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UNDERSTANDING HYBRID VEHICLES AND SAFE REPAIRS

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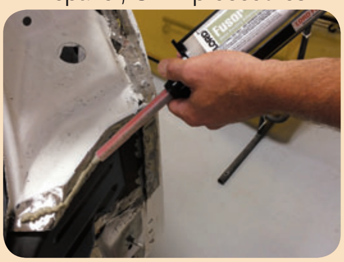

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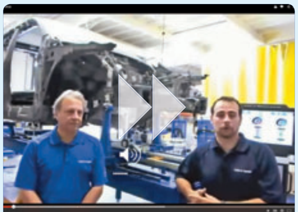

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USING SUSPENSION DIAGNOSTICS IN THE SHOP

[URL ABRN.COM/CAROLINER-SUSPENSION CHECK]

VIDEO SPOTLIGHTS

STUDY: DIGITALLY empowered customers driving collision repair change

AudaExplore, a data solutions provider, recently conducted a survey gauging the industry perspective on technology in the shop. Adam Vasquez, VP of marketing with AudaExplore, explains the impact for the collision repair industry.

[URL ABRN.COM/AEVIDEO]

FROM ON-SITE rentals for collision repair shop owners to local off-site locations, Hertz has a customer service solution for every need. This year, Hertz has expanded its airport locations and service options to the collision repair industry.

[URL ABRN.COM/HERTZGROWS]

DAVID BYERS, CEO of CARSTAR Auto Body Repair Experts, discussed recent issues that are affecting the collision repair industry and specifically independent shop owners during NACE 2014 in Detroit, Mich., this summer.

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I-CAR has redesigned i-car.com, which will provide the industry with an easy-to-use online resource for collision repair education.

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AUTO SAFETY BILL INTRODUCED TO ADDRESS NHTSA FUNDING, RENTAL CARS

Senate Bill 2760 was introduced and aims to reauthorize funding for highway and vehicle safety at NHTSA for the next six years, and ensure that recalled rental vehicles are repaired before being re-rented.

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INDUSTRY RESEARCH

Shops, insurers need trust, communication

A recent AudaExplore study shows consumers feel repair shops and insurance carriers cannot be trusted and lack effective communication skills.

The study, faciliated by the data-driven solution provider, found that collision repair technicians are less trusted than many other professions and that almost half (48 percent) of consumers surveyed believe that repair shops sometimes, rarely or never provide great customer service.

Insurance companies didn't fare much better, with only 22 percent of respondents saying carriers decreased their stress level after a car accident. There is a clear consensus that repair shops and insurance carriers must improve in the areas of communications, trust and price.

"With increased competition, employee turnover, evolving vehicles, digitally empowered consumers and endless streams of data, the relationship between customers and companies has changed dramatically," explains Adam Vasquez, VP Marketing, AudaExplore. "We are living in the era of disruption, and providing a great customer experience is more important than ever. In this new era, it's not just about the number of shops or the size of your network; it's about building trust with constant communication and transparency throughout the repair process."

Read more about the results of the AudaExplore study at ABRN.com/TrustStudy.

BREAKING NEWS

INDUSTRY EVENTS

NACE, CARS THRIVE IN DETROIT

The automotive collision and mechanical repair industry flocked to Detroit this summer for NACE | CARS 2014.

With more than 6,500 automotive industry professionals visiting the expo and 8,000-plus throughout Detroit attending NACE | CARS and related events, the turnout was top-notch.

Partnering with numerous associations, events and groups such as I-CAR, CREF and CIC was a recipe for success. It showed there is still significant support and benefits for an industry-specific event.

The conference and expo kicked off July 30, with new features, including a larger show floor, a rebranded MSO Symposium, as well as manufacturer-specific classes and a strong focus on aluminum repair.

Continue reading at ABRN.com/NACEDetroit.

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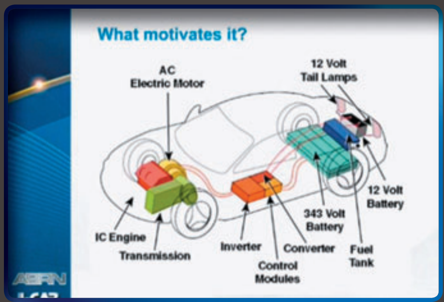

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  Chief's Global Repair Product Manager Richard Perry discusses common welding techniques for today's vehicles.
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  Industry consultant Mike Anderson shares valuable insights and best practices for the parts procurement process.
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Noteworthy — READER FEEDBACK TO ONLINE DISCUSSIONS

Darren Olson, owner of NorthStar Auto Body and Glass wrote: "I have a customer not at fault. He spun out and hit the curb; two wheels are damaged. They are aftermarket wheels, no longer made and are not repairable. How do I go about this?"

Rick Piatt, president, owner, Rick's Wreck Repair, Inc: The customer will say, "They cannot be matched, so why can't I get all four replaced?" But the insurance policy most likely only covers damaged items, so the other two wheels would be the customer's responsibility. The customer has a choice: pay out of pocket for additional wheels, buy a set of reconditioned OEM style wheels, or find a used set for the amount the insurance company is allowing.

Barrett Smith, founder, Auto Damage Experts: Your responsibility is to restore the vehicle to its pre-loss condition, no better, no worse. However, if the only way to do that is by making it better, than so be it, up to the limits of the policy coverage.

Donald Miller, body shop marketing and software company: The insurance company owes for a matching set of wheels because they all matched prior to the loss. If they are custom wheels, his policy will dictate the amount that is afforded, unless he has additional coverage for it.

Josh White, owner, Priola Body Shop, Inc: If it's third party, then there is no controlling policy language to worry about. Bottom line is the at-fault driver and that carrier need to make your customer whole.

Thomas Killilea, estimator, Saks Auto Body: If my insurance company gave me the replacement cost value of the two damaged wheels, I would become the squeaky wheel. Continue up the chain of command of the insurance company until you get them to agree to replace all four wheels, especially if you can prove that different wheels devalue the vehicle.

STREAMING PROGRAMS

- **Ensuring DRP Compliance**
  Darrell Amberson, director of MSO relations, discusses ways to stay compliant with DRP agreements while still maintaining a profitable business model.
  Visit: ABRN.com/DRPcompliance
- **NABC Gives Back**
  Nick Notte, board president of the National Auto Body Council, talks about its signature programs and giving back to your community.
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- **Suspension Diagnostics in the Shop**
  Pacific Collision Equipment's Robert Hornedo and Tom Balliet discuss the importance of suspension diagnostics in the repair process.
  Visit: ABRN.com/CarOLinerSuspensionCheck

INDUSTRY CALENDAR

NOVEMBER 4-7
- **SEMA**
  Las Vegas, Nevada

NOVEMBER 6
- **Collision Industry Conference**
  Las Vegas, Nevada

NOVEMBER 12-15
- **Automechanika Buenos Aires**
  Buenos Aires, Argentina

JANUARY 14-16
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Q+A WITH KEVIN SCHWARTZHOFF

NATIONAL SALES MANAGER,
RYDELL SURPLUS OEM PARTS

GET OE PARTS QUALITY AND PERFORMANCE, BUT AT AFTERMARKET PRICING

BY **KRISTA MCNAMARA** | MANAGING EDITOR

Rydell Surplus OEM Parts has partnered with major manufacturers to provide a low-cost alternative for supplying genuine OE quality parts to repair facilities throughout North America.

Kevin Schwartzhoff, national sales manager with Rydell, says the continuously changing company inventory meets OEM standards for fit, function and performance, therefore providing OEM quality, but is priced less than retail.

OEM surplus parts were originally created for inclusion on OEM cars and trucks, but due to production changes or minor cosmetic flaws, were excluded from the new-vehicle process. Rydell inventory includes current and past model collision parts harvested from North American assembly plants and several tier one suppliers. The parts meet or beat aftermarket prices, fit and perform as OE parts, reduce cycle time and increase customer satisfaction, Schwartzhoff says.

***ABRN:* Rydell sells surplus OEM parts at aftermarket prices. Can you explain the process?**
KS: GM, as well as several other original equipment manufacturers, have excess and surplus parts. At Rydell, we buy these parts and remarket them as OE surplus. We buy everything we can and catalog it in our warehouse. These parts can be seen through all major estimating platforms. Our retail pricing is typically less than aftermarket with the fit and finish of OEM.

