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Special project builders focus on the smallest details so drivers can look forward to 100% enjoyment behind the wheel. *See roundup on page 40*. (Main photos courtesy Cadillac & ECD Automotive Design; inset photo courtesy Novsight)

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Jef White
Editor in Chief
theshopmag.com

Drivers Resist In-Cabin Technology Overload

Have new vehicles reached their peak when it comes to in-cabin electronics? A recent study by JD Power notes a majority of drivers are most satisfied with the automotive technology they barely notice.

Features like smart ignition and smart climate control deliver high satisfaction with few problems. More complex features like hands-free driving systems and passenger screens, however, often add friction instead of value, according to the JD Power 2026 U.S. Tech Experience Index (TXI) Study.

"The technology customers value most is often the technology they barely notice because it simply works," says Doron Hikry, director of customer success at JD Power. "Smart ignition and smart climate control make everyday driving easier without demanding the driver's attention, while more automation and additional screens don't necessarily translate into a better experience. For automakers, the opportunity is to prioritize technology that makes driving simpler, not more complicated. The features that solve real problems without adding effort or stress for the driver are the ones resonating most with customers."

Here at THE SHOP, the low-tech trend is one we've seen more of recently, with recent special edition vehicles and custom builds serving as great examples. All you have to do is flip through the Project Vehicle Sketchbook found in this issue (pg. 40) to see how many luxury models and even hypercars are stripping away tech in favor of a more "analog" experience to see that drivers are resisting tech overload more than ever.

Meanwhile, some key findings of the 2026 Index:

- ***Inconspicuous smart tech delivers the strongest payoff.*** Smart technologies that operate seamlessly in the background are earning high satisfaction among owners while also generating relatively few problems. For example, smart ignition ranks highest in overall satisfaction and has one of the lowest problem counts (2.4 PP100). Similarly, smart climate control and smart driver preferences account for high levels of customer satisfaction and desirability, and low overall problem counts.
- ***More automation doesn't automatically improve the experience.*** In the United States, SAE Level 2 (L2) driver assistance systems, which require drivers to keep their hands on the wheel and eyes on the road, outperform more technologically advanced SAE Level 2+ (L2+) hands-free systems on execution and overall experience scores, despite L2+ systems offering more functionality. While L2+ systems have a slightly lower problem count than L2 systems (13.8 vs. 14.3 PP100, respectively), they don't necessarily deliver a better overall experience. "The results indicate that owners may currently be more comfortable with systems that clearly assist the driver rather than those that introduce a greater degree of automation," says Hikry.
- ***Passenger screens don't always appeal to owners.*** Passenger screens are more common and actively used in premium vehicles, yet they rank among the most problematic technologies in the index (21.3 PP100). More than one-third (35%) of owners industrywide who have a passenger screen say they have never tried to use it, while just 6% say they use it every time they drive. Some vehicles equipped with passenger screens also had higher rates of infotainment system problems in the JD Power 2026 U.S. Initial Quality Study (IQS).

The TXI analyzes 40 automotive technologies divided into five categories: comfort and convenience; connected vehicle; driver assist; electric vehicle; and smart vehicle. Cadillac ranks highest overall and highest among premium brands for innovation, with a score of 641 (on a 1,000-point scale). Genesis (559) ranks second and BMW (524) ranks third.

Hyundai ranked highest among mass market brands for innovation for a seventh consecutive year with a score of 524. GMC (470) and Kia (470) tied for second.

The 2026 U.S. Tech Experience Index (TXI) is based on responses from 68,084 owners of new 2026 model-year vehicles who were surveyed after 90 days of ownership. It was fielded from June 2025 through May 2026 based on vehicles registered from March 2025 through February 2026.

See more at https://www.jdpower.com/business/u-s-tech-experience-index-txi-study/. ***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, Paul Hanaphy, Dalton Johnson, Maura Keller, Josh Poulson, Tony Thacker, Michael Timmons

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

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Daily Leadership Steps That Work

5 powerful ways to positively encourage employees every day.



BY MICHAEL TIMMONS

Image credit: J.V.G. Ransik-stock-adobe.com



Michael Timmons is an automotive aftermarket executive, business strategist and industry adviser with more than 25 years of experience growing leading truck, Jeep, off-road and automotive accessory brands. He has led sales, marketing, product development and operations for some of the industry's most recognized manufacturers. Today, he advises manufacturers and leadership teams on business strategy, channel development, product innovation and organizational leadership while continuing to write about the trends shaping the automotive aftermarket. Visit MichaelTimmonsGG.com.

Creating a workplace where employees feel valued and motivated doesn't happen through occasional gestures. It's built through consistent, daily actions.

Leaders often underestimate how much small, repeated behaviors shape team culture, retention and performance. The good news is that encouraging employees daily doesn't require grand initiatives. It comes down to five practical approaches that, when done consistently, create a lasting positive impact on both employees and leadership effectiveness.

1 RECOGNITION & APPRECIATION

One of the most powerful daily practices is genuine recognition and appreciation. This means noticing effort, progress and wins—both big and small—and acknowledging them in real time. A simple "good work on that LED install" or "I noticed how you handled that customer request" can reinforce positive behavior and build confidence.

When employees feel seen, they are more likely to stay engaged and take ownership of their work. Recognition also helps reinforce the behaviors and standards a leader wants repeated across the team.

Doing these daily matters, because consistency builds trust. If appreciation only comes during reviews or rare moments, it loses impact and can feel performative.

Daily recognition creates momentum and reinforces a culture where effort is noticed, not assumed.

For leaders, this habit also improves awareness. You begin to actively look for what is going right instead of only reacting to what is going wrong, which naturally shifts your leadership style into a more balanced and constructive mindset.

2 INTENTIONAL COMMUNICATION & ACTIVE LISTENING

Another key way to encourage employees daily is through intentional communication and active listening. This means checking in with purpose—not just on task-related questions, but also taking time to understand challenges, blockers and ideas.

Employees who feel heard are more likely to contribute openly and solve problems early before they escalate. Even brief conversations (when done attentively) can significantly improve morale and clarity.

Daily communication builds psychological safety. When employees know their voice matters every day, and not just in structured meetings, they become more confident and proactive.

For leaders, this practice is equally valuable because it reduces blind spots. You gain real-time insight into team dynamics, work-

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load issues and potential risks that might otherwise go unnoticed until they become larger problems.

3 KNOWING EMPLOYEES AS INDIVIDUALS

A third important practice is taking the time to truly get to know your employees as individuals.

This goes beyond job roles and performance metrics. It includes understanding their strengths, motivations, communication styles and, where appropriate, personal interests. Knowing that someone values flexibility, enjoys problem-solving or is working toward a personal goal helps you lead them more effectively and humanely.

This daily effort doesn't mean long conversations every day, but rather consistent curiosity. Remembering details, asking follow-up questions and showing genuine interest in who they are all make a difference. This matters because employees don't disengage from companies as much as they disengage from feeling like interchangeable parts.

For leaders, building these relationships improves influence. People are more receptive to guidance when they feel respected as individuals, not just workers.

4 SUPPORTING GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT

The fourth way to encourage employees daily is by actively supporting growth and development. This includes giving feedback that is constructive and timely, offering opportunities to learn new skills and encouraging employees to take on meaningful challenges.

Growth-oriented leadership communicates belief in an employee's potential, which is often more motivating than external rewards alone.

When development becomes part of everyday leadership behavior, employees begin to see a future for themselves within the organization. This reduces turnover and increases engagement.

For leaders, investing in growth also strengthens the team's capabilities over time. As employees improve, the leader's workload shifts from constant problem-solving to more strategic thinking and planning.

5 CREATING A POSITIVE WORK ENVIRONMENT

The fifth practice is to create and model a consistently positive work environment. This doesn't mean ignoring problems or pretending everything is fine—it means approaching challenges with solutions, maintaining a respectful tone in difficult conversations and demonstrating stability under pressure.

Leaders set the emotional tone of the workplace more than they often realize. When positivity is modeled daily, it becomes the default team behavior.

Employees mirror what they observe, especially from leadership. This leads to better collaboration, fewer unnecessary conflicts and a more resilient team culture. For leaders themselves, this approach reduces burnout and emotional friction by actively shaping a healthier environment rather than constantly reacting to negativity.

BUILDING HIGHER-PERFORMING TEAMS

Ultimately, the benefit of practicing these five approaches daily extends well beyond employee motivation. Leaders who consistently recognize effort, communicate effectively, invest time in relationships, support growth and model positivity tend to build stronger, more loyal and higher-performing teams.

Employees who feel heard are more likely to contribute openly and solve problems early.

Just as importantly, these habits improve leadership clarity and reduce stress by creating predictable, healthy team dynamics.

In the end, encouraging employees daily is not about adding more tasks to a leader's schedule, but about changing how leadership is practiced in everyday moments. Small, intentional actions compound over time into culture, and culture ultimately determines performance.

Leaders who commit to these daily habits don't just improve their teams; they also become more effective, grounded and respected in their role. ***TS***



When employees feel seen, they are more likely to stay engaged and take ownership of their work. Image credit: Lightning - stock.adobe.com

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Off-Road Lifestyle p. 22 / Stitchcraft p. 28 / Customer Relationships, Part 2 p. 34 / Products p. 36

Bright Future Ahead

Aftermarket lighting has taken its place as an off-road industry staple.

BY JEF WHITE



Educated buyers are interested in product specs such as beam patterns, color temperature, sealing and whether a product is engineered for their specific vehicle. (Photo courtesy Baja Designs)

When customers are ready to head off the beaten path, can your shop help light the way? Featuring an exciting mix of LED emitters, housings, bars, brackets and accessories, the aftermarket lighting category has taken its place as an off-road industry staple.

Offering wide appeal to a diverse audience, lighting solutions can be the answer drivers are looking for today, as well as the first step in a much more comprehensive accessorization journey for tomorrow and beyond.

However, with lighting's growing popularity has come more manufacturers entering the market and more sources of information for consumers—some more trustworthy than others. Successful shops are ones that can drill down to the answers and brands that best meet the unique needs of individual clients and their builds.

Lighting pros are here to help illuminate the opportunities and challenges of this shiny market niche. Armed with the proper knowledge, your business can have a bright future in the aftermarket lighting category.

CHANGING MARKET

Times have changed from when lighting upgrades were considered niche enhancements for only select Jeep and off-road customers.

"LEDs that were once considered upgrades have now become standard," says Brandon Miller, brand manager for DV8 Offroad. "Technology has advanced significantly, allowing lights to have more options and be more reliable. More aftermarket companies offer DOT-optioned lights to provide their look, design and feel while following DOT specifications."

It's fair to say the category is now mainstream, says Jaclyn Bradham, chief revenue officer for Oracle Lighting.

"LED has replaced halogen as the default expectation, not a premium add-on, and the buying journey has shifted with it," she notes. "A huge share of demand now starts online, with consumers researching fitment and reviews on Shopify-style DTC sites before ever walking into a shop. That's pushed brands like ours to invest as much in digital content and community as in the hardware itself."

Over time the market "has evolved from the lumens and output race to the control and integration competition," says Brandon Nelson, marketing manager for Vision X Lighting.

"A lot of companies make bright lights, but the ones that will stand out are those that can stay on the cutting edge of vehicle integration through clever mounting, simplified wiring and multi-function designs," he notes.

The popularity of LED lighting has inflated the market and made it more difficult for professionals to identify quality components and suppliers, says Tony Savasta, vice president of marketing for Westin Automotive Products.

"LED technology became inexpensive and widely available, opening the door to an enormous number of no-name products sold primarily on price. The result has been a shrinking opportunity for established brands to compete," he explains. "Consumers can now find remarkably inexpensive lights making similar performance claims, often with little understanding of how those claims were tested. SAE testing of aftermarket LED products has demonstrated that advertised or apparent performance does not necessarily translate into properly controlled, compliant light output."

With more players making bolder claims, the market is heading in two directions, says Natalie Shpiegel, marketing director for RIGID Industries.

"On one end, commoditization has taken over, with cheap imported LED bars flooding online marketplaces, featuring lower outputs and quality at low prices," she says. "On the other end, a distinct premium tier has emerged for buyers who want high-quality lights. The conversation is moving from raw lumens to precision optics, thermal management, build quality and warranties."

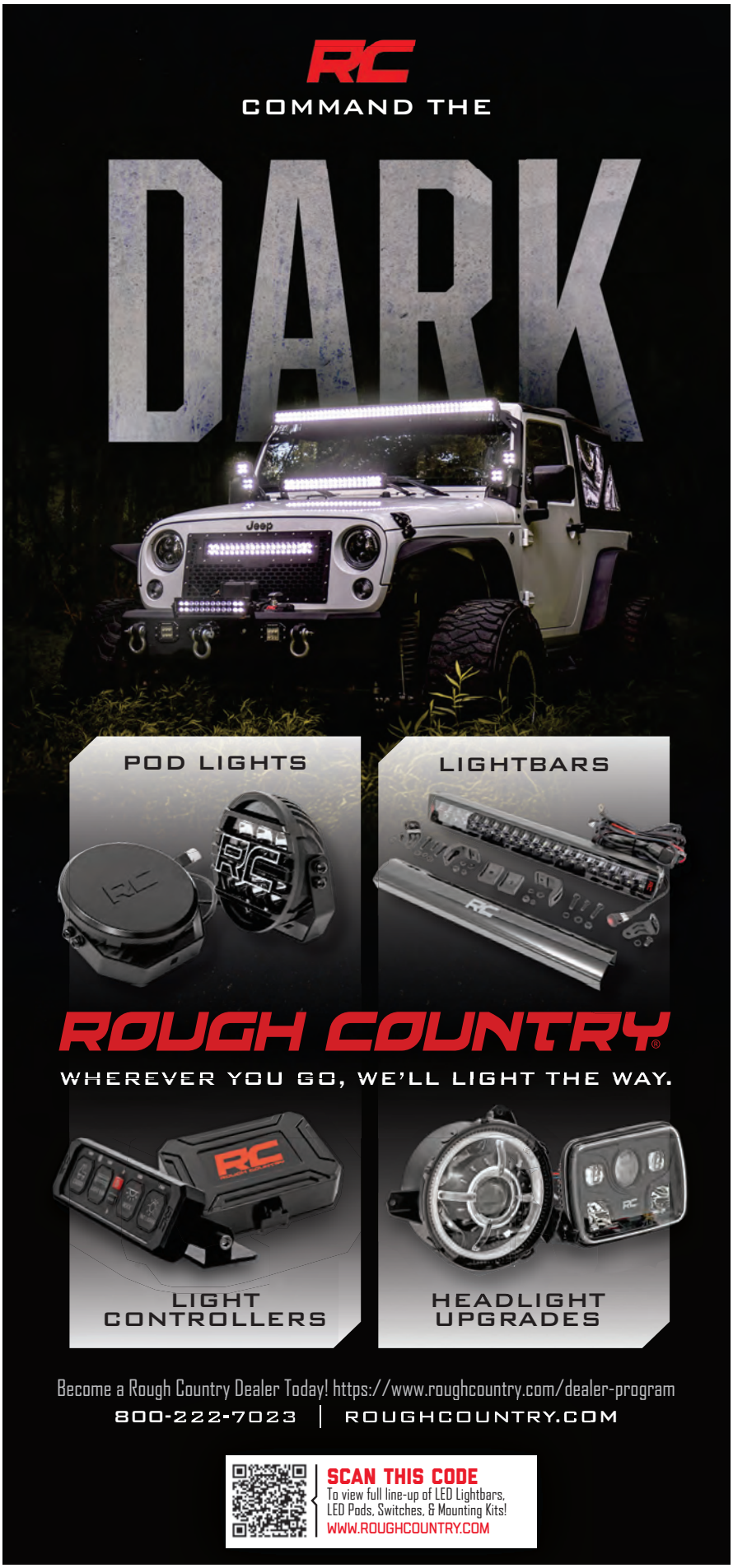
MOVING AT THE SPEED OF LIGHT

Justin Steller, sales director for Diode Dynamics, sees product innovation happening faster than ever.

"LED lighting used to be considered a luxury upgrade, but now it has become the standard," he says. "At the same time, the technology continues to evolve, with features such as backlighting, startup sequences, advanced controls and integrated electronics becoming increasingly common. Customers are also placing a greater value on where products are designed and manufactured."

Adam Watkins, marketing manager for Baja Designs, says shops see far more educated buyers these days who are interested in product specs such as beam patterns, color temperature, sealing and whether a product is engineered for their specific vehicle.

"Ten years ago, the whole conversation was lumens, and a light bar was a light bar.



LIGHTING PRODUCTS

■ **HOT PRODUCT:**
Squadron 2.0
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Next-gen 3-inch pod; Pro model delivers 5,921 lumens at 65W and Sport model delivers 3,200 lumens at 30W; all-new, color-selectable backlight; improved uService functionality with new clip-in reflectors and a redesigned lens gasket.

Baja Designs
Adam Watkins
Marketing Manager

■ **HOT PRODUCT:**
F-Series 40-Inch Light
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Dual-color red and white; full diffusion; low-profile rotation; extreme durability; extreme efficiency.

Kingpin Equipped/Kingpin Lighting
Chance Lord
Owner/Founder

■ **HOT PRODUCT:**
D-Switch Switch Panel
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Enhanced functionality in a compact, easy-to-use system; compatible with Apple CarPlay and Android Auto; backlight busbar and controller button; multiple strobing patterns; three trigger wires; solid-state relay; app and controller functionality.

Diode Dynamics
Justin Steller
Sales Director

■ **HOT PRODUCTS:**
DV8 Elite Lights
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Designed to fit all of the company's accessory products; affordable, reliable lighting alternative; strong polycarbonate lens resists cracking or breaking when impacted off-road; high-power OSRAM LEDs.

DV8 Offroad
Brandon Miller
Brand Manager

■ **HOT PRODUCTS:** Halo Pro Series Off-Road Driving Lights
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Distinctive industrial housing design that is easy to recognize on the trail; dynamic DRL signature that also works well as an in-store demonstration feature; clean installation; dependable performance; strong after-sales support.

Novsight
Alex Wang
CEO

■ **HOT PRODUCTS:**
Spectrum Series High-Performance LED Light Bars
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Modern bezel-less design with a tinted indirect reflector that conceals the OSRAM diodes and produces a bright, long-projecting light.

Rough Country
Tim Watts
VP Sales

Two things changed that. First, LEDs became more accessible. A flood of low-cost imports pushed a lot of price-driven volume into the category—and taught a generation of customers the hard way that a big number on a spec sheet doesn't equal usable light on the ground," he says. "Second, the platforms evolved. UTVs and overlanding went from niche to mainstream, and factory OEM lighting got genuinely better. Customer expectations increased drastically, pushing the industry as a whole into a new realm of performance."

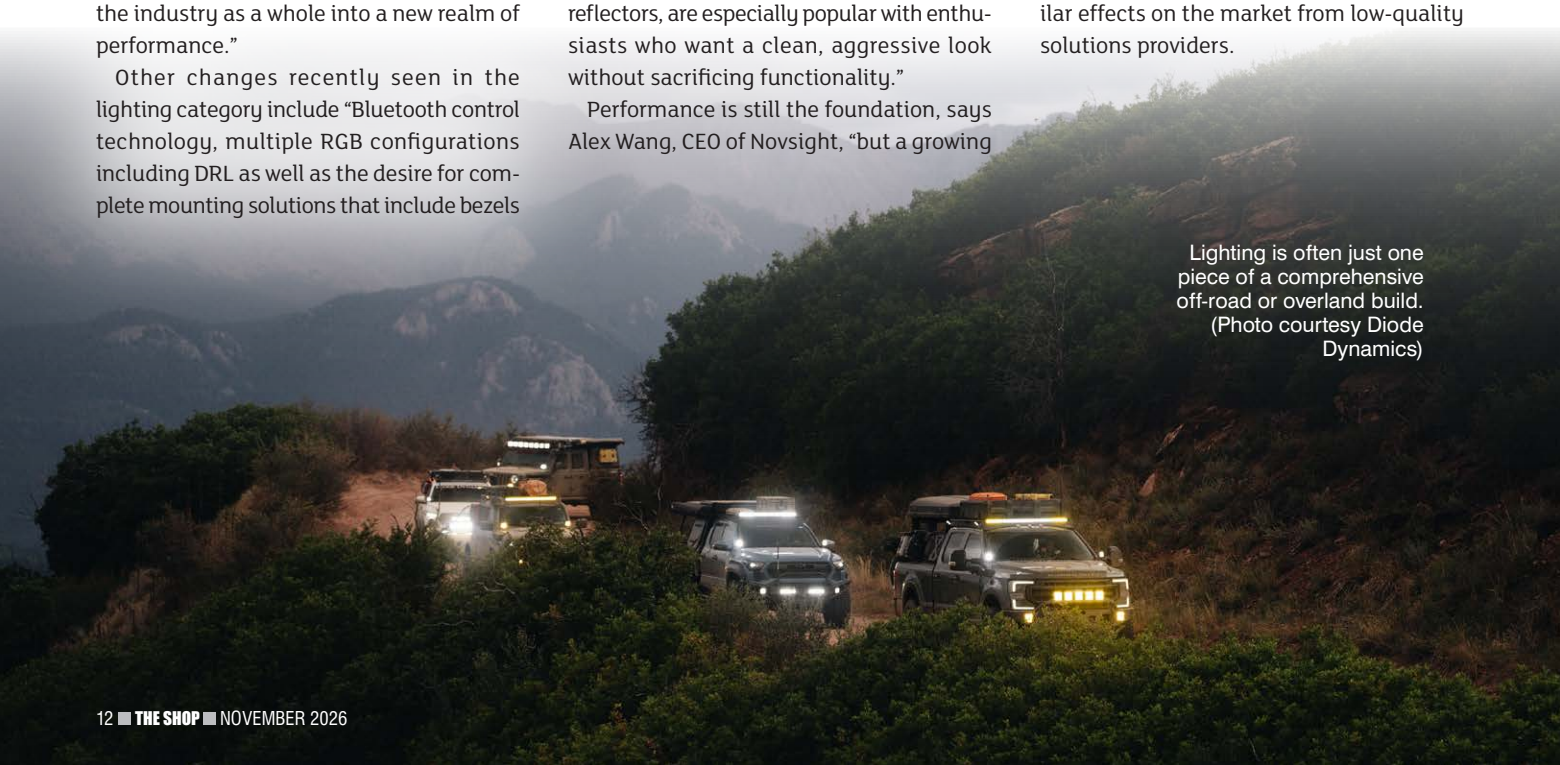
Other changes recently seen in the lighting category include "Bluetooth control technology, multiple RGB configurations including DRL as well as the desire for complete mounting solutions that include bezels or mounting solutions that create a factory, OE-like fit and finish," says Tim Watts, vice president of sales for Rough Country.

