The series will be hosted by Jesse James Dupree, lead singer of rock band Jackyl, entrepreneur and trades enthusiast. Progress will also be shared throughout the school year on Northern Tool's Facebook, Instagram and TikTok channels.

For the second consecutive year, the students' journey will also become a television series on RACER Network. Build IV will be documented as an eight-episode series, premiering in October 2027. ***TS***

MAYHEM
WHEELS

INTRODUCING

DELTA

8304 MACHINED

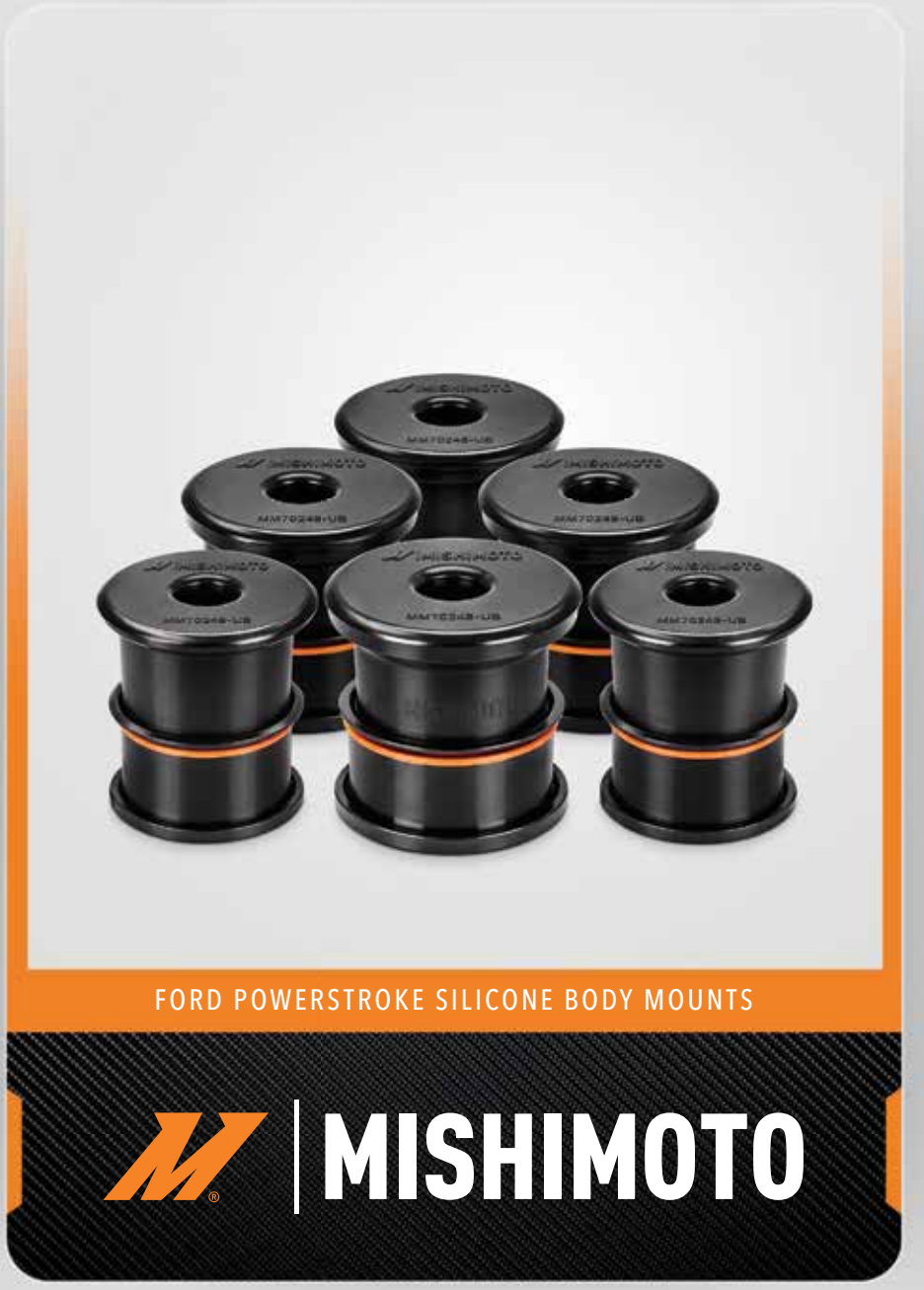


MACHINED EXPANSION

AVAILABLE SIZES: 17”, 20”

LEARN MORE AT:
MAYHEMWHEELS.COM

ORDER TODAY ON DEALER WEB
DEALERS.THEWHEELGROUP.COM



FORD POWERSTROKE SILICONE BODY MOUNTS

MISHIMOTO

YOUR COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

The Best Selection of the Biggest Brands, Right at Your Fingertips.

CONNECT WITH US AT PRI – BOOTH 3847

TURN14 DISTRIBUTION

100% WHOLESALE | TURN14.COM

As the premier B2B source for Mishimoto products, Turn 14 Distribution gives you the competitive advantage you need to succeed. Enjoy industry-leading customer support, real-time inventory, flat-rate shipping, and hassle-free returns. All designed to keep your business running smoothly.

Sign up for an account to experience the Turn 14 difference for yourself!