***ABRN:* What types of parts and from what OEMs are available to shops?**
KS: Typically we have bumper assemblies, facias, hoods, doors, fenders, mirrors, lighting, tailgates, grilles, wheels and much more. We even have a drivetrain division.

We will normally have approximately 24,000 facias, 20,000 pieces of lighting, 4,500 doors, 4,000 hoods, 3,000 grilles, 1,000 fenders and 800 deck lids.

Our website, surplusoem.com, lists inventory in a searchable fashion. Right now this takes place weekly, but the estimating systems are nearly real time.

***ABRN:* How can shops browse your inventory?**
KS: They can turn us on as a preferred vendor on their estimating platform. They will look for Rydell Chevrolet, classified as OE surplus.

***ABRN:* What are the benefits to using Rydell versus a traditional jobber?**
KS: Not only are we the biggest OE surplus supplier, but we are the largest wholesale GM dealer in the nation. I personally come from a long body shop background and take every step possible to make sure that body shops are serviced at a premium level. There are no shipping charges for OE surplus.

Schwartzhoff began his career as a technician and estimator at McGrath Body Shop in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, where he eventually became manager.

He was then recruited to a management position with Zimmerman Body Shop, also in the Cedar Rapids area. After being named director of fixed operations and then general manager, Schwartzhoff worked as DFO at Dubuque Auto Plaza. He then took his current position with Rydell. A founding member of the Iowa Collision Repair Association, he also served as president of the Eastern Iowa Body Shop Association.

BY MIKE LEVASSEUR | COLUMNIST

mikel@keenanautobody.com

Dining and recruiting

The soft skills some restaurant workers use successfully can translate to collision repair

Looking for more front office help? Maybe it's time to go out for dinner. Like most collision repair businesses (and most businesses in general), we're interested in hiring younger people — Generation X and Y employees — for all aspects of our business.

Hiring technicians and production employees can be less of a challenge in that they generally show up with some level of technical skills and a reputation in the industry, a background that we can pretty easily check.

But what about administrative people – the customer service reps and those who need to handle money and talk with customers? We've determined that if we find the right people with the right innate skills, we can teach them what they need to know about our specific industry. That means we can recruit them from almost any type of business, in particular restaurants and retail operations.

"IF YOU CAN HANDLE THE PRESSURES OF WORK IN A BUSY RESTAURANT OR RETAIL ENVIRONMENT WITHOUT LOSING YOUR COOL, YOU HAVE A LOT OF WHAT YOU NEED TO HANDLE THE PRESSURES IN OUR BUSINESS."

This is something I learned watching my own daughter at work in a very busy restaurant. She can have 30 people waiting up to 45 minutes for a table – and multi-task – all without getting frazzled. She's become adept at interacting with the customers and also knowing which customers should go to which waiters – and yet still ensure all the waiters get close to an equal number of customers. Those are not easy skills, yet they translate pretty directly to our business.

That's why I say going out for dinner might be a great opportunity to recruit your next employee. We're always looking for people with the soft skills we need: Do they understand customer service? Do they have good communication skills? Are they patient and friendly? Do they show up on time? Can they listen and learn? Can they juggle multiple demands for their attention? Will they respond to your company's culture?

You can't change someone's personality, and some of these skills are closely tied to that. Recruit someone with those soft skills, and they will easily pick up the other information and things they need to succeed in our busy, often stressful business. It's easy for them.

Once I became convinced of this reality, it was my job to teach the rest of our management team to embrace the idea. It's led to some changes in how we recruit and hire. In the past, store managers would do the interviewing and hiring, then send the new hires to our corporate office for orientation. But there were times those new hires would show up and I could quickly tell they didn't have the soft skills they needed to succeed with us.

Now, store managers still do the initial interviewing, but then a second interview is done at the corporate level by our comptroller and our marketing director, who monitors our customer service reps (CSRs). After all, CSRs are a huge part of our marketing. They represent the face of our business for most customers. They are the directors of first impressions, as we call them, because when you walk into one of our shops, that is the first person you see.

And we are actively looking for people outside our industry for those CSR and admin positions. If you can handle the pressures of work in a busy restaurant or retail environment without losing your cool, you have a lot of what you need to handle the pressures in our business.

So take a look around the next time you're out for dinner. But be aware you may not be the only shop owner there open to the idea of recruiting in that setting: I know several of my peers who hire people from the retail and restaurant world as well. Focused, conscientious, observant and respectful people have the soft skills you need when searching for a good director of first impressions.

Tell Me What YOU THINK

If there's a topic you'd like me to address, I'd love to hear from you.

Mike LeVasseur is president and COO of Keenan Auto Body, which has 11 shops in Pennsylvania and Delaware.


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PRIVATE EQUITY GROUP ACTIVITY GROWING IN COLLISION MARKET BECAUSE IT IS POISED FOR RISING PROFITS, RETURNS

BY DAVID M. ROBERTS | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

RECENTLY, the news has been full of private equity activity in the automotive aftermarkets of collision repair (sales of Service King and ABRA), auto parts (Blackstone buying Alliance Autoparts) and refinish markets (Carlyle IPO for Axalta). What's up with all this activity?

It's all about the money, of course. Private equity groups (PEGs) are taking profits because the time is ripe. The fundamental thing to understand about private equity is that their sole reason for existence is to realize profits for their investors. They aren't building a legacy for their kids, solving world hunger or investing for the next century. So when there's an opportunity to harvest their investment at a return that is substantially above their targeted return, they do so.

Most PEGs invest on behalf of their own investors, usually pension funds, sovereign equity funds (think oil rich countries like Qatar and Norway) and high net worth individuals. Very large PEGs, such as Carlyle and Blackstone, are publicly traded firms, which gives ordinary mortals the opportunity to invest as well. These kinds of investors are looking to the PEG to produce a continuing stream of realized liquidity events that better determine the underlying values of the PEG's assets. For example, while Carlyle sold a large portion of its investment in Service King, it retained a significant portion as well. And now the price paid for their majority position

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sets the value for the retained portion.

So when Carlyle sold Service King, it was just doing what smart money always does — take extraordinary profits when they can. And that's what Palladium did in selling ABRA to Hellman & Friedman. And that is what Carlyle is doing with an IPO for Axalta.

Carlyle's estimated return on Service King was 4 times their original investment in less than 2 years. That's an annualized return of more than 100 percent. Palladium has been invested in ABRA for a little over 3 years. If they make 5 times on their original investment, they too have realized better than a 100 percent internal rate of return (IRR). Most PEGs are thrilled with 30 percent IRRs.

So why are Blackstone and H&F entering the fray? It is unlikely that they will see 100 percent annual returns, but the opportunities to realize 30 percent IRRs seem widespread, so both large and medium size PEGS will find the space attractive compared to other opportunities.

Has all easy money been made?

Consider the following:

- The top four consolidators collectively generate less than $2.5 billion in revenues, less than 7 percent of total industry revenues of $31 billion.
- If the collision repair industry continues to consolidate to 45 percent of total revenues, there is more than $10 billion in headroom for investors entering the business today. That is an excellent opportunity for large and medium size PEGs to invest over the next 3-5 years.
- Now the risks seem lower. Just because Palladium and Carlyle have reaped the benefits of investing early doesn't mean investing today is more risky than 2-4 years ago. In fact, now it's probably less risky. Management is getting better and better. Processes are improving; insurers are referring more work. Capital is still very inexpensive.

But challenges remain. Experienced shop managers and technicians are still in short supply. Training is improving, but the pool of qualified candidates is limited and the price of labor is being bid up in some markets. Permits to open new locations in urban areas are difficult to obtain. Insurers may become wary of referring too much business to any one consolidator in the future.

So what does the continuing private equity involvement mean for the industry?

- We expect the industry to continue consolidating for years to come. The benefits of larger scale enterprises in this industry are little different from many others where consumers, payors and capital providers all reap the rewards.
- Well capitalized consolidators and larger MSOs are expected to continue to gain market share. With the huge capital pools of Blackstone, Hellman & Friedman and OMERS and the

public currency of Boyd/Gerber, the financing capabilities of Service King, ABRA, Caliber and Gerber are nearly unlimited. Their growth is more likely to be constrained by integration and management capacities than capital.

- Dealers with body shops should continue to make market share gains as vehicle complexity and certification requirements grow. The continuing investments in technology required to work with aluminum and evolving vehicle systems are expected to give well-capitalized dealers first shot at retaining the repairs of these new vehicles.
- Insurers are still making big gains from directing more repairs to fewer providers.
- Vendors will find a decreasing number of customers as the number of shops and distributors in the industry continues to shrink. We expect this will result in continued pressure on margins, but may conversely allow some stronger vendors to lock in large customers with national reach.