Meanwhile, the truck's overall look also plays an important role in lighting purchase decisions.

"Today's buyers want lighting that improves both visibility and vehicle appearance," says Sara Ford, marketing manager for TrailFX. "Products like our Black Edition lights, featuring clear lenses and black reflectors, are especially popular with enthusiasts who want a clean, aggressive look without sacrificing functionality."

Performance is still the foundation, says Alex Wang, CEO of Novsight, "but a growing number of customers now also care about design language, personalization, beam character, DRL signatures and how lighting fits the overall identity of their vehicle build. We see this as a natural stage in the development of the category, similar to what has happened with wheels, bumpers, suspension and other aftermarket products."

When it comes to scene lighting solutions, Chance Lord, owner and founder of Kingpin Equipped/Kingpin Lighting, has seen similar effects on the market from low-quality solutions providers.



Lighting is often just one piece of a comprehensive off-road or overland build. (Photo courtesy Diode Dynamics)

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LIGHTING PRODUCTS

HOT PRODUCTS:
Lensless Tacoma Headlights
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
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Oracle Lighting
Jaclyn Bradham
Chief Revenue Officer

HOT PRODUCTS:
Phoenix Series Lights
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Instant adaptability to changing conditions through a five-mode color system that lets drivers select the light temperature from cool white to amber via an in-cabin switch; more than 10,000 lumens per pod; three power modes; replaceable lenses.

RIGID Industries
Natalie Shpiegel
Director, Marketing

HOT PRODUCTS:
4-Inch LED Side Shooter Pod Lights
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Compact-yet-powerful lights that combine a 60-degree spot beam with a 140-degree flood beam; improved visibility and broad trail coverage; clear or amber lenses; kits include wiring harness, lens covers and mounting hardware; IP67 and IP69 ratings.

TrailFX
Sara Ford
Marketing Manager

HOT PRODUCTS: DURA Pro Dual-Action Series Driving Lights
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Versatile range of flagship driving lights; unique street-legal DRL mode; dual-circuit design utilizes an entire row of oversized TIR optics; creates a ghosted light bar effect when stacked for roof and bumper applications.

Vision X Lighting
Brandon Nelson
Marketing Manager

HOT PRODUCTS:
HyperQ LED Auxiliary Lights
FEATURES & BENEFITS:
Four powerful 5-watt Cree LEDs packed into a compact, rugged housing, delivering 1,080 raw lumens per light; available with a focused spot or flood beam; dust- and moisture-resistant polycarbonate lens; wiring harness, relay and fuse included.

Westin Automotive Products Inc.
Tony Savasta
VP Marketing



Good light when and where they need it is what people are after. (Photo courtesy Rough Country)

"The past 10 years have been a race to the bottom, with companies offering the cheapest commodity products for scene lighting options and the high-end, forward-facing lighting brands never really adopting the right technology for these applications," he observes. "Designs that rely on focused, high-power light sources to achieve their desired throw often use an extremely concentrated and bright light source that is not comfortable to look in the direction of, particularly when mounted close to your eyes. When you light up a truck, trailer, or camper, the lights are always right in your eyes, so this has always been a problem. We've looked to solve these issues and more with our light designs."

SEEING CLEARLY

Shpiegel sees lighting products as a gateway to increased vehicle customization.

"A customer who comes in for a light bar almost always needs a bracket, wiring harness, switch or mounting solution," she observes, "and the install itself is billable labor with strong margins. More importantly, it is a strong opportunity to turn a one-time sale into a long-term customer."

Steller identifies bumpers, roof racks, mounting brackets, wiring and switches as just some of the products that complement lighting upgrades.

"Customers who are investing in lighting are often building out their entire vehicle, whether that includes rooftop tents, skid plates, awnings or other accessories," he says. "Lighting is one piece of the overall build, so offering it alongside other products and installation services can help shops increase the value of each customer relationship."

Drivers already buying bumpers, racks, grille guards or other accessories are often looking to improve visibility and add functionality as well, says Ford.



A crowded supplier market means it's more important than ever for shops to identify quality components and quality brands.
(Photo courtesy Westin Automotive Products)


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Lighting products often serve as a natural gateway to further vehicle customization. (Photos courtesy RIGID Industries)

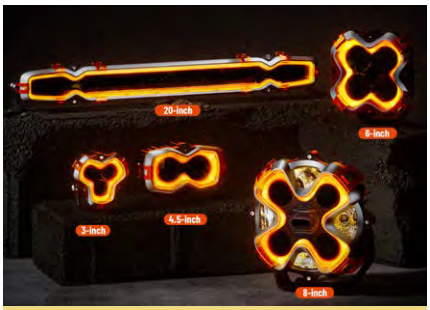
"Recommending compatible light bars or pod lights is a natural next step that helps customers get more out of their setup while increasing the overall value of the sale," she notes.

With the abundance of upsell opportunities, "a shop can turn a single-product installation into a more complete truck build—and potentially bring the customer back for the next upgrade," says Savasta, as lighting "becomes a natural 'while we have it in the shop' conversation. For installers, that can mean more revenue from the same vehicle without having to acquire another customer."



Nelson agrees that a single lighting sale can turn into a larger, more profitable project.

"A customer comes in looking for a light bar and suddenly you're talking about wiring, switches, mounts, bumpers and a complete setup—meaning more revenue for the shop," he says.



Today's lighting consumers care about performance and appearance. (Photos courtesy Novsight)

Lord reports that serious buyers will be interested to learn more about quality lighting options.

"Lighting is one of those accessories that all customers are interested in if presented with the option," he says. "Scene lighting can be sold as a small upsell or as a full-blown light system. With such a strong value proposition for the customer, once they see a demo, it's hard for them to pass up the option, especially over cheap commodity products. Combine this with an experienced shop that can confidently handle 12-volt wiring and it's a recipe for sales success."

LOOK AT ME

Miller says a well-done LED lighting upgrade becomes an appreciated finishing touch on many projects.

"Not only are they an easy add-on to a customer's build, but lighting really allows the vehicle build to look complete. While DV8 specializes in armor, once proper lighting is added, it can pull together the entire build to look complete and provide the customer that 'wow' factor they may not have expected," he says.

Following successful projects, it's often not long before the lighting upgrade is

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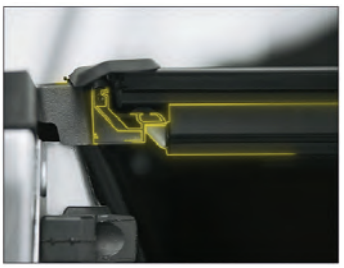
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Scene lighting can be sold as a small upsell or as a full-blown illumination system. (Photos courtesy Kingpin Equipped/Kingpin Lighting)



spotlighted on the buyer's social media channels.

"Lighting installs are inherently shareable—customers post their trucks the same day, which turns every install into free marketing for the shop," says Bradham. "It also tends to be a gateway sale: once a customer trusts a shop enough to touch their electrical system, they come back for the next upgrade, so it builds repeat traffic and ticket size well beyond the original lighting sale."

Recognition for the product often leads to recognition for the shop that installed it, Wang notes.

"Especially when the product has a distinctive visual signature, a lighting installation can often deliver an immediate and highly visible transformation. The customer drives away, posts photos or videos of the finished vehicle, friends notice the new setup and that can naturally lead to referrals back to the installer."

Watkins calls aftermarket lighting upgrades "the most efficient advertising a shop can buy," noting that the products offer a short installation time with big payoffs.

"Every rig that rolls out of your bay lit up is a billboard—at the trailhead, at the local cruise night or event and in that customer's own social feed," he explains. "Dealers tell us constantly that one lighting job brings in the next three customers."

When it comes to the lighting itself, many pros agree that brighter isn't always better.

"Good light when and where they need it is what people are after," says Watts. "A blinding white light can actually work against you more than for you."

LIGHTING ON DISPLAY

When it comes to increasing lighting-related sales, Ford from TrailFX suggests starting with a conversation about how the customer uses their truck or SUV.

"Once you know where they drive and what they use the vehicle for, it's easier to recommend lighting that adds real value," she explains. "Customers appreciate solutions tailored to their needs."

Watkins from Baja Designs advises shops to "stop selling lights and start diagnosing the customer's needs" by asking where the customer actually drives, be it the high-speed desert, tight tree-lined trails, in dust or snow, or while enjoying night camping or rock crawling.

"The honest answer almost always calls for more than one light," he reveals. "That's the whole premise of our Lighting Zone System—forward long-range, mid-range, wide cornering, ditch, work/scene and rear (options). A customer who walked in for one pod leaves with a plan, and the average ticket goes up substantially."

Nelson from Vision X Lighting calls it "selling the solution, not just the light."

"Don't just ask customers what light they want—ask what they're trying to accomplish," he states. "Once you understand their needs, you can recommend the right combination of lights, mounts and accessories to build a complete solution and increase the overall sale."

That time spent with the buyer is invaluable, says Watts from Rough Country.

"Understanding the customer's needs ensures you recommend a solution that not only performs but also delivers long-term satisfaction," he reports.

Novsight's Wang suggests thinking in terms of complete vehicle lighting systems rather than individual components.

"One of the biggest opportunities for a shop is not only bringing in more customers, but also increasing the value of each installation by showing how multiple lighting products can work together, such as a



Technological advancements mean today's lights have more options and are now more reliable. (Photo courtesy DV8 Offroad)



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An individual lighting sale can often turn into a larger, more profitable project. (Photo courtesy Vision X Lighting)

light bar, pod lights and auxiliary lighting, he says.

From there, "lighting is a relatively easy incremental purchase when the vehicle is already in the shop and installation labor can be combined," says Westin's Savasta. "Sell lighting as part of the vehicle upgrade—not as a separate product category. When quoting bumpers, a grille guard, a winch mount or other accessory, show the customer what the finished vehicle looks like with auxiliary lights installed and price them into the quote as an option."

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Shpiegel from RIGID Industries is among the insiders who suggest showcasing the products and how they work through an attractive showroom display.

"Many times, a customer will need more than one light product to get the lighting package they need, and their needs will vary based on the type of driving they do (desert, racing, night trails, overlanding), so educate your staff on the differences between the beam patterns and the ideal placement on vehicles," she suggests. "Train your staff to ask customers what kind of driving they will be doing and then match the beam pattern, lens and product to that use case. Bundle the light with the mounting, wiring and install so the customer leaves with a complete, working solution, and follow up afterward to open the door to the next upgrade."

Spotlighting options makes sense, says Steller from Diode Dynamics, given that lighting is already a highly visual product.

"Customers want to see and touch the products they're considering for their vehicles, and a good display allows them to understand the size, appearance, functionality and performance of the products before making a purchase," he notes. "We're seeing consistent growth from brick-and-mortar shops that utilize displays such as our slatwall kit, which showcases our core lineup of off-road lighting pods, light bars and rock lights, all controlled through our D-Switch switch panel."

In-store light displays help potential buyers understand the differences and



Once a customer trusts a shop enough to touch their electrical system, they often come back for the next upgrade. (Photo courtesy Oracle Lighting)





Recommending compatible light bars or pod lights is a natural next step that helps customers get more out of their setup while increasing the overall value of the sale. (Photos courtesy TrailFX)

benefits over factory lighting, says Miller. "Also, most consumers want ease of setup, which is why DV8 has tried to tailor all of our lights to have some sort of plug-and-play wiring harness," he adds.

A display unit with products that actually light up converts better than a box on a shelf, because lighting is "a visual, emotional purchase," says Bradham from Oracle Lighting. "Show it; don't just shelve it."

Finally, that strong display paired with knowledgeable employees who can answer lighting-related questions is a recipe for success, says Lord from Kingpin Lighting.

"Sales team members are the main ingredient, so they must know and understand the products deeply and be able to recommend/upsell specific lights depending on the situation," he says. "Beyond this, showrooms and interactive demo displays are the number one most important aspect to driving aftermarket lighting sales. It's also always best to have an employee vehicle set up as a demo vehicle. Most customers want you to show them what might work out best for their lifestyle, so they can point and say, 'I want that.'" ***TS***



Selling the Off-Road Lifestyle

Why storytelling beats a simple product presentation every time.



Shops can tell a powerful story about how a properly outfitted vehicle, such as the Hennessey VelociRaptor SUV Expedition, allows customers to realize their off-road dreams. (Photo courtesy Hennessey)

INTRO BY JEF WHITE
ARTICLE BY DALTON JOHNSON

As the writer of many of our articles on off-roading and overlanding for THE SHOP, I hear a lot about professional sales approaches and consumer trends affecting the specialty auto aftermarket.

Recently, several suppliers have stressed the importance of focusing on the adventure dreams and goals of 4x4 customers and explaining how a properly outfitted vehicle is integral to the safety and success of their next great excursion.

In other words, these upfitting accessories "aren't just about style; they're about lifestyle," explained Sean Fox, product manager for KYB, in a recent article on lifts and leveling kits.

The approach makes a lot of sense for specialty aftermarket businesses. Instead of simply filling a single order request, shops can share the excitement their clients feel about their favorite activities and explain how multiple accessories can be combined into specialized packages over time to maximize their experience.

The shop doesn't simply take an order—it creates a story with the customer as the main character and a go-anywhere, do-anything Jeep, truck or SUV as the trusty sidekick tagging along on an amazing journey.

The approach made even more sense recently when an adventure marketing post hit my email inbox. Author Dalton Johnson was covering much the same idea as it relates to outdoor gear, explaining that the most successful companies don't simply sell a product—they sell what the product allows the buyer to experience.

Here, in his own words, Dalton outlines the importance of storytelling as an entryway into stronger customer relationships.

-Jef White

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Selling the dream

Dalton Johnson is a photographer, writer and filmmaker who has helped dozens of outdoor and adventure brands tell their stories. Learn more at dalton-johnson.com.

You just launched a new jacket. It's lighter than last season's. The insulation is better. The fit is cleaner. Your team is proud of it, and, honestly, it deserves attention.

So, you photograph it. Flat lay on a rock. Model at a summit. A few detail shots of the zipper hardware and the interior lining. Clean, professional, on brand. And then you post it and wait for the sales to follow.

They don't. At least not the way you hoped.

Here's what's happening: you sold the jacket. But your customer wasn't buying the jacket. They were buying what the jacket makes possible.

NOBODY WAKES UP THINKING ABOUT GEAR

This is the hardest truth in outdoor brand marketing—your customer is not sitting at their desk daydreaming about your jacket. They're daydreaming about the ridge they want to stand on, the route they've been planning for two years, the trip they keep telling themselves they'll take when the timing is right.

Your gear is not the dream. Your gear is what gets them there.

The brands that understand this distinction build their content accordingly. They don't lead with the product. They lead with the world the product unlocks.

The lighter jacket doesn't just weigh less. It means you can go farther, stay out longer and move faster through terrain that used to slow you down.

The camp shower that recirculates water and runs on a gallon isn't a clever piece of engineering. It's the reason you stop cutting trips short.

Similarly, the new suspension lift on your overlanding rig isn't just an engineering upgrade. It's the reason you can finally run that stretch of road you bookmarked three years ago and never thought your current setup could handle.

That's the story. And story-driven content is how you tell it.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A CATALOG & A STORY

Most outdoor gear content, if we're honest about it, functions as a catalog. It shows what the product looks like, where it sits in the lineup and what the specs are.

That content has its place. But it lives at the bottom of the funnel, talking to people who have already decided to buy something and are just comparing options.

Story-driven content works at the top of the funnel, where the real audience lives. It reaches the person who isn't in buying mode yet; who doesn't have a search query typed in. They are just consuming content, living their life and slowly building a picture in their head of which brands understand them and which ones don't.

When your content consistently shows the world what your gear makes possible, something happens over time. That person starts to associate your brand with the version of their life they're working toward. And when they're ready to buy, the decision isn't really a decision anymore. It's a foregone conclusion.

That's brand equity. And it's built almost entirely through story.

WHEN THE PRODUCT IS THE STORY

There are times when leading with the product makes sense. If you've genuinely invented something new, if there's a material or a technology or a design decision that changes what's actually possible in the field, that story is worth telling directly.

The key word is "story." Not spec sheet.



Based on the high-spec Ford Expedition Tremor platform, the VelociRaptor SUV Expedition builds on Hennessey's blend of off-road hardware, visual impact and usability to create an aspirational vehicle to take customers on their own journeys. (Photo courtesy Hennessey)

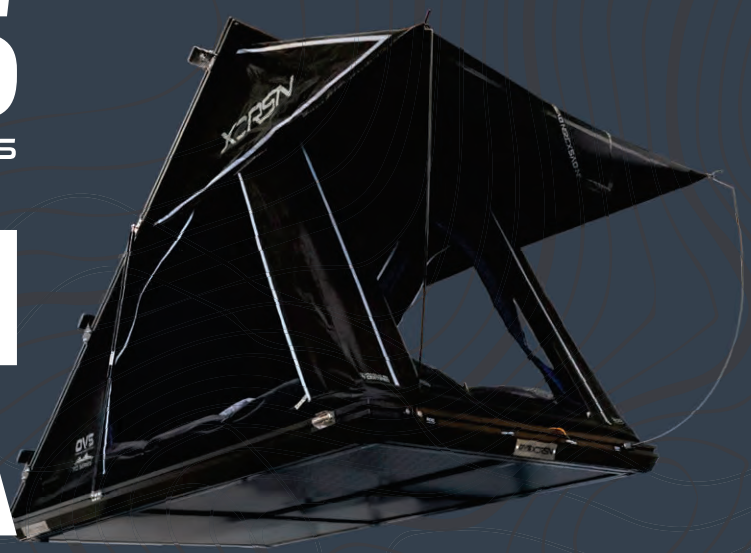
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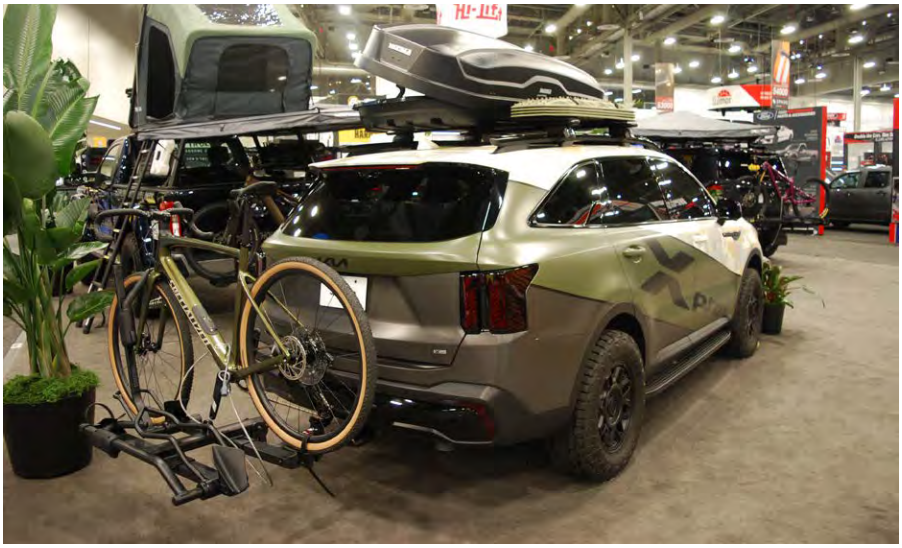


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If your new boot sole completely changes how your foot handles wet granite, don't just say it in a caption. Show someone on wet granite doing something they couldn't do before. Let the environment tell half the story. Let the outcome tell the other half. The spec is just context. The experience is the content.