What does it mean for acquisition activity and pricing?

- We expect there will be more capital chasing more acquisitions. Acquisition prices, already at all-time highs, should continue to be robust for the best MSOs.
- We are seeing more MSOs engage with potential buyers through intermediaries. Following the example of ABRA, Service King and Caliber in achieving very attractive valuations by using an intermediary to create competition among multiple bidders, more and more MSOs are doing the same thing.
- Smaller PEGs are actively looking to buy and invest in regional and single market MSOs. Those PEGs with less than $5 billion under management are looking for candidates they can back that will either grow into substantial regional operations or become candidates for sale to the big consolidators.
- We expect an increasing number of MSOs and single shop operators to sell to consolidators or other MSOs.
- MSOs and single shop operators seeking to grow are likely to find it more expensive as they have to compete with consolidators and larger MSOs. This will change their growth strategies.
- Life for single shop operators, already under pressure, will become tougher as their larger competitors gain the benefits of scale, more DRP referrals and better purchasing, cheaper capital for new investment and more attractive, stable environments for employees.

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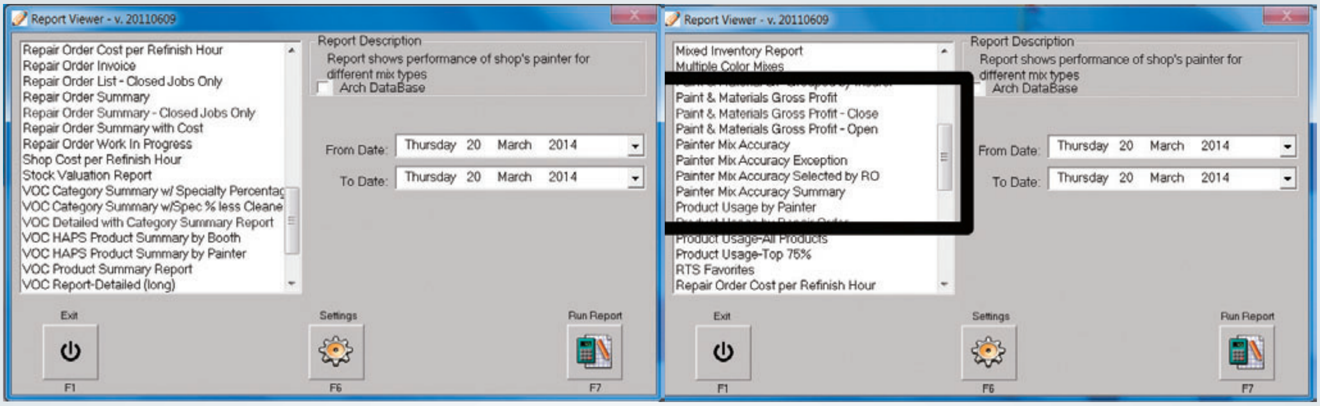
MINDING YOUR BUSINESS



JOB CO$TING ON A BUDGET

GET A BETTER HANDLE ON YOUR P&M COSTS TO LEARN WHERE TO FOCUS YOUR ATTENTION

BY JIM COMPTON | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

AT A RECENT industry event, I started a presentation with these words: "Paint…the final frontier." Beyond the comical Star Trek reference, there is some truth to this statement. Paint and materials (P&M) is one of the last areas where shops can still have very significant impacts on their costs and, therefore, their margins.

With all the competitive pressures both internal and external to do repairs faster and still maintain quality, the job of the repair shop owner has not gotten any easier. It is obvious that investments in equipment and training costs, along with significant cost controls on parts and sublet procedures, has taken its toll on repair shop margins.

When speaking with repair shop owners about P&M, there are generally three responses: 1) We probably lose money on P&M most months; 2) We think we are doing OK; or 3) We do great on P&M and are making a healthy margin.

Unfortunately, many shops don't have a handle on their

true P&M margins. The sales side is fairly easy — even the most basic management systems will summarize P&M sales, along with a lot of other key components of the sale. Even a quick adding of the P&M sales from every closed RO will give you this number. Knowing what this number doesn't include is also key to understanding P&M margins. For instance, seam sealers, cavity wax, stripping tape, foams and clips are generally accounted for separately as line item charges or a similar term.

The other half of the equation is the cost side. For the majority of shops, the paint supplier or jobber is the major source of P&M purchases. This sounds simple on the surface, but there are probably many other non-P&M items purchased from the paint jobber as well, including those line items — small tools (drill bits, gloves, etc.), air hoses, safety supplies and more.

Most shops have the ability to mix substantially all liquid products — primer, sealer, color, clear and some ancillaries — on the scale. If everything is mixed on the scale and coded or entered per RO, then we have a great foundation for job costing. So first let's verify that we are mixing everything on the scale. One easy way to do this is to run and save a report from your paint mixing system that summarizes by volume. This could be a Mix Report, VOC Report or Product Category Report; it varies by paint manufacturer. Your paint jobber can help you select the best report. Be sure to run all reports in an easy-to-decipher format. Almost all systems will output their data to an MS-Excel format. Then have your jobber run their sales report (your purchases) for the same period of time (we suggest 3-6 months). If the gallon usage on both reports is fairly close, your mix reports should also be fairly accurate.

Our next step is to take that same jobber's report and do a little quick math or sorting. For this quick job costing method, we only need three categories 1) P&M liquids; 2) All other associated products that are a true part of your P&M cost, but are not measured on the scale; and 3) everything else. This may include line items, shop supplies, equipment and small tools.

Now some quick math: Add the purchase costs of P&M liquids and the other P&M items and divide the liquid cost by the total P&M costs. For example: Liquid of $7,070 plus other P&M of $3,030 = $10,100. Then $7,070 ÷ $10,100 = .70, so liquid (items mixed on the scale) is on average 70 percent. Most shops will find this number to be in the range of 60 percent – 75 percent. We can now say that, on average, non-liquid items are about 30 percent of our costs.

Several of the paint mixing systems have the ability to enter this non-liquid cost as a constant and thereby calculate the total RO cost. Or just run the mix reports (Repair Order Summary or other system-specific report) and add back in this allied cost (the liquid cost per the report divided by the .70, in this example) and you now have a total material job cost.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Ok even easier: just use the 70 percent liquid figure. This will be close enough to allow you to run the RO cost reports from your paint mixing system and see what jobs need a little more inquiry.

I will concede that this is not a perfect system. Repairs can differ significantly from the small bumper job to the major front-end repair with lots of replaced parts or welds. But these quick calculations give you a good handle on material costs per refinish hour. You will likely be surprised to find jobs that you assumed were losers in P&M gross profit are really not, and vice versa.

Mixing

If you want to have lean material usage, everything starts at the scale. Are you mixing everything possible on the scale? Several of the paint manufacturers' systems have some great reports built in. But they are all dependent on the shop mixing/recording everything possible on the scale. Some systems even allow for batch mixing of primer, sealer and clear. For example: Mixing 20 oz of primer and using 4 oz on RO#1, 5 oz on RO#2 and 11 oz on RO#3.

Don't skip the validation. Check that over a 3-6 month period the gallons purchased are comparable to gallons used on the scale. You can do this by part number, or by category, such as color, clear, primer, etc.

And don't assume that everything is being mixed on the scale. Working with shop owners on lean material management, we have found that shops that thought they were 100 percent mixed on scale were not; some we found at 90 percent on color and 60 percent on primer; and others we found at much, much less.

After using and evaluating several paint manufacturers' mixing systems, we found some variations reports and setup screens, but all are very capable of doing a good job costing if you ensure everything is mixed on the scale. We found some other great tools in these systems, such as the ability to calculate net cost after discounts, cost per refinish hour, RO exceptions and VOC and other compliance reports.

Obviously the paint manufacturers' systems and most management systems can provide even more sophisticated job costing programs. But none of them work at 100 percent right out of the box. So shops need to mix and record everything possible on the scale. And, with the help of their suppliers, shops must periodically compare/verify purchases in gallons against gallons recorded as mixed on the scale. Try the free method outlined above. For many, this will be a great starting point for getting a better handle on materials costs.

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Jim Compton, owner and general manager of J. Hunter & Associates, has worked in the auto body industry for over 30 years. He has a special interest in the areas of lean material management, environmental protection and work place safety.