The same goes for any product with a genuine origin story. Maybe the founder built the first version of your tent in their garage after a trip that went sideways because their gear failed them.

That story, told well, is worth 100 product photos. Because it tells your customer not just what the product does, but why it exists and who built it. And that matters more than people think.

THE THROUGH LINE MOST BRANDS MISS

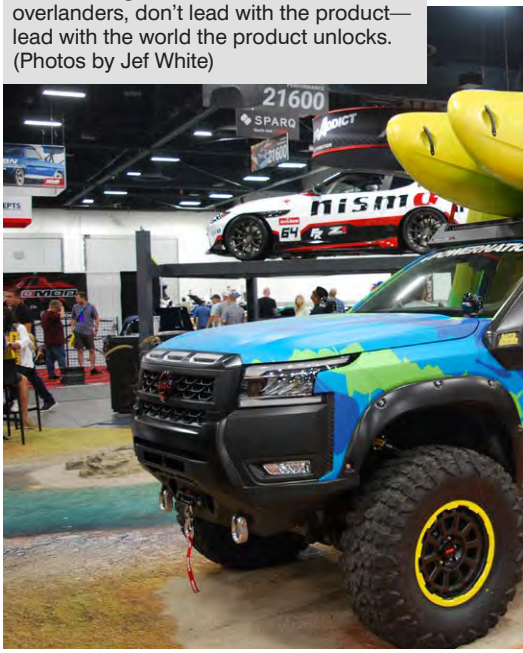
Here's where most outdoor gear brands fall short—even the ones that understand the dream-first approach. They tell a great story—once.

A beautiful campaign, a film, a photo series that really lands. And then the next season they start over from scratch with a different product and a different story and a different visual language.

The audience never gets the chance to follow anything. There's no thread to pull on.

Story-driven content at its best isn't a single piece. It's a through line that persists across seasons. The same world, the same

When selling to off-roaders and overlanders, don't lead with the product—lead with the world the product unlocks. (Photos by Jef White)



characters, the same values showing up consistently over time in ways that deepen rather than reset.

Your brand becomes a place people return to, not just something they encounter once.

This is the difference between a brand that has good content and a brand that has a story. One fills a calendar. The other builds a community.

WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE WHEN IT WORKS

The outdoor brands I work with that get the most out of their content investment are the ones who come to a project with a clear sense of the world they're building, not just the product they're launching. They know who their customer is, what that customer dreams about and what role their gear plays in those dreams.

From that starting point, everything else follows. The environments we shoot in, the people we feature, the moments we look for, the way the footage gets cut and deployed across their funnel from social to website to email to advertising.

It all serves the same story.

If your brand is at a point where the content you're producing doesn't feel like it's adding up to something, that's usually the sign that the story is missing. Not the budget, not the photographer, not the distribution strategy.

The story.

That's the conversation worth having first. ***TS***







Having been in business close to 50 years, Stitchcraft Interiors views every project as both a technical challenge and a creative opportunity. (Photo by Contemporary Visual Arts/courtesy Stitchcraft Interiors)

Keeping 'Em In Stitches

Stitchcraft Interiors has been perfecting custom interiors for nearly five decades.

BY MAURA KELLER PHOTOS BY JADAN.MEDIA/COURTESY STITCHCRAFT INTERIORS

Walk into Stitchcraft Interiors in Corona, California, and it quickly becomes clear that this is far more than a traditional upholstery shop. The space hums with activity—CNC routers carving with precision, industrial sewing machines steadily stitching and skilled craftsmen moving between workstations with practiced focus.

It's a place where artistry and engineering intersect, and where every project is treated as both a technical challenge and a creative opportunity. At the center of it all is founder and chief designer Revo Reeves, whose nearly five decades in the industry have helped shape not just his company, but the broader landscape of automotive interior design.

"Stitchcraft Interiors is a world-class automotive interior design and fabrication company specializing in custom interiors, upholstery, restoration and advanced interior engineering," Reeves says. "For nearly five decades, Stitchcraft has built a reputation for combining traditional craftsmanship with modern technology."

That balance between time-honored skill and cutting-edge capability has become the defining characteristic of the shop, allowing it to remain both relevant and influential in an industry that continues to evolve.

A SIMPLE PHILOSOPHY BY DESIGN

The company's origins date back to 1978, when Reeves founded Stitchcraft with a philosophy that was simple in concept but ambitious in execution: the interior of a vehicle should receive the same level of attention as its exterior.

At the time, much of the custom automotive world focused on paint, bodywork and performance, leaving interiors as an afterthought. Reeves saw an opportunity to shift that mindset, elevating interior design into a central component of a vehicle's overall identity.

"We believed the interior deserved the same level of design, engineering and craftsmanship," he explains, a perspective that would ultimately set Stitchcraft apart.



Revo Reeves and his dog, Sema, hard at work creating custom interiors.

Over time, that philosophy translated into a body of work recognized for its innovation, complexity and attention to



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After years in Westminster, California, the company recently moved into a 20,000-square-foot facility in Corona that also houses partner company Rock Bottom Custom Design.



The shop handles everything from complete custom interiors and seat design to door panels, dashboards, consoles, carpets, headliners, trunk builds and audio fabrication.



The company's origins date back to 1978 and a philosophy that the interior of a vehicle should receive the same level of attention as its exterior.

detail. As the shop's reputation grew, so did its ability to take on increasingly sophisticated projects, many of which pushed the boundaries of what was possible in automotive interiors.

"Our reputation has been built through decades of consistent quality, innovation and attention to detail," Reeves says, noting that the company has completed well over 1,000 custom interiors, many of which have become industry reference points. These projects are not simply upgrades or restorations—they are fully realized environments that redefine how drivers and passengers experience a vehicle, he notes.

That growth recently prompted Stitchcraft to move after nearly 15 years in a 5,000-square-foot shop in nearby Westminster, California. The new, 20,000-square-foot location in Corona not only increased the shop's upholstery area by a factor of three, but it is also strategically located within partner company Rock Bottom Custom Design's facility.

"We're here to design and build top-quality bespoke leather interiors for Rock Bottom's custom builds, while also developing interior

parts, components and complete interior packages for the Ford Bronco and Chevrolet K5 Blazer aftermarket," says Reeves. "We are leveling up to help grow Rock Bottom's brand of Broncos and Blazers, and that's allowing Stitchcraft to create aftermarket interiors for these same vehicles for customers worldwide."

A SEAT ON THE GLOBAL STAGE

That commitment to excellence has also led to widespread visibility, with Stitchcraft's work appearing in hundreds of magazine features and on a range of television programs, including "Overhaulin'," "Monster Garage," "Chop Cut Rebuild," "Rides" and "Wheeler Dealers." Collaborations with high-profile builders such as Chip Foose, Jesse James and Noah Elias further expanded the company's reach, positioning it as a trusted partner in some of the industry's most ambitious builds.

One of the most defining chapters in the company's history came through its involvement with the Toyota Supra vehicles associated with "The Fast and the Furious" movie franchise, a project that moved Stitchcraft beyond the boundaries of the automotive aftermarket.



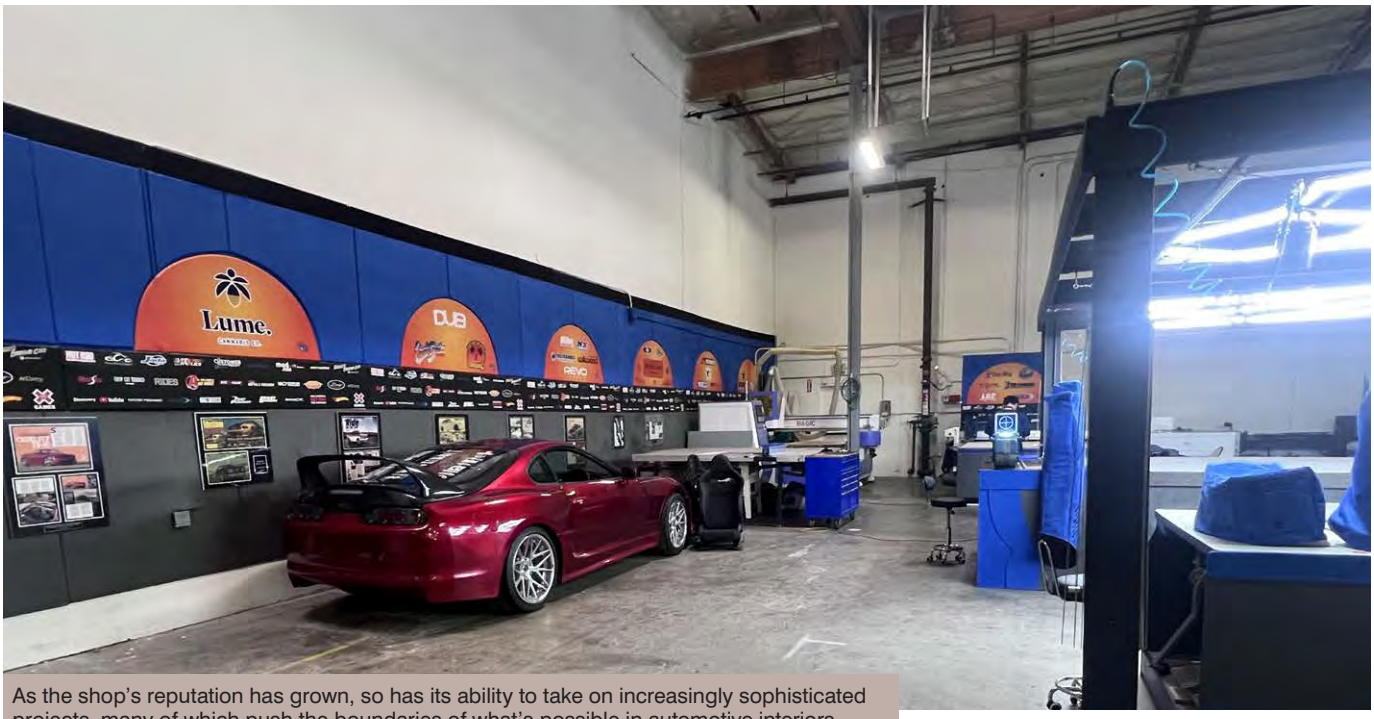
Stitchcraft's work has appeared in hundreds of magazine features, a range of television programs and the "The Fast and the Furious" movie franchise. (Photo by Contemporary Visual Arts/courtesy Stitchcraft Interiors)

"Those cars became global icons and helped introduce an entire generation of enthusiasts to the world of custom cars," Reeves says. "Being involved in interiors connected to those vehicles gave Stitchcraft a place in automotive pop culture history."

TO INTERIORS & BEYOND

Today, Reeves' Stitchcraft Interiors (stitchcraftinteriors.com) offers a range of services that reflect both its heritage and its forward-looking approach. The shop handles everything from complete custom interiors and seat design to door panels, dashboards, consoles, carpets, headliners, trunk builds and custom audio fabrication.





As the shop's reputation has grown, so has its ability to take on increasingly sophisticated projects, many of which push the boundaries of what's possible in automotive interiors.



The development of interior components and kits represents an opportunity for the future. (Photo by Contemporary Visual Arts/courtesy Stitchcraft Interiors)

"We also engineer interior components and develop aftermarket interior kits for classic and performance vehicles," Reeves explains—kits that let enthusiasts incorporate high-level design into their own builds.

The shop's capabilities even extend beyond the automotive world, with the team designing and fabricating custom acoustic panels and wall treatments for high-end home theaters. The company built a home theater for singer Britney Spears and a music studio for the nephew of actor John Stamos, Reeves notes.

This diversification reflects a broader understanding of interior design as a discipline that transcends industries, applying the same principles of form, function and craftsmanship across different environments.

Whether working on a custom car or a luxury home space, the goal remains the same—to create interiors that are both visually striking and highly functional.

TECHNOLOGY TAILORED TO TRADITIONAL CRAFTSMANSHIP

Central to achieving that goal is Stitchcraft's integration of advanced technology into its workflow. The shop is equipped with CNC routers, automated cutting systems, CAD pattern development tools, lasers, 3D scanners and printers, and other digital manufacturing technologies that enable a high degree of precision.

"Our shop integrates modern fabrication technology to push the boundaries of what is possible in interior design," Reeves says, adding that the tools enhance rather than replace traditional craftsmanship by allowing skilled artisans to execute their vision with greater accuracy and consistency.

Despite its technological capabilities, Stitchcraft remains intentionally small, with a team of approximately four to six highly skilled craftsmen. This approach ensures that every project receives the attention it deserves while maintaining the level of quality the company is known for.

"Automotive upholstery is a craft that takes years to master, so we focus on quality and specialization rather than large staffing numbers," Reeves notes.

The result is a cohesive team that brings precision and expertise to every build.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

At the heart of the business is a strong emphasis on relationships, and particularly the trust customers place in the Stitchcraft team. For many clients, a vehicle represents more than transportation—it's a personal expression or a long-term passion project.

"When someone brings their project to Stitchcraft, they're not just hiring an uphol-

stery shop; they're trusting us to help bring their vision to life," Reeves says.

That trust is built through a collaborative process that combines client input with design expertise, resulting in highly personalized, expertly executed interiors.

The company's presence at the SEMA Show has played a significant role in showcasing that work. Since 2000, Stitchcraft has participated in the event, collaborating with major manufacturers such as Mazda, Ford and General Motors, while using the platform to push creative boundaries.

"SEMA has always been a platform for us to showcase the future of interior design," Reeves explains. For 2025, the company unveiled a widebody 1994 Toyota Supra build featuring extensive in-house design, fabrication, lighting and interior work.

SEEING IS BELIEVING

As the company has grown, so too has its customer base, evolving from primarily local enthusiasts to a diverse mix of collectors, builders, restoration specialists, manufacturers and media personalities. The expansion has been fueled by increased visibility through magazines, television and social media.

When telling its story, rather than concentrating solely on finished builds, Stitchcraft emphasizes the process behind the work.

"We focus on documenting the craftsmanship—patternmaking, fabrication, sewing and design," Reeves says. "People enjoy seeing what goes into building a world-class interior."

The authenticity has helped the brand connect with a global audience while reinforcing its reputation for quality. Even with that reach, however, Reeves notes that some aspects of the business have remained consistent.

"Word of mouth has always been our most powerful marketing tool," he says, pointing out that the impact of seeing a finished interior in person often outweighs traditional advertising. Industry events, media exposure and collaborations continue to play important roles as well, he adds, but the work itself remains the most compelling form of promotion.

TRAINING THE NEXT GENERATION

Like many specialized trades, automotive upholstery faces challenges related to workforce development, with fewer young people entering the field. Reeves views this as a concern, as Stitchcraft itself is currently experiencing issues finding an experienced upholsterer to join the team as the company continues to expand.

But, with the challenge, he also sees it as an opportunity, leading Stitchcraft to invest heavily in mentorship and training.

"We believe strongly in training the next generation of builders and giving young craftsmen the opportunity to learn through hands-on experience," he says. The company is also developing educational programs aimed at teaching advanced upholstery, fabrication and interior design techniques, helping ensure the craft continues to evolve.

LOOKING AHEAD

Collaboration remains another cornerstone of the company's success, with Stitchcraft frequently working alongside builders, designers and manufacturers to bring complex projects to life. Such partnerships allow multiple specialties, from fabrication and paint to performance and interiors, to come together in a cohesive way, resulting in vehicles that are greater than the sum of their parts.

"These partnerships allow multiple specialties to come together to create truly exceptional vehicles," Reeves says.

Looking ahead, Reeves is focused on continuing to build world-class custom interiors, expanding into aftermarket product development and preserving the craft through education. The development of interior kits and components represents a significant opportunity, enabling enthusiasts to access Stitchcraft-level design in their own builds while ensuring the knowledge behind that work is passed on to future craftspeople.

For Reeves, however, the most rewarding aspect of the business remains the creative process itself.

"Interior design blends art, engineering and craftsmanship," he says. "You start with an idea, develop it into patterns and materials, and eventually create something people interact with every time they drive the car." ***TS***



Taking Customer Relationships to New Heights, PT2

Building strong client connections requires constant consideration & care.

BY JOSH POULSON



View business relationships as working pieces of equipment that need regular maintenance. (Photo by Jef White)



Named the 2022-23 SEMA Person of the Year, Josh Poulson is the principal of Auto Additions in Columbus, Ohio, which was named Restyler of the Year, 2012-13. Auto Additions offers a complete line of product upgrades including 12V and appearance packages with a specific focus on the dealership segment. Josh is immediate past-chairman of the SEMA PRO council.

Relationships with your customers are the most important part of sales—especially when selling to car dealers or other business-to-business (B2B) customers. In our last article (THE SHOP, October 2026), we looked at why these ongoing relationships matter and shared some partnership-building secrets.

Once you've built strong, solid dealer relationships, however, what comes next? It's time to view them as a working piece of equipment that you use to make money—they require attention, care and maintenance to maintain their long-term reliability.

WORTH THE EFFORT

In our throwaway society, we have a tendency to just "buy new" when something's no longer working like it should. But you can't expect to do that with business relationships.

Yes, you can always try to find new ones, but you shouldn't just throw away the old ones when you hit a bump in the road. If you get to a point where a business relationship is becoming non-productive, ask yourself how your maintenance plan is going.

In many cases, it just takes a little work to get things back on track.

STEP 1 › PUT TOGETHER A PLAN

A maintenance plan is important. Make a list of all your dealership customers and prioritize them by which ones need maintenance first.

Don't just place the weaker relationships at the top of the list, however. In many cases, it makes sense to tackle some minor maintenance with your stronger clients first before attacking the heavier lifts required by some of your weaker partnerships.

Once you have them prioritized, then decide how you want to maintain them. Is there a need to find out how things are going overall, or is the first step to address specific parts of your business partnership that needs attention?

Then, as your plan comes together, create a timetable for each step and customer in order to stay focused and not get sidetracked. Adopt a realistic timeframe with hours built in to do some "on-the-spot repairs" if the relationship calls for it.

STEP 2 › PERFORM CHECKUPS WHEN THINGS ARE GOOD

Whether it's a doctor's visit or a piece of equipment, checkups can reveal a lot. So, how do you do a "checkup" with a dealership that's a good customer?

It's important to be personally involved, which means an in-person visit—even if you already have a rep or manager taking care of their everyday needs.

Before you go, look at the data. Are sales up or down? Are orders up or down? Have they stopped doing preloads or are those steady?

Once you're sitting down in their office, ask them questions like:

- "How are we doing as a company servicing your needs?"
- "Have we let you or your customers down in any way?"
- "Is there anything you'd like to see us do differently?"

Simple questions, yes, but they can quickly reveal the status and health of your relationship. Be ready for the truth. Hopefully, they'll tell you that everything is good and even give an example or two of how your company has helped them out or done the right thing recently.

STEP 3 › REPAIRS ARE PART OF MAINTENANCE

If you examine a piece of equipment and it shows signs of a worn part, what do you do? You fix or replace it.

The good thing about ongoing relationship

maintenance checks is that now you can repair things on your timetable instead of after the equipment has already failed.

So, again, what does the data show? If sales are down, orders are coming in slowly or there's a lack of preloads, then maybe something needs "fixed" upon inspection.

As before, you'll want to visit the client in person and ask the same questions. But, make sure you get complete, truthful answers. Some customers will simply say everything is "fine"—which, to me, is the worst possible answer, because I then wonder if it's really the truth.

During these conversations, explain that it's much more helpful if they mention any issues and explain what's happening. Your job is to simply listen, apologize if necessary and then let them know what you can do to try to improve or make things better.

Sometimes the solutions require you to dig a little deeper. You may have to talk to other employees at the dealership about the situation or come back at another time and start the conversation over again to see if you can get a different answer.



Maintenance checks allow for relationship repairs on your schedule. (Photo by Jef White)

Once you form a hypothesis on what the real answer might be, put on the "full-court press" to get it resolved. Be involved as much as possible with any orders that come in, making visits and following up on any concerns or issues, as needed.

These steps will slowly repair the relationship and get it back to being solid and healthy.

ONGOING PROCESS

The good thing about a consistent maintenance program is that you maximize the relationship and are in a good position to get things back on track when issues arise and repairs are needed.