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PROFIT MOTIVE: YOUR COMPASS TO FINANCIAL SUCCESS

What route are you taking?

Develop a plan for your business exit strategy so you don't get lost in transition

BY **TOM MCGEE** | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Remember when you went on a trip and you used a paper map to plan the route you were going to take? Today we enter where we want to go into our phone or GPS, and we are provided with verbal instructions on how to get to our desired location.

So where are you on your route to retirement? Do you have a clear route and know at which exit to get off? Maybe you don't have a route at all.

Many owners do not have an exit strategy for their business. They do not have a plan for retirement, such as succession or transfer of ownership, or in the case of something unexpected, such as financial hardship, injury, disability or death.

Current industry position

Approximately 85 percent of collision repair facilities are family-owned businesses. Not only are the majority family owned, but they have also been in business an average of 30-plus years and the majority of owners are between 50 and 64 years old.

Multiple routes

Many owners, as they begin to look at where they want to go, will find that there are multiple routes they can take. For example, since the majority of businesses are family owned, one route may be to transfer ownership to one or more children. Other routes could include selling the business and property, selling the business and becoming a landlord or becoming an absentee owner. Each of these routes is an option and will get you to the desired destination, but not necessarily at the same time.

Who's going to drive next?

If you are not going to just sell the business and property, you will need to identify your successor and have a plan to evaluate their skills and their desire to own the business. It is not uncommon that the person you believe should take over the business turns out to not have the desire or skills you thought. Always have a back-up driver in case you need to change drivers.

Operational knowledge

Some businesses are like driving a car with an automatic transmission; others are a stick shift. A key part of your plan is to have a training plan that allows you to train and coach your candidate for success on every aspect of your business. The plan should outline all critical functions of the company. This may sound simple, but it's really not. You need to transition aspects of the business that only you controlled up until the training started. You also need to allow him or her to learn, grow and make mistakes while you are there as a coach. But remember that your successor can't succeed if you overrule decisions routinely.

Are we there yet?

The training and transition plan needs to have a timeline. You need to be able to measure progress or adjust if there is a detour along the way. If succession is to have a favorable outcome, you, your successor and your management team also need to know who is in charge of what and when. You need to provide a clear understanding of what the coming roles and responsibilities are going to be when you move out of day-to-day operations.

You lost your license

As you take the succession trip, you also need a plan for what you are going to do with the free time. As your successor takes on more responsibilities, spend time planning how you will continue to be involved in other activities away from the business.

As you work on your succession plan, be sure to seek the assistance of outside advisers such as your accountant, attorney and your investment or insurance professionals, since your succession plan will have far-reaching consequences from a tax, investment and legal perspective.

Not all trips are the same

There is no one plan fits all when developing a succession plan for your business. While succession planning is a challenge, it is worth the reward of watching your business grow and succeed in the next generation. We have created a workbook for you that can provide you with a start for a succession plan. Try it free for a limited time by going to www.ationlinetraining.com/abrn1410.

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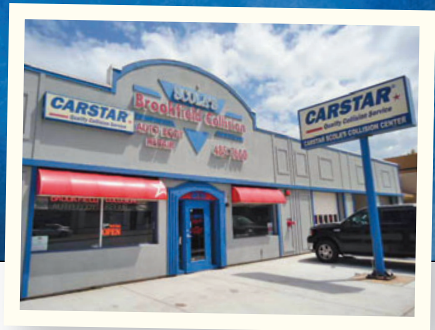
SHOP PROFILE

A snapshot of one of the industry's leading shops

CARSTAR SCOLA'S COLLISION CENTER/BROOKFIELD, ILL.



Best of the best

Shop carries on a tradition of teamwork, service

BY **JAMES E. GUYETTE** | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Clinching top honors as the 2014 Franchisee of the Year, CARSTAR Scola's Collision Center in Brookfield, Ill., has achieved customer service and production rankings that surpass more than 430 shops in 31 states and 10 Canadian provinces.

Dean Fisher, CARSTAR vice president of operations, says co-owners Luigi and Anthony Scola represent "the best of the best" within the entire organization.

"We've earned it," observes Luigi Scola. He is quick to credit the staff for the shop's success while also offering accolades for CARSTAR's proprietary management systems and a steady flow of expert advice.

After becoming a franchisee in 2003, "we've definitely moved forward because of them and our willingness" to embrace the various proven procedures. "It depends on how much you're willing to do with their processes," he explains: "Do you want to join the majors or stay in the minors?"

They decided to swing for the fences.

"My brother Tony was the one who found out about CARSTAR," recounts Luigi, who also goes by Lou. "When we took over from our father, we were looking to sustain a good business, and we figured CARSTAR would help us."

The franchisor's EDGE instruction and numerous other collision repair industry training sources, especially from paint supplier BASF, "helped us become more sustainable and efficient," Scola says. "We can produce vehicles faster. We were averaging 300 to 350 hours per week before those processes were implemented. Now we're averaging between 550 and 600 hours per week of production."

Each month some 110 to 115 repairs are completed by a staff of 15 people, presenting an attractive go-to referral among the 16 direct repair program (DRP) affiliations and other insurance carriers.

"The insurance companies measure our progress; they recognize us as a good shop, so they feed us more work," he says.

Team players

"It's like a baseball team – if everyone plays together we can win. We expect our employees to treat everyone as if they were part of our family," says Scola, emphasizing the home runs that any business can hit when it adheres to an established set of procedures coupled with the flexibility of shifting strategies when new techniques are brought into the field.

"We replace people who don't follow the rules, but we don't have to do it very often." When a potential hire is being considered, "I do some pretty extreme screening," he notes.

"The first thing I talk about with a candidate is that we work in a team concept here. You have to be willing to learn and work well with other people." If someone appears to be lacking in this team-player concept or seems to be set in his or her ways,

AT A GLANCE

CARSTAR Scola's Collision Center
Name of shop

Brookfield, Ill.
Location

Luigi and Anthony Scola
Owners

1
Number of shops

38
Number of bays

24
Years in business

15
Number of employees

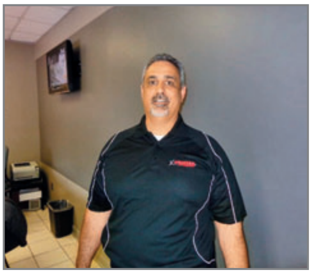
16
Number of DRPs

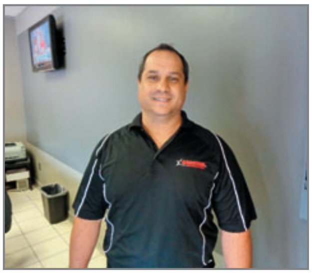
6.6 days
Average cycle time

8,750
Square footage of shop

$2.8 million
Annual gross revenue

BASF
Paint supplier





"I recognize that right away," says Scola.

Scola recruited lead estimator Justin Jernstad, impressed by his mechanical background from working with his father for 13 years and then gaining estimating skills at a Buick dealership. Jernstad also serves as youth minister at a local church, where he counsels young adults who have experienced tragedies in their lives.

Customer service representative Erica Rivera has been with the shop for nine years. Admiring her ability to be both "spontaneous and prompt," Scola marvels at how "she will always answer the phone with a smile and be courteous. Erica will follow through with every request and makes sure that it is taken care of for all our customers."

The Scolas feel that good pay and benefits are key factors in maintaining loyalty, as is the issuing of awards for workplace accomplishments.

Fit, form and function

"Everything in the shop is 5S," according to Scola, referring to the 5S Lean Process that originated with manufacturing executives in Japan – most notably applied in the auto industry by Toyota – following World War II. Also known as Kaizen, it involves the pursuit of continuous improvement, roughly translating as sort, set in order, shine, standardize and sustain. It aims to reduce waste and streamline operations to ultimately increase efficiency and productivity.

"Every piece we use has a specific place in the shop that has been chosen by the team members themselves. They're marked off with pictures and there's yellow and black paint on the floor."

A steady flow of parts, materials and other repair elements is kept up to date and accurate. "We have over 30 parts carts, and the carts are brought out to the vehicles so they're not looking for materials all the time. We try to keep the employees working in their stalls at all times," Scola explains.

Efforts are made to avoid the fit, form and function difficulties that can arise with insurance-mandated aftermarket parts. Lou and Tony pride themselves on the arrangements they have negotiated with key suppliers.

"We have several dealerships that provide OEM parts at aftermarket prices. The dealerships don't want to lose business to the aftermarket companies, so they're willing to do it," according to Scola.

"It creates a better product for the customer. People are happy and they come back," he points out.

"We have aggressive marketing," says Scola. A full-time sales representative is daily making calls on insurance agents, fleet managers and other potential customers.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Community involvement

Scola serves as chairman of the Chicagoland Business Group, which represents 15 franchises throughout the region. In 2013 the organization netted CARSTAR's company-wide Business Group of the Year Award.

Repeat business and word-of-mouth referrals have long been an important aspect of the shop's business model, along with an ongoing commitment to civic involvement and reaching out to those who are less fortunate.

"We believe in charity," Scola declares. "We've gotten a lot of feedback and we get customers who say, 'We've heard of you,"' he notes. But that is not why they do it; the entire Scola family has a firm belief in giving back to their community – the networking is merely an added benefit.

The shop has given away refurbished vehicles to deserving recipients through the National Auto Body Council's Recycled Rides Program and the Farmers Rides for Success Program.

Support is provided to the Make-A-Wish Foundation, SkillsUSA and the McDonald's Foundation for Children, along with heavy involvement in numerous Brookfield events and festivals.

Participating in a local scholarship drive has attracted grateful recognition to the shop as well. "We're proud to help support Riverside Brookfield High School and help more students be able to attend the school," says Scola. "As a longtime member this community, it is important to invest in the next generation who will live and work in this area."

Other civic endeavors include the Brookfield Chamber of Commerce, Kiwanis and Rotary.

Listening to advice

Celebrating 24 years in business next month, the shop was established by Lou and Tony's parents, Fredinando and Natalina Scola. Fredinando had been the body shop manager at Allegra Ford and Joe Rizza Ford before striking out on his own.

Lou's background includes a stint at Tom Young Auto Body prior to joining the Navy. Upon mustering out of the service, he worked for Royal Lincoln Mercury, joining his father in 1991. Tony also arrived at the family business in '91 following his high school graduation.

"My dad fell ill a few years back, and when he came out (of the hospital) he knew that it was time to step aside. My brother and I purchased the business from my father and mother, and we purchased the building too."

Fredinando went on to recover from his illness, and he remains a welcome presence to this day. "He likes to have coffee with us and we talk about things," Scola reports. ""I always listen to my father – I'm 54 years old, but I still take his advice."

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TRAINING IN FOCUS

BANK ON BOOTH PROFIT$

Two spray booths can double your paint production, unless you allow poor booth maintenance to affect the quality of your finishes.

BOOST PROFITS, CUT WASTE WITH PROPER SPRAY BOOTH USE

BY **TIM SRAMCIK** | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

One of the truths repairers operate their businesses by is that serious problems frequently have relatively simple causes. Consider the following case of an owner who expanded his operation to a second site with some major issues in its paint department.

The department was performing a number of re-dos, which usually involved polishing out and repairing paint imperfections. A further investigation revealed that the problem was long standing. The shop's previous owners had simply accepted the extra repair time as normal.

Wanting to quickly resolve the issue, the owner asked his chief painter and a rep from his paint vendor to spend an afternoon reviewing the shop's painting procedures to locate the source of the re-dos. They found that the painters' spraying techniques were proper, as was the prep work, product mixing and most other procedures. That left the spray booth as the prime culprit.

An investigation turned up cheap, ill-fitting filters. Further, employees were regularly leaving the booth doors open between jobs. Once these two areas were addressed, the re-do issues disappeared, and the paint department's production numbers improved.

Attending to small details can produce big results for shops. Nowhere is this more true, arguably, than in your spray booth, where straying from recommended maintenance and usage can result in expensive contamination problems. Let's look at all the details you should be managing with help from two booth manufacturers — Accudraft and Global Finishing Solutions (GFS).

Focus on filters

One of the keys to spray booth operation is consistency of airflow. For the booth to operate properly, airflow must be balanced and consistent to allow paint products to be

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sprayed and dried evenly and to remove any contaminants.

Airflow balance is upset most often by poor filtering, which typically is the result of using low-quality filters or not replacing booth filters according to manufacturer recommendations.

To address the first of these issues, shops should only use high-quality filters — those high-grade versions recommended by the manufacturer. Lower-grade filters affect airflow balance because they don't provide the efficiency and the correct diffusion necessary to provide consistent airflow, which is crucial for removing particulates and other pollutants. Sometimes they affect airflow balance simply because they don't fit properly.

To ensure these filters do their jobs effectively, they need to be replaced routinely. When they aren't, contaminants can build up on their fibers and plug them up, allowing overspray to build up on the exhaust fans, upsetting the booth's airflow.

Setting a replacement schedule involves factoring in the booth's engineering, workload and products being used. According to GFS, filters typically need changed when the final resistance (specified by the booth manufacturer) has been reached. Shops determine the resistance by checking the inclined-tube, U-tube or gauge-type manometers on the booth and referencing the operator manual.

Before setting a replacement schedule, speak to both the booth manufacturer and your paint company reps, who will have the most comprehensive information on how to effectively use their products in your booth. They also can help you set up internal systems that will ensure your managers and employees maintain the filter replacement schedule.

Note that before disposing of waste filters, you must determine whether they could be considered hazardous waste. Consult with your filter supplier and local authorities for assistance in properly characterizing and handling waste filters.

Clean up your act

Spray booths require regular cleaning to remove contaminants and overspray that inevitably collects on floors, walls and other surfaces. Even when a booth runs at peak performance, it still can't remove all particulates. When any remaining overspray dries, it becomes airborne and can end up on your subsequent paint jobs.

Ideally, you should be cleaning the booth every day, especially if the booth is in regular use. If you can't clean daily, try to schedule a cleaning every other day. At the very least, clean the booth once a week. Just remember that the more the booth is used, the more overspray collects. During periods of high use, you'll need to clean more often. Again, this schedule is something you should discuss with the manufacturer and your paint vendor.

Just as important as your cleaning schedule are the equipment and products used.

GFS recommends using a sponge mop and solvent-based materials to break down the paint on the booth floor and walls. They also stress never using a cotton mop, as it will leave fibers behind. Stick to lint-free mops to remove excess debris and overspray buildup.

Also, make sure the ventilation system is in operation when you use solvent-based cleaning materials. For a deeper clean, try pressure washing booth walls, floor and the pit.

Always examine booth exhausts for paint buildup. Old paint deposits can build up in the exhaust fan, duct and plenum, reducing booth operating efficiency. Inspect the entire system for potential problems before they can occur.

You'll also need to do some cleaning beyond the booth itself, especially on paint guns and air hoses where overspray can collect before it flakes off and ends up in your finishes. Clean these areas and the insides of air hoses, since paint can collect there as well. Set a regular cleaning for your equipment, and only use lint-free wipe cloths. When you move this equipment into the booth for work, be careful not to drag hoses across dirty shop floors and bring in contaminants.

On a safety note, be cautious using a shop vacuum to eliminate dust and fibers in your booth. These materials are flammable and combustible. Heat generated by the vacuum motor can

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Closed-door policy

Since open doors invite particulates into a booth, keep the doors closed at all times, except when performing necessary tasks, like loading or unloading parts.

When the doors must remain open, even for short times, keep the booth fans operating to maintain minimal pressurization. This prevents any particulates entering the booth from being transported throughout it, where they stand the greatest chance of damaging a paint job. The influx of contaminants is related to booth engineering that is designed to remove dangerous fumes.

A booth's exhaust stack damper remains partially open when the fans are off to prevent the accidental buildup of VOCs or other noxious vapors. This creates an updraft of air that continually pulls air through the spray booth, commonly referred to as a chimney effect. When the booth doors are open, these small drafts of moving air carry damaging particulates, especially fibers, into and throughout the booth where they may become a source of contamination.

The booth should be reserved for painting. Any prep work should be done in areas away from the booth doors.

PHOTO: PPG

To help employees stick to a closed-door policy, limit traffic in and out of the booth. Permit only authorized employees in the booth, and don't allow employees to store equipment or products in the booth. Using your booth for storage means the doors will be opened more often. Also, stored items can carry in and collect damaging particulates.

On a related note, makes sure the doors and the rest of the booth are properly sealed. Seal the entrance and exit doors, access doors and concrete floors, along with any other areas where contaminants may pass in the booth. If necessary, caulk ceiling frames, fire sprinkler openings, wall joints and all compressed air pipe openings.