The downside, of course, is that maintenance never ends. It will always be a part of the business relationship-building process—however, it will take less time, energy and stress overall than losing the relationship completely and needing to start over from scratch. ***TS***

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Wet-Apply Paint Protection Film

Avery Dennison, Mentor, Ohio, presents its new Supreme Defense Gloss Lite Paint Protection Film. The 7.5-mil clear PPF is engineered to bring high-volume installation versatility and a smarter price point to the Supreme Defense PPF portfolio of films. Designed specifically to fully shield vehicles from harsh road hazards, the wet-apply, self-healing, hydrophobic film delivers the clarity, thickness and stretchable performance of the company's other offerings.

Manual Retractable Bed Step

Westin Automotive Products, San Dimas, California, presents its all-new Manual Retractable Bed Step. A simple push of the foot deploys the step, providing a convenient 5-inch drop and an application-specific 5.5- or 6-inch non-slip die-cast aluminum step pad for secure footing. Rated to support up to 330 pounds, the step retracts neatly out of the way when not in use. A no-drill, bolt-on design helps simplify installation for dealers and end users.





Bronco & Ranger Suspension Kits

Timbren Industries, Whitby, Ontario, presents its FRBRG Timbren SES (Suspension Enhancement System) Kit, now available for 2021-26 Ford Bronco and 2024-26 Ford Ranger models. A high-performance solution for increased towing and hauling stability, the kit includes signature Aeon hollow rubber springs that deliver a progressive spring rate. The system engages when under load, effectively eliminating rear-end sag and maintaining a level profile. The additional support improves steering and braking.



Toyota Front Leveling Kit

Tuff Country EZ Ride Suspension, West Jordan, Utah, presents its Tuff Country 52075 2.5-inch Front Leveling Kit, now available for 2007-21 Toyota Tundra 4WD and 2008-22 Toyota Sequoia 4WD applications. The bolt-on kit levels the front of the vehicle with the rear for a balanced stance and room for slightly larger tires while preserving a near-factory ride. Built in the USA from high-quality materials for durability and long-lasting performance, it bolts on easily.



Tacoma Winch Bumper

Body Armor 4x4, Ontario, California, presents its HiLine Front Winch Bumper, now available for 2024-26 Toyota Tacoma models. Offering enhanced front-end clearance and improved approach and departure angles, the bumper features a sleek, low-profile design and comes with a welded bull bar, light fitment options, integrated shackle recovery points and a license plate bracket. Compatible with the factory TRD skid plate, it includes all necessary hardware for a simple bolt-on installation.

2024-26 Toyota Tacoma Hybrid Lift Kit

Eibach, Corona, California, presents its PRO-TRUCK-LIFT STAGE 2 Lift Kit, now available for 2024-26 Toyota Tacoma hybrid models. Offering threaded adjustments, the kit shares the same rear performance shocks as the company's STAGE 1 system. The PRO-TRUCK-COILOVER 2.0s utilize an extended travel monotube design and variable force valving for control during on-road transit and compliance for traction on the trails. Made in the USA, the system allows for various combinations to fine-tune ride height and load capacity.



Dodge Ram Suspension Upgrades



ICON Vehicle Dynamics, Riverside, California, presents new, reconfigured, lower-priced Suspension System Stages for 2014-26 Dodge/Ram 2500/3500 truck models. Among the new products are ICON 2.0 VS front and rear shocks with remote reservoirs, plus upgraded front driveshafts to accommodate up to 6-inch lifts. Complete suspension systems include a range of brand-new Stage 5 variants featuring CDEV technology, as well as reconfigurations and lower pricing for several others.



Maverick Truck Caps

LEER Group, Elkhart, Indiana, presents its full range of Truck Caps, now available for 2022-up Ford Maverick applications. Available from group brands **LEER**, **SnugTop** and **Century**, the caps include a precision-crafted, one-piece molded design that improves efficiency and profitability, among other features.

Truck Cap



RealTruck, Ann Arbor, Michigan, presents its APEX FGC-5000 Truck Cap. Featuring large windows and a streamlined, SUV-like silhouette, the cap includes the patent-pending InvisiLatch system that synchronizes the rear hatch with the tailgate for no-touch opening. Highlights include a two-tone, color-matched paint finish; shatter-resistant tempered glass; frameless sliding front window; luxury carpeted interior; and advanced ActiveTilt dome lighting and dual LED rope lights.



Drop Hitch Systems

GEN-Y Hitch, Nappanee, Indiana, presents its all-new PHANTOM-X Drop Hitch Systems. The 2.5-inch drop series is available in both 2- and 2.5-inch shank sizes and 10,000- and 16,000-pound capacities. Six new PHANTOM-X configurations feature a wide variety of specialized attachments and are usable in drop or rise positions.

Rooftop Tent Series



iKamper, Kent, Washington, presents the Skycamp 4.0 series, the latest evolution of its flagship Rooftop Tent collection. Designed for expanded space without compromising its footprint, the series offers a more efficient setup in Duo, Trio and Quad sizes. The systems fit mid-size SUVs, wagons, crossovers and mid-sized truck beds. Inside, campers find a redesigned sleeping platform with the option of a foam or self-inflating mattress, a cork-lined ThermaSeal Floor System and increased headroom.



Heavy-Duty Sliding Truck Bed System

WEATHER GUARD, Itasca, Illinois, presents its Sliding Bed System, a heavy-duty cargo management solution designed to give contractors and fleets faster, safer access to tools and equipment at the tailgate. With 100% slide extension, the system seamlessly integrates with existing WEATHER GUARD storage and organization solutions. It is constructed from heavy-duty steel and rated for payloads up to 2,000 pounds. High-performance steel rollers and a powder-coated finish deliver long-term durability and corrosion resistance.



Chevy OBS Door Panels

Fesler USA, Chandler, Arizona, presents its full-coverage Fiberglass Door Panels for 1988-2000 OBS (Old Body Style) Chevrolet crew-cab trucks and Suburbans. The set of four hand-laid fiberglass door panels cover the complete factory door areas front and rear. Each panel features a smooth gel-coat surface ready for the upholstery shop or paint booth. The full-coverage design wraps the entire factory door panel area, which eliminates the lower-door gaps and rough edges common on cut or modified shells. The layout is optimized for power windows.

Mini Mobile Radio

Rugged Radios, Arroyo Grande, California, presents its Rugged G2 Mini, a compact, 30-watt GMRS mobile radio that delivers full-size performance in a compact, remote-mount design. Built for drivers who want a clean, low-profile installation without losing capability, the units feature a compact radio body that installs virtually anywhere out of sight, with controls conveniently integrated into the hand mic. The G2 Mini delivers the flexibility to create a clean, customized installation in trucks, Jeeps, SUVs or overland rigs.





Combo Driving Lights

Vision X Off-Road, Auburn, Washington, presents its CR-14 PRO Series Driving Lights that combine high light output with a dual-function design and swappable multibeam and multicolor lens system. Delivering more than 31,000 lumens per pair in a rugged, low-profile, 6.7-inch housing, the light system's X-Lens allows users to change the driving beam shape and DRL beam color while driving. Fourteen 14-watt LEDs combine with proprietary TIR optics to make the CR-14 Pro one of the brightest lights in its class.



Wireless Air Control Kit

Pacbrake, Langley, British Columbia, presents its HP30040-QM Wireless Air Control Kit. Built around the high-output 425 Series compressor, it delivers up to 150 psi and 1.75 cfm of airflow with a 100% duty cycle at 100 psi. Designed for recreational and commercial uses, the system offers full wireless air suspension control, featuring push-to-connect fittings, plug-in wiring and a waterproof assembly that's ready to work in less than an hour. The BRAVO app allows users to manage pressures, select presets and monitor the system in real time.



Ceramic Wash

Perfect Carbon, Cedarburg, Wisconsin, presents its Perfect Carbon Ceramic Wash, a premium car shampoo engineered to maintain, protect and enhance the performance of Perfect Carbon ceramic coating. Designed for enthusiasts and professionals, the formula delivers a superior clean while actively reinforcing the protective properties of the Perfect Carbon finish. SiO_2 technology and pH-balanced cleaning agents ensure a safe and effective wash. Thick, lubricated suds safely encapsulate contaminants.

Toyota 4Runner Cargo/Trunk Liner

WeatherTech, Bolingbrook, Illinois, presents its custom-fit Cargo/Trunk Liners, available for Toyota 4Runner applications. Made in the USA, the cargo mats are designed to keep spills, dirt and grease away from the vehicle's interior, with a raised lip that contains spills. They offer complete trunk and cargo area coverage without gaps and are available in four colors to match or complement the interior. The non-slip cargo mat surface helps keep items in place.





On- & Off-Road Tire

BFGoodrich, Chicago, presents the Trail-Terrain T/A+ tire, balancing off-road-inspired style and capability with on-road comfort and longevity. Features include improved wet traction, wear performance and rolling resistance, enhancing the look and performance of light trucks, SUVs and crossovers. Formulated with a new, all-weather compound, the tire has a Three-Peak Mountain Snowflake rating and an optimized footprint shape that evenly distributes stress for extended wear.

Suzuki Jimny Suspension Upgrade



SuperSprings International, Carpinteria, California, presents its SSR-704-40 SumoSprings Rear Suspension Upgrade, now available for Suzuki Jimny models. The patented suspension product enhances load-carrying capability, stabilizes sway and improves overall driver control and ride comfort. SumoSprings are maintenance-free, do not leak air and do not require air lines or compressors. They are manufactured from proprietary closed microcellular urethane in a variety of heights, diameters and densities to support multiple front and rear applications.



Tacoma Suspension Lineup

MetalCloak, Rancho Cordova, California, presents its full Suspension Lineup for 2025-up Toyota Tacoma models. Products include the Toyota Tacoma 4G Leveling Kit, a simple upgrade that removes factory rake, improves stance and provides clearance for larger tires; the Toyota Tacoma 4G Rocklander Overland Suspension System, designed specifically for trucks equipped with rooftop tents other expedition equipment; and the Toyota Tacoma 4G Game-Changer Suspension System, engineered for maximum wheel travel, suspension control and off-road capability.



Toyota Grille Light Kits

ORACLE Lighting, Metairie, Louisiana, presents its Pre-Runner Style LED Grille Light Kits for 2016-23 Toyota Tacoma TRD Pro and SR5 grille models. Engineered specifically for their intended grilles while delivering OEM-quality fitment, a factory-inspired appearance and simple installation, both kits share the same amber LED appearance, stealth tinted lenses and snap-fit installation philosophy. When the lights are off, the tinted lenses blend seamlessly into the grille for a stealth appearance.

Roof Rack



Dometic, Thousand Oaks, California, presents its all-new Slimline 3 Roof Rack, the first of several new products in the Dometic Front Runner Series. Combining Swedish innovation with design and testing in South Africa, the rack was created to perform in the harshest environments, combining next-generation engineering with practical functionality in a durable, lightweight system.



Chevy Diesel Truck Sway Bars

Hellwig Suspension Products, Visalia, California, presents its expanded Sway Bar lineup for 2019-26 Chevrolet Silverado 1500 diesel trucks. The new applications include two rear sway bars and expanded diesel fitment for the company's existing front sway bar, providing improved safety, handling, comfort and overall driver control without affecting suspension travel. The new rear sway bars are constructed of solid, 1-1/8-inch diameter, hot-formed 4140 steel and feature three-hole ends to allow drivers to tune the sway bar rate. ***TS***



FALL 2026 PROJECT VEHICLE SKETCHBOOK

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ULTIMATE SUBARU BRAT







Hoonigan and **Subaru Motorsports USA** collaborated on a recent release in the **Gymkhana** film franchise with **Travis Pastrana** behind the wheel of the all-new **Subaru Brataroo 9500 Turbo**—a **1978 Subaru BRAT** engineered to take the viral series to new heights, both literally and figuratively.

No shortage of trick engineering went into creating a truck that enjoys being airborne as much as being sideways. The Brataroo blends the rebellious energy of Subaru's Bi-Drive Recreational All-Terrain Transporter (BRAT) while pushing the limits of modern performance and technology. **Subaru of America** and technical partner **Vermont SportsCar (VSC)** engineered the purpose-built Gymkhana weapon to corner, slide and fly well beyond the capabilities of its predecessors.

The lightweight widebody machine utilizes a rallycross-derived turbocharged 2.0L boxer engine. Built by VSC, the highly pressurized four-cylinder delivers 670 hp and revs to more than 9,500 rpm. Power is channeled through the truck's all-wheel drive system via a 6-speed sequential **SADEV** gearbox and motorsport-grade differentials.

The bodywork is constructed entirely of carbon fiber, draped over a VSC-engineered chassis and a roll cage certified to the latest **WRC** safety standards. The truck's iconic look was reimagined, with the angular lines and proportions reshaped by renowned designer and concept artist **Khyzyl Saleem (The Kyza).**

The cockpit nods to the original 1978 interior with a carbon fiber dashboard and flax composite woodgrain, a restored factory radio and repurposed HVAC controls that are now used to adjust the active aero. Participants include **KMC Wheels** (forged monoblocks), **Mercury Marine**, **Yokohama** (ADVAN A052 or APEX tires), **Heat Wave Visual**, **Dixxon Flannel** and **Uniden** (period-correct CB radio).



PORSCHE 911



Theon Design has revealed its latest bespoke **Porsche 911** commission, a carbon-bodied coupe created for a British customer. The 4.0L, 420-bhp build was created to be a pared-back, timeless interpretation of the ultimate road-optimized, air-cooled Porsche 911.

Crafted over the course of 18 months and based on a 911 (964) donor, the car was taken back to a bare shell and then outfitted with Theon's signature lightweight carbon bodywork. The proportioned panels blend aerospace and motorsport composites technology to deliver a shell that's light and rigid, finished in elegant Medium Ivory paint complemented by classic Grand Prix White stripes.

Highlights include the flat-six engine, state-of-the-art ignition system, independent throttle bodies, switchable exhaust, 6-speed manual gearbox built to 993 RS specifications with modern enhancements, repositioned pedals, touring-focused springs, calibrated TracTive semi-active damping system, 5-stage adjustable dampers, Porsche 993 RS brake setup, 17-inch wheels, high-performance **Michelin** Pilot Sport rubber, fully carbon fiber interior, **Recaro** CS seats with rear seat delete, carbon fiber storage deck with matched luggage, **Audison**-based audio system and aluminum touchpoints including vents, door handles and control knobs.

1962 BUICK

The team at **The Custom Shop** in Flanagan, Illinois, is building a one-year **1962 Buick** project named **"Sky Vair"** featuring a chopped and sectioned custom unibody channeled 5 inches. The car will include plenty of unique metalwork underneath the Zenith Gold finish.

Power comes from a 364-ci LS engine with a **Borla** stack injection and **Holley** EFI, monitored by **Dakota Digital** gauges and running through a **Bowler Transmissions** 4L80E and **Pypes Performance Exhaust**. Engine cooling comes via an **Entropy Radiator** and **SPAL** fans.

Participants include **North Star Plating** (chrome); **Cerakote** (suspension finish); **RamLiftPro** (coil-overs); **Apex Leather** (red custom seats); **Kenwood** (audio system); **Scosche** and **Painless Performance** (wiring); **Vintage Air** (A/C system); one-off custom wheels; **Atturo Tires**; **Steele Rubber Products** (seals); and **TCP Global** and **Carworx** (finish products).



2026 ROUSH RT6



Roush Performance announces the return of its **RT6** production truck for the 2026 model year. Drawing on decades of engineering and motorsports development, the RT6 fuses performance upgrades with iconic styling, delivering improved capability and premium build quality while maintaining OEM safety standards.

The highlight of the package is the Roush 6.0 Performance Suspension System, an integrated 6-inch lift. A high-flow Roush grille with integrated lighting improves airflow while giving the truck a distinctive front-end signature, and functional hood heat extractors assist with engine bay cooling. Wide, paint-matched fender flares provide additional clearance and emphasize the truck's increased track width and ride height.

The 2026 Roush RT6 rides on 35-inch **General Tire** Grabber A/TX all-terrain tires mounted to satin black 20-inch Roush off-road wheels. A Roush Performance cat-back exhaust system offers a deep, aggressive exhaust note.

Roush design elements include RT6-specific badging on the hood and tailgate, Roush fender extractors, Jack Roush signature graphics and model-dependent Roush puddle lamps. Inside the cabin, Roush custom-molded floor liners help protect against dirt, while Roush "R" key fobs and a Roush hitch cover come standard.

The optional Premium Package adds the Roush Performance Active Exhaust System, a Roush Performance Off-Road Lighting System with a front amber light bar and rear bumper LED floods, a Roush Carbon Fiber Interior Trim Package and a Roush integrated overhead auxiliary switch panel to control lighting and accessories. Additional upgrades include the Roush Premium Leather Interior Package (available in Raven Black), the Roush Ready Package (a console vault, utility kit and jump starter), a Roush Bedside Graphic Package in black or silver and Roush off-road ditch lights with covers by **Diode Dynamics**.

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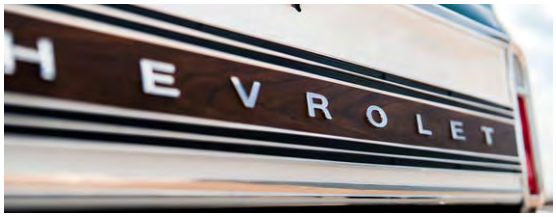
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WHSE26TS

1972 CHEVY K5 BLAZER







ECD Automotive Design's 1972 Chevy K5 Blazer commission looks to preserve the SUV's original character while elevating it through modern craftsmanship, performance and finish standards. From the precisely executed paintwork to the thoughtfully considered interior design, every element reflects the company's in-house capabilities and attention to detail.

Defined by its removable top, wide stance and straightforward utility, the build carries the original character forward through a modern restoration approach. It's been engineered for both appreciation and regular use, stressing reliability, comfort and drivability.

Finished in a period-correct two-tone of Chevy Dark Olive Poly and Frost White with a classic billboard stripe, the exterior reflects the bold styling of the era. Chrome accents and subtle detailing retain its authenticity, while under the hood the client opted for a modern 6.0L V-8.

Inside, buffalo vinyl seating is paired with Pepita green houndstooth inlays, creating a cabin that blends vintage inspiration with a tailored feel. Modern features include climate control, digital gauges and upgraded audio.

Participants include **BFGoodrich** (tires), **VIPER** (alarm) and **Retro Manufacturing** (RetroSound radio).

1970 CHEVROLET CHEVELLE



A year-long **1970 Chevrolet Chevelle** build from **The Custom Shop** in Flanagan, Illinois, is based on a **Roadster Shop** chassis featuring a **Prizmatic Powders** powder-coat and **Cerakote** finish. The powerful Chevy includes a 572-ci big-block with a **ProCharger** supercharger, **Holley** EFI system, **Shauns Custom Alloy** intake and **Granatelli Motorsports** products, ending in a **Pypes Performance Exhaust**.

Participants include **Tuff Stuff Performance Accessories**; **Painless Performance** (wiring); **Vintage Air** (climate system); **TMI Products** (custom seats with **Apex Leather**); **Alpine** (audio system); **SPAL** (fans on billet radiator); **Auto City Classic** (smoked glass); custom one-off billet wheels; **Atturo Tires**; **Dakota Digital** (gauges); **Eddie Motorsports**; **Fesler USA** (interior panels covered in Apex Leather); **Nu-Relics Power Windows**; Pearl White painted finish with custom graphics using **TCP Global** and **Carworx** finish products; **XKGLOW** undercar lighting; and **Radiantz LED Lighting** (marker lights).

CADILLAC V-ONE CONCEPT

Cadillac reveals the **V-ONE**, a concept study combining the brand's race-winning authenticity and bespoke **refinement**. Its name unites the **Cadillac V-Series** performance legacy with a one-of-one, single-seat expression—the first of its kind for the brand.

Rooted in performance engineering with shared Cadillac V-Series.R race car foundations, the V-ONE Concept explores how competition hardware can be translated into a driver-focused experience, while reinforcing Cadillac's broader race-winning story across design, performance and technology.

Rooted in Cadillac's LMDh racing program , it features a V-8 hybrid powertrain and deeper race-bred architecture from the V-Series.R in areas such as suspension, transmission and select electronics. Body and overall proportions carry directly from the race car, giving the concept an authentic foundation.

Highlights include a V-Series wheel design and updated dark persona; V-Series badging; hand-sprayed paint gradient from silver to deep navy; a single-seat, fully bespoke, race-bred cockpit blending exposed carbon structure with an immersive, custom UX/UI and deeply personalized materials; and a serialized plaque on the door.