Problem prevention

One of the best ways to prevent booth contamination is eliminating possible contamination sources that will go in the booth or near it.

Start by mandating that all personnel are clothed with lint-free garments while in the spray booth, and ensure that those garments are not worn outside of the spray booth to perform other tasks. When these garments are worn inside of the spray booth, air passing across the surface creates a mild static

(Left) Avoid carrying contaminants into your booth by using only lint-free garments and cleaning your painting equipment. Pay attention to hoses since they can bring dirt into a booth if they're dragged against dirty shop floors. (Right) Always clean your paint guns with lint-free cloths before bringing them into your booth.

PHOTO: SHERWIN-WILLIAMS

charge to make it a magnet for every piece of lint or fiber close enough to attach. If possible, install a changing room attached to the booth or use an attached paint mix room for this purpose. Always store your painters' suits in a clean area.

If possible, perform all your prep work outside of the booth in prep stations. Performing tasks in the booth, such as using compressed air to blow off the parts prior to painting, can free up enough contaminants to damage paint jobs during an entire day. If this kind of work must be done inside the booth, give the booth about an hour or so of run time to change out the air through the filters. That should be enough time to fully remove the contamination. Then, be sure to tack off the parts prior to painting.

Keep in mind the time you can lose by having the booth filter out contaminants from prep work. If you don't have enough space to do your prep work, consider adding room. The payoff in improved paint times is well worth the investment.

Never perform any sanding in your booth. If your shop uses a wet sanding or buffing operation in the same general area, isolate these operations by using curtains and pressurizing the painting area with an air makeup system.

These recommendations should head off the majority of issues you might have with your spray booth. The good news is they're relatively simple to implement and maintain, and their results will show up immediately in your shop's number and product quality.

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Tim Sramcik has written for ABRN, Motor Age and Aftermarket Business World for more than a decade. He has produced numerous news, technical and feature articles covering every aspect of the collision repair market. In 2004, he was recognized for his work by the American Society of Business Publication Editors.

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ALUMINUM AUTO BODIES WILL CHANGE ALUMINUM PROCEDURES FOR OEMS AND REPAIRERS

BY **ED STAQUET** | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

When Ford Motor Company's new all aluminum-bodied F-150 pickup truck hits the retail market this fall, it will herald an evolution in the industry. Or some might see it as a revolution in the industry. No matter how it is defined, aluminum auto bodies will unquestionably result in changes for aluminum producers, vehicle manufacturers, and ultimately, the auto repair businesses.

And what is the driving force behind the increased use of aluminum in vehicle bodies? Better fuel economy. Better fuel economy standards first by Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) regulations enacted by the United States Congress in 1975, and now updated to require that all cars and trucks operate at an average of 54 miles-per-gallon by 2025.

Reaching that goal is best accomplished by making cars lighter in weight, hence the switch to using more aluminum in car manufacturing, along with higher strength steels that are thinner, stronger and also weigh less. The Aluminum Association estimates that aluminum can provide a weight savings of up to 50 percent compared with the traditional mild-steel automotive body structure. Aluminum offers a fast, safe, environmentally-friendly, and cost-effective method for increasing performance, boosting fuel economy and reducing emissions while maintaining or improving safety and durability.

Industry changes

Various Ford F-150 models, with high-strength steel frames and high-strength aluminum-alloy bodies, will weigh up to 700 pounds less than previous all-steel models. Its reduced weight not only contributes to fuel efficiency, but also allows the truck to tow and haul more cargo while improving acceleration, braking and handling performance. The military-grade, aluminum alloys are rust- and corrosion- resistant, which helps to increase vehicle service life.

Aluminum producers are also gearing up for the increased demand from car manufacturers for aluminum sheet. In a December 2013 article in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, Randall Scheps, the executive in charge of selling Alcoa's aluminum sheet to the automotive market said, "Automotive demand for the product is forecasted to increase fourfold by 2015 and 10 times by 2025."

To meet this demand from the auto industry, Alcoa is investing $575 million to expand production at its plants in Davenport, Iowa and Alcoa, Tenn.

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The article also mentions that Novelis, an Atlanta-based aluminum supplier, is also expanding automotive sheet lines in Oswego, New York.

The vehicle repair industry as well will be impacted by the increased presence of aluminum-bodied vehicles on the roads. Repair shops will have to prepare their facilities to handle aluminum repairs, and technicians will have to learn new techniques for making those repairs. However, none of these adaptations need to be daunting tasks for a repair shop.

According to a news article on The Aluminum Association's website (http://www.aluminum.org/productmarkets/automotive), "…working with aluminum is not difficult; it is merely different." As more aluminum vehicles enter the market, repair shops will adapt to handle damage repairs. Although different techniques are required for steel and aluminum repairs, professional programs, as well as training from manufacturers and suppliers, are available to help technicians understand these differences.

Aluminum repairs

Reconfiguring a body shop to handle aluminum repairs and the training needed can be done with minimal investment. In the past, aluminum repairs were expected to be made in a separate room or building within the body shop's complex. But this is no longer the case. It is now acceptable to use shop curtains to separate aluminum repair operations from areas where steel repairs are being done.

The reality is that investing in training and shop space for aluminum vehicle repairs is something that will have to be done anyway, as more aluminum-bodied cars and trucks enter the market. Currently, many OEMs, such as Honda, Audi and Mercedes Benz, do have aluminum-bodied cars for sale. And for many years, steel-bodied vehicles have been built with aluminum components, such as hoods or body panels. The Ford F-150, though, is the first high-volume, full-bodied aluminum vehicle to enter the market.

A similar sentiment is voiced by Douglas Craig, Technical Application Engineer & Collision Industry Liaison, Structural Adhesives Tech Service for LORD. "As soon as it became known that the Ford Motor aluminum-bodied trucks would be entering the market, there was a huge concern in the collision repair industry over how to make repairs that are feasible, safe and meet customer and insurance industry approval," said Craig. "Auto body repair shops have to embrace aluminum repair and learn the new techniques so that aluminum repair becomes mainstream, as is comparable to working with steel materials. Consider the training as the cost of doing business."

"The collision repair industry has been adapting to these changes already," Craig said. "Now, there will be just more aluminum in the vehicles." And it's not just aluminum that will be used more frequently. Craig noted that other materials, including composites, such as carbon fiber and fiber-reinforced plastic (FRP), will become more typical in vehicle manufacturing. "So the real point for the repair shop is – 'How do

Ford has approved Fusor 108B /109B Metal Bonding Adhesive for repairing its aluminum-bodied F-150 pickup truck.

you adapt and learn how to fix these new materials?'" said Craig.

It's not really that much of a challenge to work on aluminum vs. steel. The body shop technician just needs to become familiar with the aluminum material and the repair techniques. Once a properly trained technician learns how to repair aluminum dents and replace aluminum parts, it will become second nature, as with steel repairs.

Repair training

There are many venues available for learning how to work with aluminum – including online and classroom courses, support from repair-product suppliers, and programs and instructions offered by the OEMs. Specifically, the Ford F-150 was built with repairability as a key design element.

From the beginning of the F-150's design, repairability was a prime concern. This is an extremely repair-friendly vehicle for the technician. Various truck components can be replaced in sections, eliminating the need for extensive labor, and the B-Pillar can be replaced without removing the roof panel.

"In the design of the F-150, Ford's engineering team embraced the need to repair," said Craig. "The truck was engineered to have solutions in place for the customer when damage repair is needed."

Ford has worked closely with The InterIndustry Conference on Auto Repair (I-CAR) and the aluminum industry to develop training programs for aluminum panel repairs. Collision repair experts from I-CAR collaborated with Ford Motor engineers during the F-150's design and development process. Together, they created training programs for collision repair professionals that address the unique processes associated with aluminum repair for safely executing repair operations.

Ford is augmenting these training programs with a comprehensive package of supplemental repair information. Each aluminum replacement part for the F-150 comes with detailed instruction sheets, a parts list, diagrams of repair locations on the vehicle, and a list of the tools and supplies needed to make the repair. Online instructions will be available both on the Ford Motor and I-CAR websites.

Different not difficult

So what are the differences between repairing aluminum and steel vehicles? "It's not so much that there are differences," said Staquet, "But rather that there are specific details to be aware of – such as having dedicated tools and equipment for aluminum repairs, and making sure that aluminum repair areas are curtained off from areas where steel repairs are being performed." Cross-contamination is of particular concern when working on aluminum and steel vehicles in the same facility. Fine particles from steel or other metals can adhere to tools and equipment, and if these particles are deposited on aluminum parts, they are extremely corrosive to the aluminum, especially if moisture is present. Keeping separate sets of tools and equipment (such as MIG welders) for aluminum and steel repair work will minimize the problems associated with cross-contamination.

Using shop curtains to cordon off a separate area for aluminum repair work is necessary to prevent cross-contamination. "Most repair facilities should have separate work areas in place already," noted Craig, "Since many vehicles have aluminum hoods or deck lifts, the repair work done on these panels should have been isolated from steel repairs." A curtain arrangement is adequate for isolating the steel and aluminum repair bays.

As Craig explained, there really is not that much aluminum that will be exposed during a repair procedure. When a vehicle is under construction in the OEM plant, assembly personnel are working with bare aluminum. In the repair shop, technicians are handling painted aluminum parts and replacement parts arrive with a coating over the aluminum. The only aluminum that will be exposed during a repair procedure will be on the mating edges where the paint or coating is removed to facilitate bonding and riveting.

Another shop method for avoiding cross-contamination is the use of dust removal or extraction equipment, not just to protect vehicles, but most importantly, for personal health protection. Technicians should always be wearing the proper respiratory equipment when performing sanding, grinding and welding operations. And this is even more important when working with aluminum, since aluminum particles have a tendency to stay floating in the air for a long time. So using respiratory equipment is a necessary personal health device.

The adhesive is recommended for panel and weld bonding of aluminum roof and quarter panels, rear body and van side panels, and door skins.

Many shops have vacuum systems that automatically collect sanding and grinding dust. The sanding and grinding tools are attached to the vacuum system and the dust particles never reach the surrounding air. Still, Craig cautions that, similar to the need to have a separate set of tools for steel and aluminum repairs, the vacuum systems must also be kept independent of each other, so as not to contaminate the vacuum system.

Repair products

What makes these new aluminum alloys so "revolutionary" is their strength and their ability to be rivet-bonded both in assembly and repair. As Scheps said in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette article, "A new process for treating aluminum sheet makes adhesive bonds between the metal and other components last longer. That means aluminum sheet can be used in the structural framework of motor vehicles." The technology was developed at Alcoa's Technical Center in Upper Burrell, Penn.

Ford Motor has approved only two suppliers' repair products for use on the F-150, one being the LORD Fusor 108B/109B Metal Bonding Adhesive. "LORD products have been used in vehicle assembly for many, many years, both with Ford and other OEMs," Staquet said.

Fusor 108B/109B is an acrylic structural adhesive that offers fast full-cure and clamp removal times and is six to eight times faster than typical panel bonders. Its acrylic formula is compatible with aluminum and guarantees corrosion protection. The adhesive is recommended for panel and weld bonding of quarter panels, rear-body panels, van-side panels, roof panels, door skins and outer truck-bed panels.

Aluminum prospects

As the deadline for stricter standards for fuel economy approaches, car manufacturers will be substituting lighter-weight parts and materials to help meet the CAFE standards. As Ford brings the first all-aluminum-bodied F-150 pickup truck to the market, other OEMs will soon be following with their own aluminum-bodied vehicles.

As aluminum producers scurry to meet the demand for raw materials, repair-product suppliers are also striving to develop new bonding formulas that can match OEM quality for repair work. In addition, repair shops need to mobilize for handling aluminum vehicle repairs – if they haven't done so already. Training, proper shop set-up, and dedicated tools and equipment are key components for successfully handling aluminum vehicle repairs.


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Ed Staquet has more than 40 years of experience in the auto body repair business. For the past 20 years, he has worked for Fusor Repair Systems and LORD Corporation and is now the senior staff technical support manager. He has been an instructor at I-CAR for 30 years; and he served two terms on the I-CAR Board of Directors.

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GO FISH

CHRIS MACMAHAN SHOWS HOW TO CREATE A CLASSIC FISH SCALE EFFECT

BY **JOHN WOODWARD** | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Whether you're looking for an eye-catching fill or a background for pinstripes or artwork, the fish scale technique is timeless. "This is a very easy technique to pick up," says Chris MacMahan, owner of Aerografix in Elyria, Ohio. "We do this a lot on choppers and bobbers for a 70s look. It's also great for backgrounds in retro-style murals."

In this tutorial, which was first featured in the PPG *Repaint Reporter*, MacMahan uses a traditional circular scale, but other shapes work just as well, such as triangles for a diamond pattern or curved "teeth" for a quilt pattern. With a little imagination and experimentation, you'll be able to create a wide range of patterns and effects.

Drawing the pattern guide

MacMahan uses a template to create the pattern of overlapping circles ***(FIG 1)***. Generally, the scale size should be big enough to fill the space without appearing busy.

Cut the guide

Your pattern should be drawn on a light cardstock, about the thickness of a business card — heavy enough not to become soggy and tear, light enough to cut cleanly with scissors or a craft knife ***(FIG 2)***.

Panel prep

To ready the panel for tutorial, it was covered with a bright silver paint. MacMahan uses PPG products in his shop. Over that, two color layers were added, each fogged toward the center — yellow, then green.

Airbrush selection

Any general-purpose airbrush, single or double action, can be used to achieve this effect. MacMahan recommends a

2

medium sized tip at 40 psi. "The higher pressure allows me to use the airbrush

as a mini paint gun and put on a wash of color."

Spraying

Placing the template against the surface, MacMahan sprays a line of green. The green is solid at the bottom of the "V" and fades upward. Keep the template and the spray motion as horizontal as possible ***(FIG 3)***.

Row symmetry

Aligning the scales is simple — the center of each circle slightly overlaps the bottom on the "V" on the row above ***(FIG 4)***. Spacing between the rows is a matter of personal

taste. Here, MacMahan uses a tight formation for a more intense pattern.

Template saturation

The template will be covered with many layers of paint. To maintain a crisp pattern, allow the template to dry for a minute every few rows, or create more than one template ***(FIG 5)***.

Solid border

Once all the rows have been sprayed, MacMahan fogs the outer edge of the panel with several layers of green until the color is intense ***(FIG 6)***.

Ready for anything

From here, your options are open ***(FIG 7)***. The design stands on its own, so you could add a midcoat, or go straight to clear. MacMahan also suggests that the pattern can be a bed for pinstripes, lettering or artwork. "As a background, fish scales can push any job over the top."

JOHN WOODWARD
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John Woodward has been writing about the automotive and collision repair industries for more than 20 years. He has a master's degree in English from the University of Iowa and teaches writing at the College for Creative Studies in Detroit, Mich.

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Defend against dead batteries

There are no easy shortcuts to finding parasitic drains, but it helps to identify them as soon as possible

BY **DONNY SEYFER** | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Charging and testing stations like the Midtronics GR8 will charge and test a lead acid, AGM/ spiral, or deep cycle batteries and give reliable results along with assisting in diagnosing starting, charging and parasitic drain problems along with module reprogramming support.

IMAGE: DONNY SEYFER

FINDING a dead battery before, during or after repair is a very common problem when a vehicle has been in an accident. Something as simple as door misalignment or as complex as a damaged wiring harness or module can be at the root of the problem. In a mechanical shop environment, we learn about these problems when a customer finds out they have a dead battery. In a collision environment, you can find out at almost any time throughout the repair process. I have some simple advice before we dive into a couple of tests you can run to nail down the source of a parasitic drain on the battery. Let's start with a few vehicle feature considerations that could make your diagnosis difficult or completely unnecessary depending on the situation.

Many, if not most, late-model vehicles have some sort of battery saver that will disconnect the battery from the vehicle electrical system when, say, your 10-year-old leaves the door open in the garage all night. Instead of a dead battery 30 to 45 minutes into a steady load on the battery, the smart fuse block or body control module will just shut everything down. This very useful technology can also create a head scratcher when after a few days in the shop and usually about the time you are ready to move it, the battery is unable to turn over the engine. Go back to that door misalignment issue or an interior light that got turned on during the accident. We could have a battery drain that reactivates when a door is opened and then disappears after half an hour, overall taking a few days to drain the battery from having enough energy stored to start.

But don't panic yet and start searching for a parasitic drain. First, completely charge the battery and then make sure all lights are out when the doors are shut, trunk and glove box are closed, hood is down or any other feature that turns on those 2-5 amp drains. Before we go on, let's talk about charging batteries because the best of us get in a hurry and do it wrong.