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2026 SHELBY GT350/TA



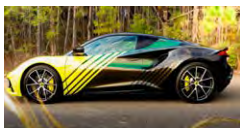
Shelby American, a wholly owned subsidiary of **Carroll Shelby International Inc.**, offered a limited run of **2026 Shelby GT350/TA** edition cars at **Barrett-Jackson** in Scottsdale, Arizona, earlier this year. The 830-plus-hp sports car, inspired by Trans Am SGT category specs in honor of the 60th anniversary of the first year of the series, was constructed in collaboration with **Turn Key Automotive** in Michigan.

The street-legal GT350/TA is track-ready with components from Shelby's future Trans Am spec race car. It starts with the popular street version of the **2026 Shelby GT350**, with performance taken to new levels with reduced weight and upgrades including a 6-speed manual transmission, carbon fiber interior tub, integrated roll cage, Trans Am-spec high-speed carbon fiber aero package, fully adjustable race struts and shocks with remote reservoir, new **Alcon** racing brakes, chassis upgrades and more.

Production is limited to 70 cars, and Turn Key is also helping develop a track-only version intended for Trans Am competition.

2026 LOTUS EMIRA







Sickwrap in Florida recently tackled a **2026 Lotus Emira** wrap project featuring **Avery Dennison** Supreme Wrapping Film in Satin Yellow and ColorFlow Gloss Urban Jungle and Gloss Obsidian Black. **Jeremiah Bienko**, the creative force behind Sickwrap, was contacted by the car's owner, a race car collector from Alabama who had followed Bienko's work on TikTok and told him simply to "do your thing."

Bienko's bold, multi-layered design incorporates diagonal hash marks to bridge the colors, creating a sense of motion and speed, even while the car is at a standstill. The wrap also relied on one of Bienko's favorite design tools—the "happy little mistake." During the knifeless tape process on the hood, a spacing error created unexpected, curved tips. Rather than pulling the tape, he realized the shapes added a unique, three-dimensional depth that complemented the car's geometry.

He further customized the Emira by widening the hood vent by 2 inches and blacking out the front bumper posts, creating a more aggressive, bespoke profile. The car later "stole the show" at multiple events.

MINI 1965 VICTORY EDITION

The new **MINI 1965 Victory Edition** makes a stylish statement and maintains the brand's typical craftmanship, building on the foundation of MINI's storied rally history. In the U.S. market, the edition will be exclusive to the **MINI John Cooper Works** 2-door model, building on 228 hp and a maximum torque of 280 pound-feet.

The exterior impresses with Chili Red exterior paintwork accentuated by a white trim stripe extending from the bonnet to the roof and rear. A white "52" graphic adorns both sides of the vehicle—a reference to the number of the original rally car campaigned in 1965.

Highlights include a panoramic roof in Glazed White, a subtle "1965" sticker on the C-pillar, 18-inch alloy wheels in the JCW Lap Spoke 2-tone design with floating wheel center caps and JCW valve stem caps, door sills that display white "1965" lettering on a red and black background, a placard on the inside edge of the door commemorating the historic rally and more "1965" lettering on the 6 o'clock spoke of the sports steering wheel and the storage box in the center console.



ACELA DISPATCHER 4X4 TYPE 6 FIRE ENGINE

Acela Truck Company is expanding its product line in the wildland fire market with the introduction of its **Dispatcher 4x4 Type 6 Fire Engine**, purpose-built for rapid initial attack in access-constrained environments. Engineered with a 150-gallon water capacity and a full complement of tools, hose, etc., the Dispatcher delivers the maneuverability, payload and on-/off-road performance required for modern wildland firefighting.

Built on a highly modified **Jeep Gladiator** chassis, the Dispatcher features a two-door extended cab paired with a custom 7-by-5-foot "ute"-style flatbed. Powered by a Pentastar V-6 engine and 9-speed automatic transmission with selectable four-wheel drive, the Dispatcher delivers reliable performance on highway and across mountainous, sandy or muddy terrain.

A 240-amp alternator supports pumps, lighting and communications equipment, while modern safety systems and an ergonomic cab design enhance operator effectiveness during extended incidents. It is compatible with a wide range of skid unit upfitters.



SHELBY FORD F-150 BAJA RAPTOR





Shelby American, a wholly owned subsidiary of **Carroll Shelby International Inc.**, focuses on high-performance pickups with its new **Shelby Ford F-150 Baja Raptor** models.

With a sophisticated, robust suspension paired with upgraded cooling, styling enhancements and up to 1,000-plus-hp on pump gasoline, the line includes the V-6 **Shelby Baja Raptor** and the 5.2L Predator V-8-powered **Shelby Raptor R**, both available in limited quantities through a nationwide network of dealers.

Shelby American worked closely with partners like **Ford Performance** and **Whipple** to bring more power, refinement, technology and handling capabilities to the off-road segment. Highlights include a host of styling cues, an aluminum functional intake ram air hood, DOT-compliant grille and fenders, power running boards and rock guards.

A functional high-clearance front bumper by **Addictive Desert Designs** and LED lighting are two of the many accessories that help the trucks feel at home on the trail.

Inside, the Shelby theme continues across the full leather seat covers, digital gauges, custom carbon fiber accents, embroidered floor mats and billet racing pedals. Each comes with special badges and a CSM serialized plate inside.



MINI JOHN COOPER WORKS CONVERTIBLE



MINI has custom-crafted a special one-off **John Cooper Works Convertible** for a longtime MINI enthusiast in the U.S., representing a new depth of factory-led personalization by MINI Plant Oxford. The project began with a devoted MINI owner and a clear, personal vision. From there, the MINI design and production teams embraced the opportunity to explore creating a higher-level, custom-crafted vehicle.

The result: a midnight black and custom-tinted metallic green two-tone exterior, hand-sprayed and clear-coated in the form of a custom design where the left and right sides are color-inverted, creating a diagonal color split across the entire exterior.

Inside is a fully matched interior, featuring, green stitching, painted belt covers, custom-accented bands, a bespoke "MINI.01" badging system and personalized labels throughout. The soft top features a tonal Union Jack graphic.

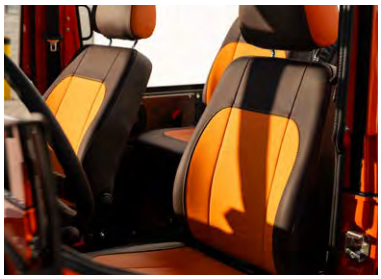
The green colorway extends across more than 50 individually specified details, including a metallic, green-trimmed **Harman Kardon** speaker surround, custom door armrest overlays, a MINI.01 steering wheel badge, a personalized floor mat and instrument cluster identifiers.

MERCEDES-BENZ 250GD G-WAGEN

Expedition Motor Company (EMC) presents a standout **Mercedes-Benz 250GD G-Wagen** restoration. Finished in Mercedes-Benz Magma Beam Orange, it pairs a 2.5L OM605a turbodiesel with a Mercedes 717-series 5-speed manual transmission to deliver an analog driving experience rooted in the Wolf's original rugged identity.

Features include an open-top, two-door cabriolet body; fold-down windshield; Doppio and Nasturtium dual-tone interior accented by dark-stained AAA European oak trim; and EMC forged 17-inch Stahl wheels. The warm earth-tone palette creates a refined-yet-purposeful cabin that accents the Wolf's utilitarian heritage while elevating the overall ownership experience.







JEEP CJ SCRAMBLER





Vigilante expands its portfolio of reengineered classic **Jeeps** with the introduction of the Scrambler, an entirely new tier of vehicle that redefines what a vintage-inspired 4x4 can be.

Designed as a lightweight, open-air counterpart to the brand's larger Wagoneer, Cherokee and J-Truck builds, the **Vigilante Scrambler** channels the raw, analog driving experience that defined early civilian Jeeps while delivering the performance, composure and craftsmanship expected of a modern machine.

Built on the extended CJ-8 platform, the Scrambler benefits from a longer wheelbase that enhances stability, ride quality and overall usability. The foundation allows Vigilante to integrate modern engineering without compromising the vehicle's elemental character, resulting in an adventure vehicle that feels both agile and composed across a wide range of environments.

Highlights include a **Mopar** Gen-III 392 Hemi SRT-8 V-8 producing 485 hp; 5-speed manual transmission paired with an Atlas II twin-stick, shift-on-the-fly transfer case that preserves true four-wheel-drive capability; 4-link suspension; **Dana** 44 and Dana 60 axles; 6-piston performance brakes; custom wheels; seating and flooring that incorporate premium materials such as **Chilewich** and **Sunbrella**; Bluetooth connectivity; and HD audio.



1969 MERCEDES-BENZ 280SE

Led by classic car specialist **Daniel Valjevac**, North Carolina's **Retro Designs** is known for bringing historic automobiles back to life with modern engineering and subtle styling. The company's newest creation is a fully reimagined **1969 Mercedes-Benz 280SE** that features elite performance tastefully paired with the crisp, timeless lines of the celebrated classic.

Restored largely to original exterior specifications, the car is finished in **Axalta** Chromax XP Irish Green and distinguished by carefully considered updates including a shaved sunroof, LED lighting, custom **EVOD Industries** billet wheels and restored chrome and brightwork refinished by **Advanced Plating**.

At the heart of the build is a modern **AMG**-sourced 5.4L M113 V-8 paired with a 722.6 5-speed transmission. Engineering the drivetrain required a fully integrated approach, including a custom wiring harness and sealed motorsport-grade electrical system from **Modern Racing**, aftermarket ECU integration, transmission management developed by **Sound German Automotive**, and a stainless steel fuel system featuring a custom tank by **Rick's Tanks**. Cooling is handled by a **Ron Davis** aluminum radiator.

Highlights include a **Kooks** stainless steel custom exhaust system, **E-Stopp** electronic parking brake, a modernized audio system featuring an **Audison** amplifier and **Focal** speakers, one-off **Dakota Digital** gauges and **Vintage Air** climate control.









1966 JEEP SUPER WAGONEER

Few vehicles carry the historical significance of the **Jeep Super Wagoneer**. With its latest bespoke creation, a fully reimagined 1966 example, **Vigilante** transforms the pioneering luxury SUV from the ground up, honoring its legacy while elevating its performance, comfort and refinement for a new era.

Finished in striking Empire Blue and detailed with the cues that made the original Super Wagoneer legendary, the build maintains its classic aesthetic while integrating cutting-edge engineering.

Power comes from a **Mopar** Gen-III 392 Hemi SRT-8 V-8 producing 485 hp mated to a **TREMEC** TR-6060 6-speed manual transmission. A handcrafted suspension system, **Baer** performance brakes and a custom four-wheel drive system ensure the Super Wagoneer stops, steers and rides with confidence and composure.



Highlights include a cabin that merges heritage and innovation, including vintage-correct styling cues and a classic push-button radio paired with Bluetooth connectivity and a fully functional HVAC system. Custom console elements and thoughtfully reinterpreted trim details ensure the interior feels authentic, while the exterior retains its chrome accents and iconic proportions.



1970 MUSTANG BOSS 302



Reengineered **Ford Mustang** company **Revology Cars** debuts its latest model, the **1970 Mustang Boss 302**. Originally produced in 1969-70, the Boss 302 was developed for Ford's **SCCA** Trans-Am competition, featuring a high-revving engine, competition-tuned suspension and functional aerodynamic and cooling components.

Powering the Revology Boss 302 is a 5.0L Ford Coyote V-8 producing 460 hp. Modern tech includes an aluminum block and heads, four cams, 32 valves, and advanced fuel injection and engine management in a choice of 6-speed manual or 10-speed automatic transmission.

Highlights include air conditioning, hydraulic power rack-and-pinion steering, four-wheel disc brakes, an all-new steel body engineered for improved rigidity and refinement, double-wishbone front suspension and a three-link rear suspension with torque arm and Panhard rod.

Inside, the cabin blends classic Mustang design cues with modern ergonomics, materials, and craftsmanship, creating an environment suited for both spirited driving and everyday use.

SIGNATURE GULLWING COUPE

Signature Autosports presents a **Gullwing Coupe** based on a **2004 Chrysler Crossfire** foundation and inspired by the **Mercedes-Benz 300 SL**. Instantly recognizable features include a long hood, dramatic doors, compact cabin and grand-touring proportions that helped define an era of performance, elegance and mechanical imagination.

Finished in deep blue over a warm tan diamond-stitched interior, the distinctive build blends vintage Gullwing presence with modern drivability and everyday usability as a modern interpretation of one of the most celebrated silhouettes in automotive history.

Highlights include upward-opening doors, round headlamps, wide performance wheels, a 3.2L M112 E32 SOHC 18-valve V-6 engine paired with a 5-speed 5G-Tronic automatic transmission, and warm Golden Brown Merino leather on the seats, dashboard, steering wheel and surrounding trim.







PORSCHE 911





Singer, the California-based luxury specialist that restores and reimagines classic **Porsche 911**s in collaboration with their owners, presents the first car reimagined through the company's **DLS Turbo** services and reunited with its owner. Singer's clients often name their cars at the start of the restoration, and in this case the owner chose "**Sorcerer.**"

The process began with a 30-plus-year-old Porsche 911 (Type 964) that was carefully disassembled and readied for refurbishing.

The iconic flat-six engine features water-cooled cylinder heads combined with air-cooled cylinders and electric fan. Together with two variable-geometry turbochargers, the features enable the 3.8L to develop more than 700 hp running through an optimized 6-speed manual gearbox.

Highlights include a raised gear shifter with an exposed shift mechanism; hybrid Inconel and titanium exhaust system with side-exits; carbon fiber bodywork; track-focused front fascia configuration with a deep front spoiler and larger, raised rear wing; Fantasia Blue exterior with satin carbon fiber lower trim; seats trimmed in Pebble Grey leather with Pearl Grey Alcantara centers and contrast Champagne piping; floating gauges; double wishbone suspension, **Brembo** CCM-R carbon ceramic disc brakes with monoblock calipers; **Michelin** Pilot Sport Cup 2 tires mounted on lightweight 19-inch (front) and 20-inch (rear) forged magnesium center-lock wheels; and five drive modes (Road, Sport, Track, Off and Weather).

1991 MERCEDES-BENZ 620GE WOLF





G-Wagen restorer **Expedition Motor Company (EMC)** completed a one-of-one **1991 Mercedes-Benz 620GE Wolf** finished in a historically accurate, multitone camouflage exterior. Commissioned by a private client, EMC developed the new camo-colored Wolf to honor the heritage of the original Mercedes-Benz 250GD donor, investing 2,500 hours of restoration work.

Using original green, brown and black paint codes, the camo finish reflects the visual character of original service vehicles while remaining true to EMC's restoration-first philosophy. Underneath, the new EMC 1991 vehicle is engineered for modern use, built as an EMC 620GE and powered by a 430-hp LS3 V-8 paired with a 6L80 6-speed automatic transmission that delivers contemporary drivability.

Inside is a clean interior finished in Sweetgrass upholstery with Port stitching and complemented by gray-stained AAA European oak trim. All interior cabin elements are integrated with the purposeful, function-first simplicity of the original vehicle, but with elevated materials and high-quality finishes.

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2026 ACURA MDX TYPE S OVERLAND CONCEPT



This spring, the **Specialty Equipment Market Association (SEMA)**, in collaboration with **Acura**, revealed a one-of-one **2026 Acura MDX Type S Overland Concept**, showcasing how modern OEM platforms can be thoughtfully reimagined through purposeful aftermarket upgrades to support off-road and overland adventure—without sacrificing daily comfort and refinement.

Designed and built at the **SEMA Garage** in Los Angeles, the build showcases the innovation and technical expertise of SEMA-member companies. The Acura was transformed into an adventure-ready, overland-capable concept through the integration of off-road wheels and tires, functional lighting, cargo solutions and camping equipment.

Participants include **Black Rhino** (Voll 18x8.5 ET25 wheels), **Falken** (WildPeak A/T4W 275/65R18 tires), **Inspired Overland** (Stargazer Duo rooftop tent), **NoLo Designs** (ditch light brackets), **Prinsu** (roof rack) and **RiG'd Supply** (UltraSwing spare tire carrier).

HENNESSEY VENOM F5-M

Texas-based hypercar manufacturer **Hennessey Special Vehicles** revealed the **Hennessey Venom F5-M**. The new model benefits from Venom F5 Evolution enhancements including new aerodynamics, active suspension and 2,031 hp, making it the world's most powerful manual hypercar.

The car combines a new carbon fiber chassis, bespoke bodywork and revised aerodynamics, with a unique 6-speed gated manual transmission and open-top roadster configuration. At its core sits Hennessey's 6.6L twin-turbocharged Fury V-8 paired with sophisticated traction control and engine management system.

Unique styling elements include a 55-inch (1,400mm) dorsal fin that stretches from the roof-mounted air intake to the trailing edge of the rear deck and an integrated roof scoop. Inside, the cockpit is entirely reconfigured around the manual driving experience and features custom personalization details alongside the prominently mounted billet aluminum gear shifter.

Only 12 Venom F5-M Roadsters will be produced globally, each uniquely specified.







PORSCHE 911 CT4S & AUDI R8 WRAPS

Steve and **Tea Palella**, the husband-and-wife team of Odessa, Florida shop **PopShadow Decals**, know a thing or two about creating seriously sleek, stealth looks for sportscars. Since founding their shop in 2010, the Palellas have expanded their business from its origins creating motorcycle number plates to a full-service graphics and decal shop .

One of their specialties is full vehicle wrapping with color-change vinyl films. Recent sportscar wraps include a **Porsche 911** and an **Audi R8** that show the power of the latest wrapping film finishes—on-trend for today's creative use of black films.

On the Porsche 911, Steve and Tea wrapped the branded sportscar in Avery Dennison Supreme Wrapping Film Satin Black. They added Supreme Wrapping Film Gloss Carmine Red for accent striping and Pearl White film to the hood and roof. The seamless color effect enhances the legendary curves of the 911, while giving their client a custom race look.



The Audi R8 looks like a simple full-body wrap. However, it's a true transformation from its original gloss paint to a complete "blackout effect" with Avery Dennison Supreme Wrapping Film in Matte Black. Installers can use a range of black films to achieve the blackout look that car dealerships are showcasing and consumers are demanding for today's highly custom and personalized vehicle aesthetics.



ICON 4X4 C MODERN RETRO SERIES











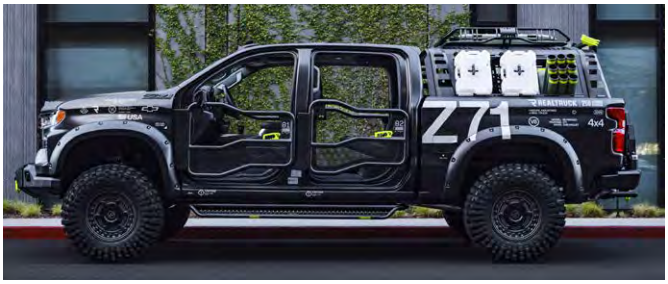
ICON 4x4 launched its newest vehicle program: the **Chevrolet C Modern Retro Series**. The limited-production series blends the iconic styling of **1967-72 Chevrolet C10** and **C20** pickups with the engineering, performance and everyday usability of a brand-new **Chevrolet Silverado 1500** 4x4 V-8.

Developed from the ground up by ICON founder **Jonathan Ward** and his team of engineers, designers and craftsmen, the C Modern Retro Series is neither a restoration nor a conventional C10 Chevy build. Instead, it represents a comprehensive reengineering effort that preserves the complete functionality of a modern Silverado while clothing it in one of the most beloved classic Chevrolet trucks ever produced.

Prospective owners choose between ICON's signature Derelict and Old School-style builds. Highlights include modern safety technologies, ABS braking system, infotainment system, towing capability, fully undercoated body with extensive modern sound deadening and thermal shield coatings, custom seat with improved ergonomics, and custom dash panels that integrate the new truck's features and controls.



CHEVROLET 1500 SILVERADO







American inventor and entrepreneur **Palmer Luckey** embarked on a distinctive collaboration with pickup accessory brand RealTruck on a custom military utilitarian **Chevrolet 1500 Silverado** build that was auctioned through **Barrett-Jackson** in support of veterans.

Known for founding **Oculus VR** and **Anduril Industries**, Luckey's involvement underscores a commitment to pushing boundaries in vehicle design and functionality, alongside RealTruck's extensive customization capabilities. The benefitting charity was the **Call of Duty Endowment**, which seeks to help veterans find high-quality careers after their service.

The custom truck showcases a fusion of rugged utility and cutting-edge innovation with RealTruck's new Ascend Cap and Traction recovery winch, a **SuperLift Suspension** 6-inch lift, custom tube doors and more.

KESTREL WORK TRUCK

Morgan Olson, a leading manufacturer of purpose-built commercial work vehicles, showcases its new work truck platform on the **Kestrel**, a commercially available solution engineered for the most demanding first response use cases. It is purpose-built and fully validated, representing a new class of compact, four-wheel drive, Class 2 commercial vehicles designed to support emergency response operations in urban and rural environments.

Developed with direct input from fleet operators and real-world users, the fully engineered commercial platform can be configured to support a wide range of first responder applications, including fireground support, command and communications, EMS and rehabilitation units, logistics and equipment transport, and multiagency response roles. Its modular, upfit-ready design allows departments to tailor the vehicle to specific operational requirements while maintaining flexibility for future needs.



MORGAN SUPERSPORT 400

Introducing **Supersport 400**, the most powerful production **Morgan** to date. Producing more than 400 hp, the new model delivers a more intense and deliberate driving experience, with a clear emphasis on dynamic capability.

Supported by Morgan's longstanding technical partnership with **BMW**, the Supersport 400 includes the company's Dynamic Handling Pack featuring adjustable front and rear **Nitron Suspension** dampers with bespoke valving and spring rates tuned to deliver optimum performance. An optional limited-slip differential further enhances traction, stability and control.

The car is powered by the latest BMW B58 O1 inline 6-cylinder turbocharged engine, paired with an 8-speed **ZF Friedrichshafen** automatic gearbox.

Highlights include an advanced CXV aluminum platform, high-flow Active Performance Exhaust System, analog driver connections, front wing vents, 19-inch **Sport Lite** alloy wheels and **Michelin** Pilot Sport 5 tires Optional coral accent detailing can be specified across exterior graphics, brake calipers and interior elements for a refined finishing touch.







DESERT POWER WAGONS CREW CAB







Restomod company **Desert Power Wagons** recently created a bespoke 4-door **Dodge Power Wagon**-inspired **Crew Cab** truck finished in Jupiter Red. After more than 1,500 hours of meticulous craftsmanship, the build is a bold fusion of classic American grit and modern precision engineering.

The factory-built foundation includes front and rear heavy-duty **Magneti Marelli** shocks with **KONI** Frequency Selective Damping valving, and a 12,000-pound **WARN** winch mounted up front.

A **BorgWarner** BW 44-48 electronic shift-on-the-fly transfer case maximizes power from the high-output 6.7L **Cummins** turbo diesel engine, while Gun Black 20-inch **Black Rhino** Armory wheels wrapped in 40-inch **Mickey Thompson** Baja Legend MTZ tires deliver improved traction and stance.

Inside, the factory Dodge Power Wagon Limited Longhorn interior has been expertly integrated into the wider and longer Desert Power Wagon cabin, resulting in a seamless blend of vintage proportions and present-day ergonomics.

The cabin is upholstered in distressed Pinecone leather, featuring heated and ventilated power front bucket seats and a heated 60/40 split-folding rear bench with a fold-down armrest.

The leather-trimmed dashboard, Alcantara headliner and **Focal** premium surround sound system transform the cabin into a sanctuary. Add in the **Uconnect** 5 14.4-inch touchscreen, **Mopar** ParkView rear back–up camera, 360-degree surround-view cameras, heated steering wheel, dual-zone automatic climate control and power-adjustable pedals to complete the refined cockpit experience.



INEOS GRENADIER





A **MetalCloak**-equipped **INEOS Grenadier** completed the legendary Rubicon Trail this year, becoming the first INEOS Grenadier to conquer one of the world's most challenging and respected off-road routes. The historic run was led by **Scott Becker**, MetalCloak media director, and demonstrates the importance of pairing an experienced driver with purpose-built suspension and protection systems designed for serious off-road terrain.

MetalCloak equipped the vehicle with products designed to work together as a complete capability package, including its 2.5-inch Game-Changer suspension, Rocker Rails and UnderCloak Skid Plate System. Other upgrades included 33-inch Patagonia A/T Pro tires from **Milestar**, Sahara wheels from **Nomad** and **Rugged Radios** communication equipment.

BIZZARRINI 5300 APERTA LUSSO

The **Bizzarrini 5300 Aperta Lusso** is an open-top interpretation of the striking **Bizzarrini 5300 GT**. The first all-new production Bizzarrini since the 1960s, the *Nuova Classica* combines modern technology and luxury with '60s design language and elegance.

Ten initial examples were planned, each hand-built to its owner's exact specifications, designed for rivieras rather than racetracks. The first commission is named "**La Dolce Vita.**"

Engineered with modern materials, modern construction methods and with subtly incorporated modern technology, highlights include leather-trimmed seats, an instrument panel sculpted from a single piece of wood, gear knob crafted in Italian tortoiseshell inlaid with gold details to create the Bizzarrini logo, Azzurro Gaia exterior color, air-conditioning, premium frameless windows and modern weather sealing, adjustable steering column, MagSafe charging and sound system, double-wishbone suspension with **KONI** adjustable dampers, center-lock wheels, **Pirelli** tires, **Alcon** four-piston front and **Brembo** two-piston rear calipers, rack and pinion steering, adjustable column, **Nardi** wood-rimmed wheel, single-piece carbon-fiber composite body, carbon fiber roof panels, frameless glass windows and Inconel valved exhaust, all powered by a 5.3L front-mid V-8 with port fuel injection to reach 400-plus-hp.



BUGATTI VEYRON

Two decades after the **Bugatti Veyron** pushed the limits of automotive performance and engineering possibility, the icon now enters a new chapter of stewardship with a one-of-one project from its exclusive certification and restoration division, **La Maison Pur Sang**. The unique Veyron created with newly developed materials and fresh avenues for restoration continues the legacy of the dedicated program introduced at **Rétromobile** in Paris back in 2020.

La Maison Pur Sang offers Veyron owners a personal pathway that remains anchored in the authenticity, technical knowledge and historical sensitivity of Bugatti's specialists. The **La Maison Pur Sang Veyron 20 Years** special edition embodies the philosophy in its complete form.

Finished in Rouge Rembrandt and Petrol Blue with a Magnolia interior, the car brings





a fresh visual expression to the Veyron while preserving the proportions and presence that defined its legendary silhouette. A new wheel concept enables it to use tires in Chiron dimensions, while three-dimensional mesh elements for the front, side and rear air intakes deliver a subtle, more contemporary technical expression.

Inside, drivers find Mocassin stitching handcrafted specifically for the project on the steering wheel and gear selector, while between the seats a special 20 years of Veyron emblem honors the anniversary of the car along with a Côte de Genève finish on the center console.

HOLLAND & HOLLAND BESPOKE COMMISSION











British bespoke **Range Rover** creator **Overfinch** unveils the one-of-one **Holland & Holland Bespoke Commission**.

Created as a highly individual interpretation of the Holland & Holland Edition, the unique vehicle builds upon the foundations of the limited series SUV while introducing a more formal, tailored and deeply personal design language.

Adopting a more poised and contemporary presence, the vehicle's exterior is finished in a deep black, offset by refined gold detailing. Signature elements include the grille, side vents, wheel detailing and rear finisher.

Inside, the transformation includes a warm ivory and black colorway replacing the traditional London Tan, black piping, contrasted monogram embroidery on the headrests, seats adorned with bespoke bird embroidery and handcrafted moorland marquetry deployable tables.



MOTORCYCLES & POWERSPORTS

A look at some recent powersports-based project vehicles & bike builds.

BMW MOTORRAD M 1000 RR LIMITED EDITION ISLE OF MAN TT







With the **BMW M 1000 RR Limited Edition Isle of Man TT**, **BMW Motorrad** introduces a special model limited to 115 units globally to mark the 115th running of the Isle of Man Tourist Trophy in 2026. The edition is based on the **BMW M 1000 RR M Competition** model and combines exclusive TT design elements with carefully selected equipment features and collector attributes.

The design of the Limited Edition is consistently aligned with TT DNA: British Racing Green Matte color with special TT graphics featuring selected sections of the TT Mountain Course—lefthand turns on the left, righthand turns on the right fairing side. A carbon airbox cover with TT course and TT logo and a seat in Alcantara finish underscore the motorsports character.

Limited edition equipment includes milled numbering on the top yoke, a certificate of authenticity, aluminum tank painted in satin chrome including graphics, M Race Cover Kit, black swingarm, TT branding and lettering on the rear frame, rear wheel stand with mounting equipment and a BMW M Motorcycle Mat (98-by-41 inches) with M and TT logos.

CAN-AM DEFENDER PRERUNNER

Powersports vehicle company **Can-Am**'s success at iconic races like **King of the Hammers** inspired the **Defender Prerunner** project build, created as the ultimate remote race support vehicle. Built on the Defender platform in a 6x6 configuration, the Defender Prerunner has an imposing stance and a unique silhouette.

Its robust fabrication makes it capable of prerunning and chasing some of the toughest races in the world. The side-by-side vehicle (SSV) is equipped with aggressive 35-inch tires and the company's trophy truck-inspired LinQ bed.

The comfortable four-seat cab features premium **Sparco** seats suited to a racing environment. True to its Defender roots, the unique SSV delivers rugged utility when needed.





CAN-AM MAVERICK R XRAY











Born in the dunes, the **Can-Am Maverick R XRay** project build is an embodiment of Glamis riding culture.

Inspired by custom sand rails with robust lighting, the vehicle combines next-level LED lights integration with a one-of-a-kind lightweight design.

When the sun goes down, the Maverick R XRay comes to life with an industry-first exoskeleton structure and custom lighting integration throughout. The translucent, backlit panels create a unique aesthetic that can only be achieved through OEM-level manufacturing and design.

Built on the Maverick R platform, it features a custom two-wheel drive configuration, innovative active roof spoiler, premium Sparco seats and paddle tires.

With changing light colors, the side-by-side vehicle (SSV) illuminates red under braking and can be programmed to display various lighting patterns that bring an inspired and dynamic show to the sand. ***TS***

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Heavy-Duty Punch & Die Tooling Utility Cart

Scotchman Industries, Philip, South Dakota, presents the Scotchman Heavy-Duty Punch & Die Tooling Utility Cart. Built to handle tough shop environments, the rugged cart boasts a heavy-duty welded steel frame and 2,400-pound load capacity. A durable black marine-grade HDPE worktop provides a convenient, oil-resistant surface for staging tooling. Drawer setups can be stacked or stepped.



Air Impact Wrench

K-Tool International, Lakeland, Florida, presents its heavy-duty, 1-inch Air Drive Impact Wrench. Featuring 2,700 pound-feet of breakaway torque, the powerful wrench weighs just 12.4 pounds and includes magnesium front and rear housings and a composite center housing. A side handle delivers enhanced control and a variable speed trigger allows for multispeed operation. It produces 1,000 blows per minute and is powered by a seven-vane motor delivering 5,500 rpm to quickly reach maximum torque. The handle exhaust directs airflow away from the user.

Open-Top Two-Post Lift

BendPak, Agoura Hills, California, introduces the 12APF Open-Top Two-Post Lift. Designed to eliminate the overhead bar to deliver unencumbered lifting even in shops with low ceilings, the 12APF is designed with shortened columns and an extended rise that provides more than 6 feet of working area under the vehicle. All hydraulic and equalizer lines are protected beneath a durable steel floorplate that enables smooth movement of jacks, drain pans and other equipment. The lift is suitable for lifting cars, trucks, SUVs and vans weighing up to 12,000 pounds.





Electric Vehicle Tool Kits

Cementex, Burlington, New Jersey, presents its 13- and 18-piece Electric Vehicle Tool Kits, made in the USA for professionals and first responders working with hybrid and electric vehicles. Designed as the starting point for safely servicing EVs, the kits include a core selection of DC voltage-rated insulated tools such as combination wrenches, pliers, screwdrivers and a torque wrench—plus open-ended wrenches, additional pliers and a ratchet with drive sockets in the 18-piece set—organized in a tool roll pouch and large canvas tote.



Professional-Grade Battery Tester

TOPDON US, Rockaway, New Jersey, presents its BT600 Plus Professional-Grade Battery Tester that offers more than 14 hours of continuous, mobile standalone operation. Designed for workshops, dealerships and mobile technicians, the tester supports accurate diagnostics for 6V, 12V and 24V systems. It includes a built-in, rechargeable lithium battery offering accurate, reliable diagnostics and analysis for lead-acid, lithium, alkaline and carbon-zinc batteries.

Complete Air System

Atlas Copco, Rock Hill, South Carolina, presents its G 2WIN Complete Air System. Engineered to meet the real-world demands of busy workshops, the system offers easy operation, minimal noise and maximum uptime in an all-in-one duplex solution. Designed to power paint booths, pneumatic tools or wash bays, it features a next-generation element, high-efficiency motor with full-size standalone dryer with coalescing in-line filter included, 80-gallon horizontal ASME air receiver, a top plate that securely holds both compressors and dryer, Bluetooth control and more.





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If your operation relies on compressed air, downtime can be costly. That is why it's important to have an air compressor you can trust. The AirSWAP compressor upgrade program helps you find just that. Whether you have an old, inefficient compressor, one at risk of downtime, or another brand you are not satisfied with, Atlas Copco can help you find a cost-effective solution that fits your needs and makes the switch easy. Plus, get money back for every horsepower of your traded-in compressor.

A compressor's total lifecycle cost is heavily influenced by its efficiency. While the purchase price of a new compressor may seem high initially, it accounts for only 10% of the total lifecycle cost. Over its lifetime, energy costs account for about 80% of total cost, and an inefficient, outdated system can drive those energy expenses even higher. Compressed air systems generally represent about 20% of a facility's total electricity bill. By swapping out your old compressor, you can achieve long-term cost savings and greater production efficiency.

There are several factors to consider when deciding whether it's time to replace your compressor. Rising energy costs, declining performance, and recurring repairs can all signal that your equipment is no longer operating efficiently. Older compressors can also be more difficult to maintain as replacement parts become scarce, increasing the risk of costly downtime. Upgrading your system can reduce operating expenses and support long-term productivity.

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Multiprocessor Welder

Miller Electric Mfg. LLC, Appleton, Wisconsin, presents its Multimatic 215 PRO Multiprocess Welder. Engineered for professionals and small- to midsized shops, the welder delivers enhanced power, flexibility and ease of use, helping users tackle more jobs. Combining multiprocess capability with next-generation usability features, users can transition between MIG, DC TIG or stick welding on the fly. An intuitive 4.3-inch color display and Auto-Set technology allow welders to fine-tune settings across multiple processes and materials.

Material Lifts

JET Tools, La Vergne, Tennessee, presents its JET S-Series 450-pound Material Lifts, engineered to deliver compact power, reliable performance and enhanced mobility for shop professionals. Featuring a short-stack mast design with a more compact footprint that improves maneuverability through tight spaces, doorways and vehicles, the lifts include all-metal pulley wheels, bearing-mounted mast rollers and debris guards. Multiple settings include standard lift, stow and flat transit modes, with optional fork extensions.





Apprentice Vise Line

WILTON, La Vergne, Tennessee, presents its expanded Apprentice Vise line that now includes a six-model assortment. Designed for small shops, automotive mechanics and MRO technicians, the expanded lineup introduces three new additions: a 5-inch vise, a heavy-duty 6-inch model, and a compact 3-inch clamp-on vise, joining the existing assortment of 4-inch and 6-inch models, as well as a versatile 5-1/2-inch multipurpose vise. Most offerings feature the company's fully enclosed bullet design for enhanced durability, consistent clamping force and long life.

A/C Flush Machine

AirSept, Atlanta, presents its A/C Flush Machine with dual tank and SoundSilence Technology. Designed to provide clean solvent for each vehicle flush, the system is quiet and odor-free and works in shops of all sizes. The unit performs full flush and dry cycles, with a unique drying system that ensures maximum air purge. SoundSilence technology reduces noise, with an airflow management system that prevents flushing unless flush/purge settings are in the correct position. Flush solvent and replacement filters are available.





Battery Charger & Maintainer Line

Schumacher Electric Corp., Fort Worth, Texas, presents its RUGGED BY SCHUMACHER Battery Charger and Maintainer line. Designed for maximum performance, the versatile units support both 6- and 12-volt systems offering 1-, 2-, 3-, 5- and 10-amp charge and maintain rates. A low-profile clamp design and patent-pending clamp assembly with Schumacher Flex Eyelet Technology allow the innovative clamps to easily convert into ring leads by removing a single screw, offering a low-profile solution for hard-to-reach terminals.



Enterprise-Scaled Operating System

Solera, Westlake, Texas, presents ShopCentral, a cloud-based, enterprise-scaled operating system for automotive repair shops. Developed for multishop operators (MSOs) and independent businesses, the system integrates all critical aspects of shop management, from customer communication and scheduling to parts pricing and billing, into a unified, cloud-based platform. Real-time analytics help analyze pricing strategies and proactively recommend services to boost margins and build customer loyalty. ***TS***

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PERFORMANCE

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Pro-Touring: Looking Back to Move Forward

Adding the latest technology to classic cars is still in high demand.

BY JOHN CAROLLO



Designer Louis Vuitton and Porsche restoration company Singer worked on a pair of eye-catching 911 restomod creations. (Photo courtesy Singer)

There's something about today's Pro-Touring market that just feels right—the allure of classic vehicles, outfitted with advanced parts and the latest technology to maximize performance and enjoyment.

The market tends to agree, as projects big and small are helping customers rekindle their love for older cars, trucks and SUVs and, more importantly, getting them out onto the street or track to actually drive them.

The challenge for shops begins with the extremely wide variety of components available to enhance seemingly any project. Builders must be certain diverse components will work together seamlessly, while balancing high-value potential with limited budgets to provide the most bang for every buck.

Market insiders are ready to help with observations on current market trends and pitfalls to avoid, and introductions to the hottest new products. Once you have a handle on the category, it makes sense how looking back can be the first step toward moving forward.

THE SEARCH FOR CLASSICS

There's no doubt Pro-Touring projects are still in high demand, as many builds bring together the best of both worlds.

"Today's enthusiast wants the character and styling of a classic car, but they also expect the performance, drivability and reliability of a modern vehicle," says Rich Barsamian, vice president of sales and marketing for Advanced Clutch Technology. "That is pushing builders toward modern engine swaps, higher horsepower and components that can handle that additional power without sacrificing the driving experience. Customers don't just want a car that puts up impressive numbers—they want to be able to get in, start it and enjoy driving it."

Building a great Pro-Tourer, of course, starts with finding a classic vehicle suitable for upfitting. While some drivers are inheriting their rides, others are paying to obtain them.

"Since Wilwood Disc Brakes has been exhibiting at or attending so many events lately, we're finding more people who are getting cars handed down from their parents (baby boomers) talking to us about what upgrades on the brakes we can help them with," says Michael Hamrick, events and

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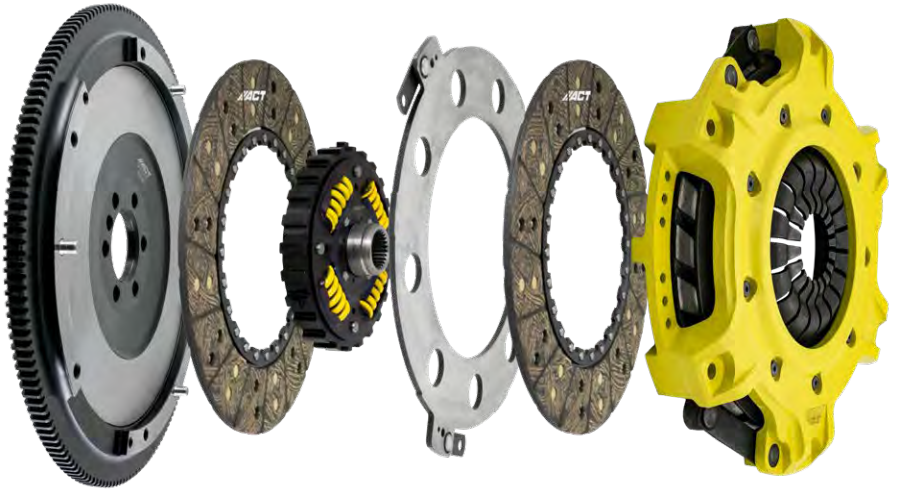
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View Pro-Touring or restomod builds as complete systems, with every component needing to work together. (Photo courtesy Advanced Clutch Technology)

promotions manager. "Most are not looking for a full Pro-Touring brake setup for their car that was handed down from their father, but many do want more performance and that restomod look. They typically have a budget in mind, so we ask what they are looking for in the brake system and give them numerous options to help balance the best of performance and aesthetics. If we can help get the customers' feet wet by explaining the best options for their vehicle, we have helped with getting them to a shop to install the products."

Meanwhile, those on the hunt for the perfect classic may need to be ready to spend more than in the past.

"I would say the greatest outside factor affecting Pro-Touring and the restomod market is the prices of the cars," says Brett Domin, sales manager at Flaming River Industries. "There's been a significant cost increase in the price of cars in need of restoration, and cars that have been restored but not modified with aftermarket parts have also increased (in price). On the plus side, availability of components to make these builds your own is better than ever."

The overall economy can affect business as well.

"Cost increases of all things impact the available funds that can be spent on project vehicles," says Art Kendrick, director of performance and retail for Red Line Oil.