Battery charging is not a quick operation. If it were, the electric car would probably be a much more viable means of transportation right now. SLI — Starting, Lighting and Ignition — batteries take some time to charge to full potential. These are the batteries we use in our cars and are not the same as the batteries in hybrid and electric vehicles. They are used because they can dump large amounts of current very quickly. Keep in mind that most cars require about 120-200 amps to the starter to start the engine and that most alternators/generators create about 85-140 amps. SLI batteries do not like to

be recharged at 85-140 amps. They like something in the 60 amps or less range, depending on their state or charge (basically how far they are down from fully charged). The rest of that alternator output is intended to be the power station for the rest of the vehicle while always maintaining the battery at a full state of charge (SOC).

So how do you know when a battery is at a complete SOC? For an SLI battery, it should be sitting at around 12.7 volts with no load against it and no charge going into it. A battery at only 11.89 volts is dead, according to BCI, who sets standards for batteries. Without belaboring the point too much, if you jump start a system with a battery at 0 percent state of charge and then pull the cables, the alternator is going to exceed not only its intended load, but will be over charging the battery as well. You will also have no idea if that battery is any good or not.

When a battery has reached a discharged state, you need to use a quality battery charger that will limit current and/or voltage, depending on the type of battery being charged. There are two common SLI-type batteries in use: the familiar lead acid battery and the AGM (absorbed glass matt) design. They require different approaches to charging, and many modern battery chargers have different settings, depending on which type you choose. The single best way to charge these batteries is to use a fully automatic charger. Once you program in the kind of battery, cold cranking amps and where the charger's cables are placed, it will determine if the battery is good or not.

Batteries are often damaged in collisions, but the damage is not visible. If the battery has lost its ability to store energy, you might spend time looking for a parasitic drain when, in reality, you just don't have adequate energy stored on board anymore. It is also bad form to send a customer home with an alternator that has been damaged by repeated jumpstarts on a dead battery.

If you suspect a system drain, get the battery cables disconnected by removing the negative first. In most situations, it makes sense to repair the vehicle before you look for the cause of a parasitic drain. There are numerous reasons for a module to stay awake and drain a battery following a collision, and it seems likely that the repair is going to resolve these issues, or at least uncover them. While it makes great sense to gather diagnostic trouble codes prior to "putting the vehicle to sleep for surgery," doing any diagnosis of those codes or a potential parasitic drain should be left for last and only performed with a fully charged and proven battery/charging system.

Once repairs are complete, connect the vehicle and clear any DTCs present. In many vehicles, you will also need to clear adaptive memory (depending on the work performed) and complete any programming required. At this point, if you suspected a parasitic drain but did not find a smoking gun, you will want to test for loss. Again, I think you will find that if you have a charging and starting system tester, you will be able to determine if a drain still exists fairly quickly. Of course, we are talking about late-model cars, so it is not as easy or quick as we would hope. Once you have test driven the vehicle and are ready to test it, you need to leave it alone for a while. There are many modules that stay awake for a while after a vehicle is shut down to perform their tasks, such as evaporative emissions systems and body control modules. This has been common since the late 1990s in many vehicles. Once these systems all power down, you can get a pretty reliable parasitic reading, and it should be under 40 mA (milliamps). Again, I am taking a different approach than in a mechanical environment where we start in with the low amperage amp clamps and break the battery connection right away to get "in the circuit."

If you find that you have a parasitic drain greater than 40mA, but under, say, 500mA, there are numerous detailed articles on diagnosis of those problems in our sister publication *Motor Age*. These are more difficult problems to find and often supervisors should be involved with the additional time that may be required and special tools that are probably not lurking in your toolbox. For larger drains of, say, 1 amp or more, you are generally talking about a non-ignition switched circuit, unless something has gone terribly wrong. You would probably know that before you got this far.

The easiest way to narrow down these problems is to remove the positive battery cable and place a DMM (digital multi meter) set to 10 amps (connecting the leads properly to the DMM so you don't blow the fuse inside it) in line with it. You will probably have to wait awhile for the modules to go to sleep again. To simplify your work, you may want to remove the driver door interior light switch to avoid adding new current to the drain. Be very careful not to turn on any large drain, like the ignition, or you will blow the fuse in your DMM. Think about the systems that are battery powered, like fuse blocks — did an engine compartment fuse block get damaged and is feeding B+ power into a circuit that it would not normally? That will be fun to find, but consider the damage from the accident and go over electrical components in that area with a fine-tooth comb, particularly those with large-gauge wires, since they will almost certainly carry a live battery (B+) connection that is activated by a relay or internal component switching. Consider lighting circuits and switches that you may not be able to see. Were there any modules that got hit and had visual or superficial damage? Did the alternator or bracket get hit? Pull your alternator voltage regulator connection (if it is internally regulated and not PCM regulated) with the engine off and see if the drain goes away. Pulling large fuses first will help to narrow down the section of the vehicle where the drain is occurring, at the risk of waking a module you will have to wait on when you put the fuse back in. Pull small battery-powered fused circuits first to get there quicker, and have a wiring diagram of the power distribution circuits on hand so you can make logical choices.

There are no easy shortcuts to finding battery drains. The key is to be sure you actually have one. A very thorough inspection prior to diagnosis for damage will help uncover battery drains that may have been hidden or overlooked during the initial blueprinting of the repair.

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THE LAST DETAIL

THE WIND OR THE FLAG

Are you controlled by your circumstances, or do you take charge of your own destiny?

I don't use the term life-changing experience very often, but I recently had one. A lot of people I respect and admire in this industry, people I consider to be successful or even my mentors, had told me about attending (or sending key employees) to Discover Leadership Training in Houston, Texas. I was intrigued, so I signed up and attended. I'm not getting paid to endorse it, but I can honestly say it was life changing.

I won't go into all that I came away with, but one of the key things Mike Jones of Discover Leadership said that really resonated with me was this: Do you want to be the flag, or the wind? The flag is visible and gets all the attention. But think about it: The wind controls the flag. The wind determines whether the flag moves at all, and sets the direction for the flag.

The lesson for our industry (and really for our country) is this: Not enough people are striving to be the wind. We tend to blame our situation on all sorts of things: the economy, insurance companies, aftermarket parts, etc. I'm not saying there aren't legitimate concerns about all those things. But at some point we have to accept personal responsibility for our own destiny, not just be a flag waiting for the wind to change our direction.

Mike Jones' analogy took me back to my days in high school. I attended a new school, so my class was the first 9th graders at the school, the first 10th graders, etc. When I was a junior, all the student officers for my class were female. They all must've been dating older guys, because they made a rule that no underclassmen could attend the junior prom.

But my girlfriend at the time was an underclassman. I wanted to take her to that prom. I went to the class officers, but they said the rule was the rule. I went to our class faculty sponsor, and then to the principal, but they both said, "That's the rule your class officers made, and you have to abide by it."

Now I could have easily just told my girlfriend that I couldn't take her to the prom. But I made a decision that no one but me was going to choose my destiny.

> "At the end of the day, do you want to say the collision industry changed you, or that you changed the collision industry?"

So I had my mom type up some petitions demanding that the rule be changed. I distributed them to some friends, and between us we gathered more than 100 signatures. I also called the local newspaper and TV stations and told them about our effort.

The next day when I got to school, there were news cameras there. The principal called me into the office and said, "You called all these people. You need to tell them to go away."

I told him I couldn't do that. When he said he was going to call my father, I told him to go ahead, that my dad also thought I should be able to take my girlfriend to the prom.

The end result: I took my girlfriend to that prom. And the next year, I was elected as a senior class officer.

I could have just sat back. But I decided I was going to be the wind, not the flag. I changed my situation. I didn't expect someone else to change it for me.

If you're a body shop having a hard time, choose your destiny. Choose to be the wind, not the flag. To learn how to do that, how to become a better person, a better leader, a better spouse or parent – to learn how to be less passive and instead be a game-changer – consider checking out Discover Leadership Training. I'm sending some of my employees and even my sister and my niece and nephew. I told them that for me to use the phrase "life-changing" to describe something is a pretty big deal.

But the bigger question I urge you to think about is: At the end of the day, do you want to say the collision industry changed you, or that you changed the collision industry?

I choose to be the wind, not the flag.

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Mike Anderson, *a former shop owner, currently operates CollisionAdvice.com, a training and consulting firm.*

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