There are still bargain projects to be found, says Marc DeMontigney, sales and marketing manager for American Autowire, but many standard classics now carry a much higher cost of entry, especially for younger enthusiasts looking to take on their first project.

PRO-TOURING PRODUCTS

■ **HOT PRODUCTS:**
10.5-inch Mod-Twin G14 Clutch Kits
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Fit the popular GM 6.2L (376-ci) L3 engine platform; rated to handle approximately 891 to 1,469 pound-feet of torque at the engine; smooth, predictable pedal feel and engagement; diaphragm spring designed from the ground up for the specific application.
Advanced Clutch Technology
Rich Barsamian
VP Sales & Marketing

■ **HOT PRODUCTS:**
Rear Electric Parking Brake (EPB) Kits
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Ease of installation with no troublesome cable routing; electric motor and gear drive provide a minimum of 2,400 pounds of clamping force with no electrical draw after activation; On/Off switch can be hidden to add one more layer of protection against thieves.
Wilwood Disc Brakes
Michael Hamrick
Events and Promotions Manager

■ **HOT PRODUCTS:**
Direct-Fit Steering Columns
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Made in the USA; designed for performance and ease of installation; complement other popular components including bolt-in rack and pinion cradle kits, power rack and pinions and steering universal joints.
Flaming River Industries
Brett Domin
Sales Manager

■ **HOT PRODUCT:**
Hydroformed SwitchFire X-Pipe
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Unique sound; increased horsepower and torque; hydroforming provides a low profile.
Borla Performance Industries
Tim Sayers
Muffler Development Manager

■ **HOT PRODUCTS:**
High-Performance Gear Oils
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Maximum performance and protection for differentials and manual transmissions; smoother shifts and more power to the ground due to reduced friction in gear sets.
Red Line Oil
Art Kendrick
Director of Performance and Retail

■ **HOT PRODUCTS:**
97000 Series Adjustable Upper Control Arms
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Allow for large camber and caster changes; incorporate 1/2-inch longer ball joint studs to help modify OE suspension geometry; forged ball joint housings deliver increased clearance; lower arms also available for many GM platforms.
Specialty Products Company (SPC)
Tom Przedpelski
Technical Specialist/ Alignment Trainer

■ **HOT PRODUCTS:**
Classic Update Series Wiring Kits
■ **FEATURES & BENEFITS:**
Engineered around a specific vehicle while providing the additional capacity and flexibility needed to support modern engines, aftermarket gauges, upgraded steering columns, air conditioning, EFI and other common accessories.
American Autowire
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LUXURY RESTOMODS

Guided by its Art of Travel philosophy, Louis Vuitton brought its expertise and savoir-faire to a recent two-car collaboration with Singer, the Californian atelier known for its highly personalized restorations of classic Porsche 911s.

The first, a Porsche 911 Reimagined by Singer – Classic, showcases an exclusive livery in the House's iconic colors of saffron, cobalt blue and yellow, specially crafted with and for Louis Vuitton.

Its counterpart, a Porsche 911 Reimagined by Singer – Classic Turbo, conceived by Nicolas Ghesquière, Louis Vuitton's artistic director of women's collections, is a cabriolet finished in Calcaire Lutétien white and complemented by precious-wood trim.

At the heart of the project lies a detachable, mechanical timepiece, which can be converted into a desk clock and whose design is inspired by the iconic Tambour watch, recognizable by its distinctive shape and 12 polished and engraved letters forming the name of the House on the bezel. Once integrated into the cockpit, it soon became clear that Louis Vuitton's involvement would not be limited to the single timepiece.

"This unique and remarkable adventure began with a request for a dashboard clock for a car reimagined by Singer," says Jean Arnault, Louis Vuitton watch director. "In addition to the design and production of this clock by La Fabrique du Temps Louis Vuitton workshops in Switzerland, it quickly became apparent that this collaboration with Singer could extend to the personalization of every functional element of the vehicle, enhancing them through our expertise in leather craftsmanship and watchmaking."





The special Porsche builds grew from a simple request to include a classic mechanical timepiece in the interior. (Photos courtesy Singer)

"This has brought more modern vehicles from the 1980s through the early 2000s into focus, and that shift is being reflected in the products developed by the aftermarket, as well as in which vehicles are now considered 'classic,' he observes. "Pricing for some key vehicles aside, it is a great time to be involved in the automotive industry. Vehicles that received little aftermarket attention just a few years ago are gaining support, giving builders more options and making a wider range of projects practical."

While price can be a determining factor, many Pro-Touring customers are at an age where they're willing (and able) to pay for the experience.

"There is a group of people that are at a stage in their lives where they have the money, time and a desire to have a car like they either had, or wanted to have when they were younger, only they want it upgraded or updated," says Tim Sayers, muffler development manager at Borla Performance Industries.

Once the vehicle is obtained, most every build plan has a common goal—to get it on the street or track.

"A desire for drivability is probably one of the biggest factors for today's Pro-Touring market," says Tom Przedpelski, technical specialist/alignment trainer at Specialty Products Company. "Whereas, in its infancy, it was more about form than function,





Understanding individual components is only half the equation—knowing how different parts work together is just as important. (Photos courtesy Wilwood Disc Brakes)

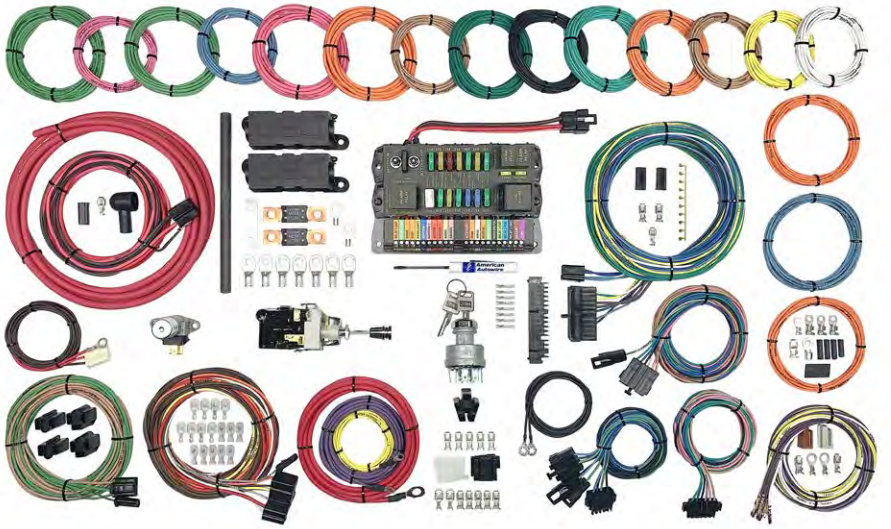
today's builders are creating vehicles that not only look awesome but perform and handle as good as they look. Look at any recent high-impact auction and you will see an ever-growing selection of superbly engineered restomods that are designed to be driven and enjoyed, as well as admired when parked."

THE RIGHT PROJECT AT THE RIGHT PRICE

The right Pro-Touring project starts with everyone asking the right questions, so everyone is on the same page from the beginning.

"The most common mistake when selling or installing aftermarket parts is not taking the time as the seller, buyer and installer to understand the project," says Domin. "It is so important to ask as many questions as possible before making the purchase. Compatibility is not always the problem, but more understanding what the project consists of to get the job done."

It's up to the builder to keep problems or issues to a minimum, says Hamrick.



Presenting wiring as a complete solution creates opportunities to include relays, switches, and other installation accessories from the start. (Photo courtesy American Autowire)

"A recurring mistake shops make is not asking the customer the right questions and (being) hesitant to reach out to manufacturers for the best answers," he explains. "As I tell many shops, you are building a whole or part of a car and have many talents, for sure, but may not be an expert on every aspect of that car build. But, if you contact an engine, suspension or brake expert, they can share insightful knowledge with the shop that will help with the outcome of the build and make more money on the project. Never hesitate to pick up the phone or email a manufacturer—that's what we are here for."

Przedpelski points to a suspension upgrade as an example of not understanding the full capacity or potential of a product.





The right Pro-Touring project starts with everyone asking the right questions. (Photos courtesy Flaming River Industries)

"Many people believe adjustable control arms are only for competition vehicles," he says.

In a similar vein, DeMontigney reminds shops not to choose a wiring system based only on its initial price instead of evaluating the complete vehicle and everything included.

"A well-sorted kit with vehicle-specific components will almost always cost a little more than a universal system, but it may save a significant number of labor hours and reduce the effort required to source additional parts," he explains. "At the same time, a high-end Pro-Touring or restomod build may realistically require a universal wiring system to accommodate custom routing, extensive modifications or a smooth firewall."

Barsamian cautions against selecting components based solely on horsepower or torque, without considering how the customer actually intends to use the vehicle.

"A Pro-Touring or restomod build is a complete system, and every component needs to work together. With a clutch, for example, the highest torque capacity isn't automatically the best choice. Shops need to consider engine torque, vehicle weight, gearing, tires, power adders and, most importantly, how the car will be driven. Is it primarily a street car, will it see autocross or road-course use, or is it being built for a combination of everything?"

As mentioned earlier, budgets are an important part of most Pro-Touring projects. Sayers cautions professionals against being too consumed with keeping costs to a bare minimum, however.

"Don't immediately underestimate the amount of money a customer is willing to pay for modifications to get their vehicle upgraded/updated the way that they want it to be," he says.



Take a comprehensive approach to Pro-Touring builds, leaning on your knowledge and experience to guide the project. (Photos courtesy Red Line Oil)

Therefore, a comprehensive approach makes sense, says Kendrick.

"Sell everything for the build. Don't have them go elsewhere to buy the rest of the items they need to do the installation."

SALES ON THE HORIZON

The best Pro-Touring builds feature customers who are totally sold on the performance and safety benefits new technology provides.

"Potential customers need to be made aware their vehicles were designed and manufactured with parts and specifications that are now obsolete, unless they are running bias-ply tires and/or are in the concours circuit," explains Przedpelski from Specialty Products Co. "Every vintage muscle car can take advantage of the increased alignment range and improved suspension geometry our arms provide. Plus, if a vehicle needs to be returned to concours condition, these arms can be removed, and no one is the wiser."

Barsamian from Advanced Clutch Technology explains that Pro-Touring and restomod customers are typically building a complete vehicle, not just replacing a single component.

"That creates an opportunity for shops to become a trusted resource by helping customers select components that work together and deliver the driving experience they want," he says. "Don't just sell the customer the most aggressive component

available. Sell them the right combination for their build. When you take the time to understand their goals and recommend the right solution, you build credibility, increase the opportunity for additional sales and, ultimately, create a customer who is more likely to come back for the next project."

Knowing how the vehicle will be used, which accessories are planned and whether additional equipment may be added later gets projects off on the right foot.

"Presenting the wiring as a complete solution also creates opportunities to include the appropriate relays, switches, connectors, grounding components and other installation accessories from the start," says DeMontigney from American Autowire. "This increases the value of the sale while helping the shop avoid delays, additional orders and rework."

Ask questions and be thorough, advises Kendrick from Red Line Oil.

"You know better than a customer what they need to complete an installation and what other things they could potentially upgrade at the same time," he explains.

Domin from Flaming River says the key to maximizing sales is becoming familiar with available products and then "watching installation videos, talking to tech departments, going to trade shows and seeing the products in person. Of course, having a passion for these vehicles is essential to continually building knowledge that benefits the customer."

Hamrick notes that understanding individual components is only half the equation—knowing how new parts affect each other is just as important.

"Confirm that the products you have chosen with the customer work together. Doublecheck the flange and offset of the rear end to make sure Wilwood gets you the correct rear brake kit," he says. "The last thing we want to do is send you incorrect parts and then make your customer wait for replacements. We say, 'Let's not make the freight companies richer' as a joke, but it really isn't a joke. Ordering parts correctly the first time saves everyone's time and money."



Today's builders are creating vehicles that perform and handle as good as they look. (Photo courtesy Specialty Products Co.)



Don't immediately underestimate the amount of money a customer may be willing to spend for their desired modifications. (Photo courtesy Borla Performance Industries)

Once they have a handle on the market, top shops can get to work getting the word out about their restomod builds.

"Make sure your current and prospective customers know that you are in the Pro-Touring business," says Sayers from Borla Performance Industries. "Things like social media, newsletters, email blasts and articles in local newspapers, along with marketing information in your shop are good ways to get the word out." ***TS***





3D Printing Performance Parts

How New York's Tucci Hot Rods uses updated scanning technology to speed up customizations.

BY PAUL HANAPHY | PHOTOS COURTESY TUCCI HOT RODS

Paul Hanaphy is head of content and PR at Artec 3D, a global leader in handheld and portable 3D scanners. Founded in San Diego and with headquarters in Luxembourg, the company has been at the forefront of developing innovative 3D technology since 2007.

Hot rods hold a special place in automotive folklore. Their roots can be traced all the way back to the Great Depression, when many young Americans—short on money but with plenty of time on their hands—experimented with modifying cars and helped start the performance aftermarket we're a part of today.

Not just eye candy, these vehicles were modified to race. Alongside flamboyant mods scrounged and swapped among drivers, many featured performance upgrades. After World War II, formal hot rod racing championships sprung up across the U.S. and Europe.

To this day, hot rodding—a term now used to describe modified vehicles of various eras—remains a popular pastime for automotive enthusiasts. Seeking to recapture some of the magic that made the originals so special, some collectors also continue to modify early- to mid-20th-century vehicles, looking to aftermarket shops for parts, service and advice.

OEM production of most classic car parts ceased long ago, with some of their designs lost to the pages of history. For many low-volume or insignificant pieces, performance shops can be forced to create their own solutions.

While it's possible to do so via traditional, manual patterning techniques, Tucci Hot Rods in Marcy, New York, found a way to make the process faster and more accurate with the help of Artec Leo 3D wireless scanning technology.

TUNING AT TUCCI HOT RODS

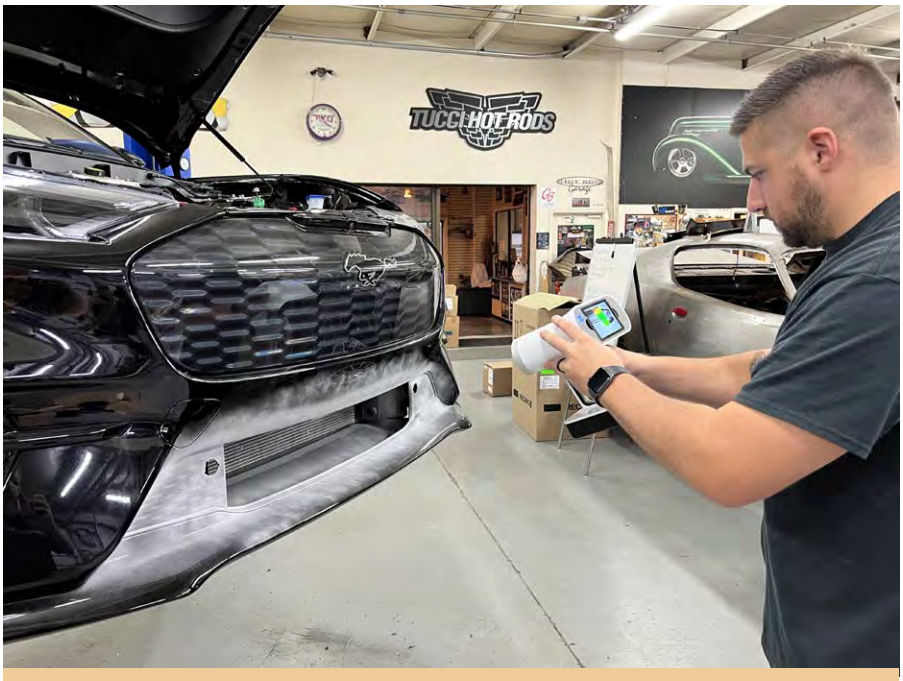
Over the past quarter-century, Tucci Hot Rods has established itself as a major force in the U.S. modding arena, with clients based everywhere from New York to Nevada. Initially founded by Dave Tucci Jr. and his wife, Jill, the firm continues to be family-led, with their son Dominick Tucci now onboard as an industrial designer.

Customers tend to approach the company with plans that are often broad, revolving around a desired style or engine, but with no real idea of what it will take to make the project a reality. This is where Tucci Hot Rods has made its name: as a partner that walks car modification enthusiasts through the entire journey, from initial design to fabrication and assembly.

More recently, the firm began integrating extrusion and resin 3D printers into its workflow, which allows for the creation of custom end-use components like lenses, light covers and vents.

Initially, the company faced considerable challenges around the way it gained the measurements needed to make such modifications fit seamlessly.

(Above) Tucci Hot Rods is always seeking new ways to utilize its scanning technology.



Dom Tucci of Tucci Hot Rods uses an Artec Leo wireless AI-driven 3D scanner to take precise measurements for 3D-printed parts.

"Say you have a complex metal shape—you could make a pattern of one side, a pattern of the other, take measurements and then connect the dots to make something that is close to fitting exactly," explains Dominick Tucci. "Initially, we used a lot of cardboard, and there was also a lot of printing prototype pieces, seeing what fit, making changes and then printing new ones. Lots of back and forth. If I made a really nice template, it could take me two hours. At that point, it may not even be perfect, either."

MODERNIZING CAR CUSTOMIZATION

In an effort to streamline Tucci Hot Rods' 3D parts-fitting approach, Tucci began to experiment with upgraded scanning technology a few years ago. At first, he used an Xbox Kinect camera and cheap scanning software, and while it could only "pick up really rudimentary surfaces," he says, it "gave him an idea of how it would work" if he could get ahold of a higher-end device.

Having seen Artec 3D scanners at a trade show in 2021, Tucci reached out to Digitize Designs, an Artec ambassador company, which helped choose the correct device and software to meet Tucci Hot Rods' needs. While he considered corded scanners, Tucci says the fully wireless Artec Leo's all-in-one nature and built-in display were deciding factors.

"I've used scanners before where it's connected to a computer and you're constantly looking at what you're getting and making sure you're getting it," he adds. "With Artec Leo, you're looking directly at it the whole time. Plus, the fact that it's so portable has come in really handy a bunch of times already."

Adopting Artec 3D scanning has also allowed Tucci Hot Rods (tuccihotrods.com) to reduce its lead times. Before, it could take up to two hours to template part of a customer's car and then as much as 20 additional hours to 3D-print a prototype—depending on modification complexity.

The Artec Leo's 0.1mm point accuracy and data capture speed of up to 35 million points per second allows Tucci and his colleagues to model guaranteed-to-fit parts in minutes.

One of the first projects to benefit from 3D scanning saw Tucci design custom taillights for a classic Dodge. Right away, the cost and lead time savings were clear.

"Initially, we spent 3-4 days going back and forth, templating, printing a test piece, changing it, printing another. Prints were a minimum of 8-9 hours, and these were made of cheap material as well—not the stuff I use for end parts," he says. "At the time, we were talking 3-4 days of back and forth, a process we replaced with just 15 minutes of scanning."

PRODUCTIVE PARTNERSHIP

Artec Studio has played its part in improving the shop's productivity. Tucci says he ini-

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A classic 1936 Dodge truck scanned and modified by Tucci Hot Rods.

tially worried about "capturing scans with enough detail, but not so much that it couldn't be moved around Rhino 3D," a popular CAD design software.

"Our collaboration with Tucci Hot Rods—a connection made through a satisfied customer—has enabled us to deliver superior 3D scanning expertise," says Kyle Burdine of Digitize Designs. "After an assessment, we recommended Artec 3D as the ideal fit for Dom's operations. The dividends of this relationship are clear, with high ROI and continued innovation in the automotive modification industry."

With guidance from Digitize Designs, Tucci has since learned to use Artec Studio mesh simplification to reduce model complexity. The program makes it possible to remove small polygons, set a maximum level of deviation or even target a polygon count to optimize results, making models easier to manage when exported to other platforms.

"In Artec Studio, I started to mess around with the tools for reducing the number of polygons in a mesh," Tucci says. "I did a few training sessions before we got the scanner on how to use Artec Studio and process scan data for certain things. It works really well for what we do with it."



Tucci uses the shop's Artec Leo to 3D-scan the front of a Chevrolet Chevelle project.

AUTOMOTIVE 3D SCANNING & BEYOND

Since turning to Artec 3D scanning, Tucci Hot Rods has digitized all sorts of automotive parts. One of the first it scanned was the grille of a classic 1936 Dodge truck.

According to Tucci, the component's complex convex outer shape made it particularly tricky to model with traditional methods, and initial prints using the old method were a quarter-of-an-inch off at the front and back. Given that there was "not much room for error" in that part of the vehicle, it was "really critical that it fit exactly," making 3D scanning a necessity.

The shop was able to use scan data as a basis for 3D printing headlight covers that fit perfectly around the car's grille, he continues. Building on the success, Tucci and his colleagues have gone on to customize vintage Fords, including a 1970 Mustang muscle car and a 1931 Model A sedan.

"To customize the Model A, we would previously have mounted its motor on frame rails



A Tucci Hot Rods custom-fabricated motor mount installed on a vintage Model A.

and cardboard-patterned everything," Tucci explains. "With 3D scanning, I was able to capture the motor and frame in place, draw all the motor mounts, laser-cut them out and then everything just fit right off the bat."

The financials worked as well.

"If you consider that we charge $95-$100 per hour as a labor rate, and customizing each car takes 12-18 months, even minor time savings can be hugely beneficial."

EXPANDING HORIZONS

The shop's portfolio continues to diversify, with one client recently asking for a modern 2022 Ford Maverick to be digitized, and another wanting to capture data of an offsite cleanroom.

Through several floors at the latter's silicon wafer chip plant, concrete-casted holes had been made to accommodate the multilevel piping of machines and pumps. To avoid spillage on different floors, tiny curbs needed to be installed.

"We developed these plates that go around each pipe and lock into each other, but we still had to scan 20 holes of different sizes that had tubes running through them," Tucci says. "We were able to bring in our Artec Leo and capture every hole, label it and process it into a model. Each hole had its own plate that we had to make specifically for it. Without a 3D scanner, the project would've been almost impossible."

In the future, Tucci says his company will stay on the lookout for ways to maximize its improved scanning technology.

Along with building hot rods, he notes if someone needs his company to come out and scan something, it's a service he's now happy to offer. ***TS***





Pete Chapouris III (left) and Alex Xydias revived the original (at the time title case-spelled) So-Cal Speed Shop in 1997, ushering in a new era of signature hot rods that combined reliability and a distinctive nostalgic appearance. (Photo courtesy Randy Lorentzen)

SO-CAL Speed Shop Turns 80

A fast-paced history of the company that helped define modern hot-rodding.

BY TONY THACKER



Alex Xydias started the original So-Cal Speed Shop in 1946 after the end of World War II. (Photo courtesy SO-CAL Speed Shop)



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.

Eighty years ago, on March 3, 1946, a young, recently discharged serviceman was, like so many, wondering what to do now that World War II was over. The question weighed heavily on the mind of 23-year-old Alex Xydias, who had trained as an U.S. Army Air Corps bomber flight engineer and top-turret gunner—skills that weren't much called for after the war. Heck, it was a short-lived career *during* the war.

Xydias rightly surmised that he was not alone, recognizing that there were thousands of young people just like him with a need for excitement, a passion for cars and Mustering-out payments ready to be spent.

He'd dabbled in hot rods a little bit before the war, had been to the races at the dry lakes and owned a mildly customized 1934 Ford Cabriolet. It was as much training as he was going to get before he decided to open a speed shop with $100 borrowed from his mom.

GETTING UP TO SPEED

The first So-Cal Speed Shop was located at 1806 North Olive Drive in Burbank, California, with a sign advertising "SPEED EQUIPMENT" above the one-room store. Business was initially slow, almost non-existent, as there was no way to reach potential customers (HOT ROD Magazine wasn't introduced until 1948.) Xydias spent many days lifting weights with his first customer-turned-employee, Keith Baldwin.

The only way to reach prospects was to go lakes racing, which had shifted east from Muroc to El Mirage in the Mojave Desert, where—racing under the Sidewinders club banner—Xydias fielded his first belly tank lakester. Not yet the shop's well-known iconic red and white, No. 555 was a $60 drop tank partly assembled by Bill Burke around a Ford Model T frame and fitted with a Baldwin–built V8-60. By the end of 1948 it owned the B Streamliner record at 130.355 mph.

The So-Cal Speed Shop went on to campaign a fleet of hugely successful race cars throughout the '50s until the new, readily available OHV (overhead valve) engines from Chrysler and GM began to push Xydias's beloved flathead Ford V-8 onto the trailer.

He closed the shop doors in 1963 and went on to enjoy a career in motorsports filmmaking, publishing and, eventually, event promotion with Mickey Thompson. Meanwhile, he was canny enough to keep the So-Cal trademark protected with catalog reprints and commemorative events.

A NEW BEGINNING

Fast-forward to 1997, when another hot rod icon, Pete Chapouris III, struggling to find an identity for his new business, had an epiphany that maybe he could resurrect the So-Cal Speed Shop.



SO-CAL's signature red and white hot rods are known by fans all over the world. (Photos courtesy SO-CAL Speed Shop)



Chapouris knew Xydias from his days as marketing director of what is now the Specialty Equipment Market Association (SEMA)—they were both members of the SEMA Hall of Fame—and Chapouris had cannily protected his former business name for more than 30 years.

A deal was reached and in November 1997 the new (uppercase!) SO-CAL Speed Shop was launched.

Chapouris, his old partner Jim "Jake" Jacobs and their band of brothers already had a host of traditional hot rod products on the drawing board and a complementary retro clothing line that took off around the globe. Building hot rods and customs for the likes of ZZ Top's Billy F. Gibbons generated gallons of magazine ink and in turn sold T-shirts.

Building a fleet of red and white, SO-CAL-branded, record-setting land speed race cars for MG and then General Motors only added fuel to the fire.

The brand went viral before the word "viral" went viral, with licensed speed shops across the country. You seemingly couldn't travel anywhere without seeing the SO-CAL logo on a hat, jacket or shirt.

Then, suddenly, like a shooting star burning up upon entering Earth's atmosphere, Chapouris died on Jan. 6, 2017, from complications resulting from a stroke. He was 76.

CHANGING WITH THE TIMES

SO-CAL briefly spiraled out of control until Chapouris's son Peter (known as "re-Pete" or "PC4") stepped up to take the reins with assistance from his brother-in-law, Matt Robbins. A new, more retail-friendly headquarters location was opened at 33 S. Eucla Avenue in San Dimas.

While some of the original satellite locations fell by the wayside, there remain three locations besides the San Dimas headquarters still operating: Las Vegas; Hewitt, Texas; and Surrey, British Columbia.

"There is also a string of dealers all over the world," says Peter Chapouris, "selling the three mainstays: hot rod parts, merchandise and memorabilia."

The business is still very much "on the road," he continues.

"We have displays at numerous West Coast events, from the Winternationals and World Finals to the Grand National Roadster Show—all three of which are in our own backyard of Pomona, California," he says. "The drag races have become a very important venue for us, as we sponsor our friend Jeff Diehl's Funny Car. We also have a retail spot right inside the public entrance to Pomona and next to the car show corral, and we do well there meeting and greeting the fans."

Fans can join the SO-CAL Speed Shop Club for $199-per-year at jeffdiehlracing.com to access member-only benefits including discounts on parts, apparel and storage, Chapouris reveals.

"The latter is available only at the SO-CAL San Dimas location, where we have 10,000 square feet total and 1,500-square-feet of retail space," he adds. "We no longer build customer cars, but we do own several historic SO-CAL rods including the '27 Roadster 'SIROD' and one of the iconic red and white roadsters that have seen a significant uptick (in attention) lately."



Three physical locations still exist outside of the company's San Dimas headquarters, continuing to offer a mix of hot rod parts, merchandise and memorabilia. (Photo courtesy SO-CAL Speed Shop)

It's hard to believe in today's world dominated by "mis-adventure" capitalists' buy-outs and mergers that companies such as the SO-CAL Speed Shop can survive and indeed thrive—but thank goodness they do.

"In my father's 10-year tenure, SO-CAL built more than 20 hot rods, including about a dozen distinctive scalloped rods, of which seven were red and white in the historic SO-CAL livery," says Chapouris. "Suddenly, 20 years on, they have become collectible in what is otherwise a softening market. I think they are fetching a premium because of SO-CAL's history, their perfect stance and styling and the fact that my dad and his team that included Pete 'P-Wood' Eastwood—who is still with us—built a bulletproof car that you can drive cross-country without a care. And, at the end of the day, that's what everybody wants from a hot rod." ***TS***

PERFORMANCE **PRODUCTS**

Stock Your Shelves With These Go-Fast Components



Dodge Transfer Case

Zumbrota, Zumbrota, Minnesota, presents its Dodge Transfer Case (RTC271D-1HD). Designed to upgrade 2007-12 Dodge Ram 2500 and 3500 models, the new transfer case features 29-spline input and a 1.5-inch switch. It ships standard with new, heavy-duty front and rear case halves featuring extra webbing to prevent cracking.

Ford Mustang GT Clutch Kit



Advanced Clutch Technology (ACT), Lancaster, California, introduces its 10.5-Inch Mod-Twin Clutch Kits for 2024-26 Ford Mustang GT models. Engineered for high-performance street and race applications, the Mod-Twin delivers increased torque capacity, durability and service life without traditional twin-disc compromises. Its modular hub system offers sprung or solid hubs paired with Organic Street or 6-Puck race discs, while a forged aluminum cover delivers responsive pedal feel and a refined street driving experience.



Steering Stabilizer

Dynatrac, Louisburg, North Carolina, presents its Centerline Steering Stabilizer (JL DT922043). Designed to ensure safe and sensible driving, the stabilizer system accommodates the bigger tires, wider stance, taller shocks and additional weight found in today's Jeep builds, all of which can adversely affect steering function.

Ford 6.7L Fuel Leak Prevention Kit



S&S Diesel Motorsport, Seymour, Indiana, presents its Ford 6.7L Fuel Leak Prevention Kit (LPK). Made in the USA, the billet aluminum engine-mounted fuel filter housing replaces the plastic OE fuel filter and offers OEM-spec filtration (4-micron absolute at 99% efficiency) while exceeding OEM dirt-holding capacity (23 grams vs. 12 grams). Bolt holes are machined to accept 8mm Allen wrenches for easy filter removal, with an easy-release quick-connect. Applications include 2011-26 Ford F-250 to F-750 trucks with 6.7L Power Stroke diesel engines.



Bead Grip Wheel

Method Race Wheels, Santa Fe Springs, California, presents its 710-HD Bead Grip heavy-duty wheel, engineered for drivers seeking strength, traction and reliability. Combining patented Bead Grip Technology, motorsports-derived engineering and heavy-duty load ratings of 3,310 to 4,500 pounds, the 710-HD features solid A356 aluminum construction and T6 heat treatment with a reinforced inner lip. The wheel is available in gloss black and machined finish options in 17-, 18- and 20-inch sizes.



XRS Calipers

Wilwood Disc Brakes, Camarillo, California, presents its high-performance XRS Street Calipers. Built on decades of the street- and race-proven Superlite Radial Mount design and the success of the widely used XRZ race version, the XRS features innovative X-bridge architecture. Advanced FEA design combined with precision CNC machining transforms premium forged aluminum into a stronger, lighter and more rigid caliper with improved airflow for cooling, available in four- and six-piston applications.

BMW Exhaust Suite



AWE, Horsham, Pennsylvania, presents its new AWE Exhaust Suite for BMW G42 M240i models. The full 3-inch, straight-through system is engineered for more flow and power and available in both a Touring Edition with 180 Technology to eliminate drone and an aggressive Track Edition. Handcrafted from CNC mandrel-bent, U.S.-made 0.065-inch wall T304L stainless steel, the systems feature tip options including OE tips and quad 4-inch double-walled slash cut tips in chrome silver or diamond black.

Digital Dash



AutoMeter Products, Sycamore, Illinois, presents its new 7400 InVision Digital Dash, a universal-fit solution on the company's latest 8.8-inch InVision platform. Designed to expand fitment opportunities, the 7400 delivers modern instrumentation in a more compact format, offering the same advanced functionality and performance as its popular 12.3-inch InVision series. At the center of the system is a high-resolution 8.8-inch LCD display, providing sharp, easy-to-read data across five user-selectable screens with customizable color options.

Diesel-Specific Exhaust System & DPF Cleaner



Cataclean, Bowling Green, Kentucky, presents Cataclean Diesel Exhaust System & DPF Cleaner, a new, diesel-specific treatment that supports emissions system performance, fuel economy and overall efficiency in diesel-powered vehicles. By targeting carbon build-up and deposits throughout the system, the cleaner supports DPF regeneration, improves fuel economy and helps restore overall engine performance. It also cleans and maintains diesel particulate filters (DPF), catalytic converters, turbos, oxygen sensors, fuel injectors and heads.

Lawn Care Engine Oils



Lucas Oil, Indianapolis, presents its new line of Lawn Care Engine Oils formulated for small engines that power lawn mowers, chainsaws, leaf blowers, trimmers, power washers and more. Products include Multi-Season Engine Oil (10W-30), Heavy-Duty Engine Oil (10W-40), SAE 30 Plus Motor Oil and Synthetic Blend Hydrostatic Drive Fluid, plus maintenance products including fuel treatment, hybrid fuel treatment, hybrid oil treatment, Red 'N' Tacky & X-Tra Heavy Duty grease pack and synthetic SAE 75W-90 gear oil.

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Brake Components



Wagner, Skokie, Illinois, a **DRiV** brand, presents its expanded Braking Components offerings, including new Brake Pads, Rotors and Brake Hardware. ES brake pads, ES rotors and brake bolt kits are engineered for consistent performance, durability and installation efficiency. ES brake pads provide OE-style fit and formulation with a noise-reducing three-layer shim. ES rotors deliver OE-style design with precision balancing to reduce vibration and pedal pulsation. Brake bolt kits support proper clamping force and installation integrity.

Drop Steel Leaf Springs



Ridetech, Jasper, Indiana, presents its 2-inch Drop Steel Leaf Spring sets for first- and second-generation GM F-body (1967-81 Camaro/Firebird) and third-gen X-body (1968-74 Nova) platforms. Designed for upgraded performance without abandoning a proven suspension design, the steel leaf springs lower the vehicle's ride height while improving handling, ride quality and overall control. Kits include steel leaf springs, shackles, Delrin bushings and all necessary hardware, and can be combined with the company's 1.5-inch steel body RQ-S shocks.

Short Blocks



BluePrint Engines, Kearney, Nebraska, presents three new Power Adder Short Blocks. Designed as a foundation for supercharged, turbocharged, nitrous-assisted and high-horsepower naturally aspirated builds, the offerings provide more displacement options while eliminating many of the delays associated with custom machine work and engine assembly. Available in GM big-block-compatible 540- and 632-ci configurations, as well as a GM LS-compatible 427-ci platform, each short block is assembled using premium components.

Universal Front Suspension Kit



Speedway Motors, Lincoln, Nebraska, presents its G-Comp Universal Front Suspension Kit. Engineered, built and tested in the USA to transform old muscle cars into modern Pro-Touring machines, the kits are available in direct-fit and universal configurations. The G-Comp X Edition includes spindles with C7 Corvette hubs for handling and control. The kit provides camber adjustment using shim plates and caster adjustment using inserts and comes with a 1-1/4-inch O.D. splined sway bar. *TS*





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The Growing Demand for Civilian Armored Vehicles



Armored upgrades provide protection against common civilian threats while preserving the performance, comfort and appearance of standard luxury vehicles. (Image courtesy Miami Armored)

U.S.-based armored vehicle dealership and protection solutions provider Miami Armored shared its observations earlier this year on how armored vehicles are becoming a practical safety choice for everyday Americans

Across the United States, according to the company, personal safety has become an increasingly important part of everyday life. From business travel and daily commuting to school dropoffs and family outings, many Americans are reassessing how they protect themselves during routine activities.

While public discussions often focus on crime statistics and policy debates, a quieter shift is taking place among individuals, families and executives—the growing adoption of armored vehicles as a practical form of personal security.

PROTECTION FOR EVERYDAY PEOPLE

Once associated primarily with political leaders, military convoys and high-profile celebrities, armored vehicles are now designed for a range of individuals and activities, the company notes in a press release. Today's modern armored vehicles are discreet, refined and engineered to integrate into everyday life.

In many ways, they are following the same path as home security systems. Most homeowners install alarms not because they expect danger every day, but because preparation provides peace of mind. Increasingly, personal protection on the road is being viewed through the same lens—a proactive step that allows people to move freely and confidently in an unpredictable world.



Today's modern armored vehicles are discreet, refined and engineered to integrate into daily life. (Photo courtesy Miami Armored)

Armored vehicle manufacturers have focused on developing solutions that prioritize discretion, usability and comfort, allowing clients to maintain normal routines while benefiting from advanced protection.

Modern armored vehicles generally fall into two primary categories, each designed to address different levels of risk:

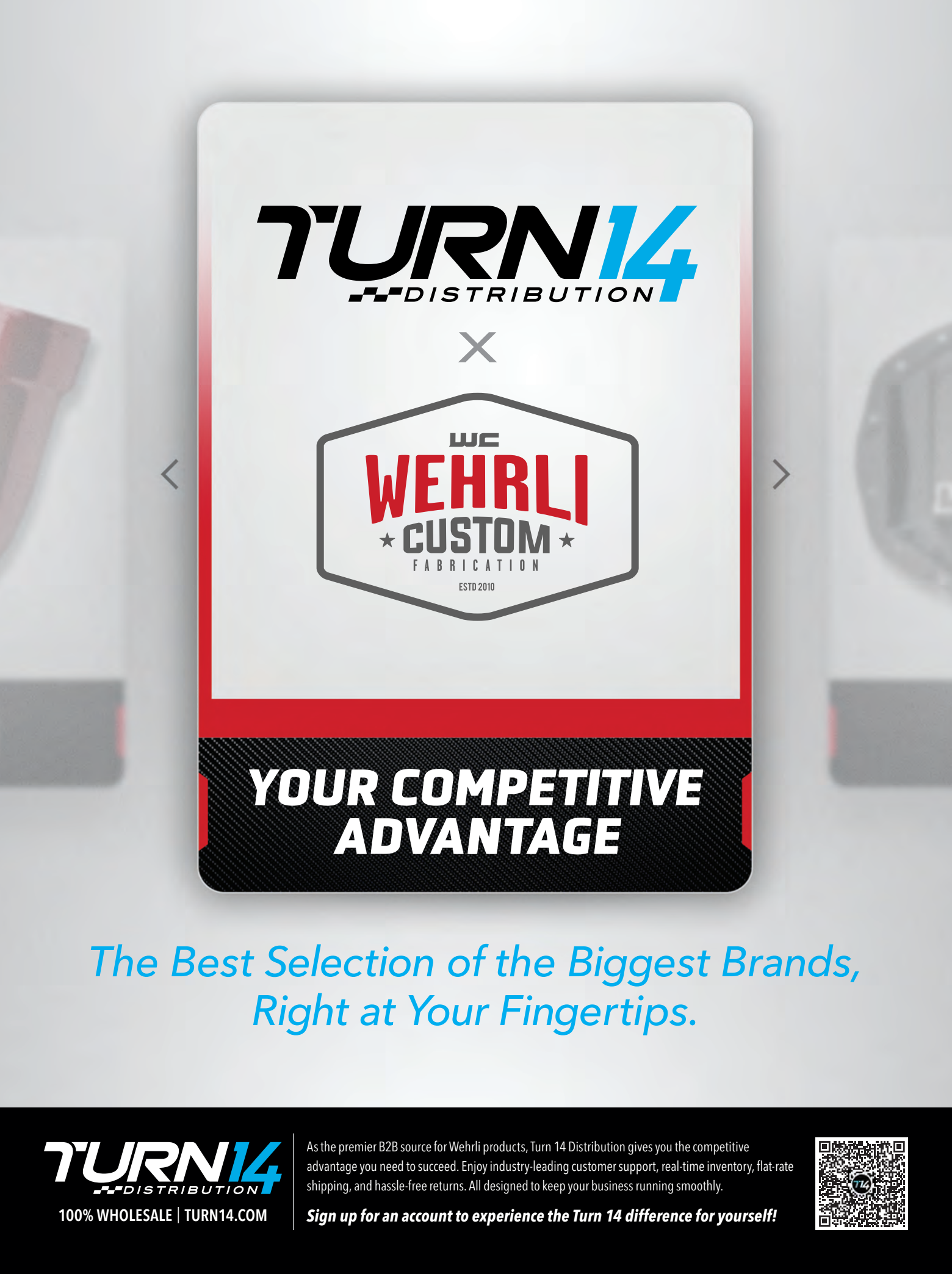
- *Heavy armored vehicles* are engineered for individuals or organizations operating in elevated threat environments. These platforms are commonly used by government officials, security teams and tactical units requiring maximum ballistic protection.
- *Lightweight armored vehicles* are designed for everyday mobility. Built for executives, families and professionals living in major metropolitan areas, these vehicles provide protection against common civilian threats while preserving the performance, comfort and appearance of standard luxury vehicles.

One of the defining characteristics of modern civilian armoring is invisibility, according to the company.

Protective materials are integrated beneath the vehicle's factory design, maintaining the original exterior appearance. From the outside, an armored vehicle looks virtually identical to the standard version since, in many situations, not attracting attention is itself a form of protection.

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