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FEBRUARY 2015



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OE'S MATERIAL USE TO GROW
OVER NEXT SEVERAL YEARS

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SHOPS FIND WAYS TO CUT
COSTS WITHOUT SACRIFICING
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8

TOYOTA

ANALYSIS

TOYOTA TO EXPAND ALUMINUM

BY BRIAN ALBRIGHT | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

A recent industry report reveals Toyota is set to expand the use of aluminum in multiple models over the next several years.

OEM NEWS

ORIO ACQUIRES NEVS TO MAKE SAAB SPARE PARTS

8 Orio AB, formerly Saab Automobile Parts, acquired all tools from Nevs to make Saab Original spare parts.

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I-CAR PREMIERS ALTERNATIVE FUEL VEHICLE COURSE

8 I-CAR launched Alternative Fuel Vehicle Damage Analysis and Safety to enhance technician understanding of how to safely approach these vehicles after a collision.

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12

FEATURE

SHINING A LIGHT ON THE NEED FOR SOCIAL MEDIA

BY MICHELLE BIZON | ABRN BLOGGER

Are you in the dark when it comes to optimizing your online presence? Learn what you need to navigate the social media landscape.

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BUSINESS MANAGEMENT INSIGHTS, BEST PRACTICES & IMPLEMENTATION



20

MINDING YOUR BUSINESS

TEACHING DOLLARS AND SENSE

BY JOHN YOSWICK | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Shops find ways to reduce costs without sacrificing quality, productivity or customer service.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF ABRN

The truths, fallacies, myths and urban legends of repair planning.

FEATURES

THE SHOP PROFILE

**ACTION COLLISION SPECIALISTS;
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JAMES E. GUYETTE / CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

28 Colorado shop owner Steve "Tank" Burns transitioned from Air Force One to collision repairs. He and partner John Stock are making continuous forward strides by specializing in aluminum and high-end vehicle repairs.



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COVER FEATURE

ESTIMATING THE ALUMINUM REPAIR

34

TECHNICAL TRAINING

BY LARRY MONTANEZ | TECHNICAL EDITOR

The only way to know the amount of sustained damage to an aluminum vehicle is through a thorough triage and blueprinting process.

TECHNICAL FOCUS

HOT PRODUCTS OF 2015

BY TIM SRAMCIK | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

42 Add these suggestions to your must-have list in 2015.



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FROM ABRN CONTRIBUTING EDITOR AL THOMAS.
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PRODUCT FOCUS

49 Three new GenMax Clears have been introduced to support the GenMax 4010 Clear, a 2:1 European style ultra high-quality clear for all applications.



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VIDEO SPOTLIGHT

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"We made an extra \$16K in the first 7 months of 2014. The shop's labor cost by 2014 hours, the gross profit percentage jumped up 3.2% and our average repair order increased by 8%." - Mike Thompson, Superior Auto Repair

BLOG SPOTLIGHT

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KYB AMERICAS Corp. earned an award for its relaunched website, which aims to change the paradigm of how professionals should evaluate and present shock and strut replacement.

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THERE'S MORE ONLINE:
ORIO ACQUIRES NEVS TO MAKE SPARE SAAB PARTS

Orio AB, formerly Saab Automobile Parts AB, signed a contract with Nevs and has acquired all tools used for producing Saab Original spare parts for all existing Saab models.

»» ABRN.COM/SAABPARTS

CCC ACQUIRES ACTUAL SYSTEMS OF AMERICA

CCC Information Services has acquired the assets of Actual Systems of America, the provider of Pinnacle Professionals automotive recycling software.

»» ABRN.COM/ASABOUGHT

I-CAR PREMIERS ALTERNATIVE FUEL VEHICLE COURSE

I-CAR has launched a new instructor-led course, Alternative Fuel Vehicle Damage Analysis and Safety to enhance technician understanding of how to safely approach and understand the risks of these vehicles after a collision.

»» ABRN.COM/ALT03

KAESER EXPANDS COMPANY HEADQUARTERS

Kaeser Compressors has broken ground on a new building expansion to their headquarters in Fredericksburg, Va.

»» ABRN.COM/KAESERGROWTH

FORWARD LIFT REDESIGNS WEBSITE

Forward Lift has redesigned its website with new features to benefit potential vehicle lift buyers and current owners.

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TOYOTA
OEM NEWS
Toyota poised to expand aluminum

 BY **BRIAN ALBRIGHT** | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

A report in Nikkei Asian Review indicates that automaker Toyota will greatly expand the use of aluminum in some of its cars over the next several years.

According to the report, Toyota will switch to aluminum for the hoods, bumpers, doors and fenders of its Lexus vehicles when they are refreshed. Currently, Toyota uses aluminum hoods and other parts on its Japanese market Prius, the Scio FR-S and some Lexus models.

The report stated that "Toyota plans to invest several billion yen to set up assembly lines exclusively for aluminum parts at a plant outside Nagoya and elsewhere."

Switching to aluminum could reduce the weight of the vehicles by as much as 100kg (220 lbs.), and improve fuel efficiency by 1km per liter (or nearly 2.5 miles per gallon).

As of this writing, Toyota had not responded to inquiries from ABRN about the expanded use of aluminum.

After the report in Nikkei Asian Review, shares of aluminum provider Alcoa surged 1.92 percent. Nippon Light Metal's valuation jumped 6.6 percent on the news.

In September, Toyota announced that the 2016 Lexus RX 350 crossover would have an aluminum hood and tailgate, and an all-new Camry would have an aluminum hood in 2018. These changes represents a step up in the volume of the metal the company would likely purchase.

The aluminum for the Camry hood will likely come from a joint venture between Toyota Tsusho Corp., a trading company affiliated with Toyota Motor Corp., and Kobe Steel to produce more aluminum sheet metal in the U.S. Having a local manufacturer in the U.S. would help Toyota avoid production problems associated with aluminum shortages. Continue reading at ABRN.com/ToyotaAu.

BREAKING NEWS
AIRBAG RECALLS
TAKE CAUTION WHEN DEALING WITH SUSPECT AIRBAGS

Japan's Takata and American regulators are taking it on the chin over faulty airbags that can blast shrapnel into vehicle cabins, drivers and passengers. The OEM vendor, which has several facilities in the U.S., is receiving criticism from consumer safety advocates, media outlets and lawmakers upset with how Takata executives have been reacting – or not reacting – to the problem airbags.

And the situation is setting the stage for even wider ramifications as the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) is experiencing bipartisan disdain emanating from U.S. House and Senate leaders, Democrats and Republicans alike, who say that the agency has been too slow to act. Continue reading at ABRN.com/AirbagRecalls.

Photos: ABRN

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Q+A WITH GREG MCVICKER

CO-FOUNDER,
TALENTMONGER.COM



Talent Monger™

SHOP MANAGER HELPS FORM WEBSITE TO CONNECT QUALIFIED TECHNICIANS WITH SHOP OWNERS LOOKING TO HIRE

BY KRISTA MCNAMARA | MANAGING EDITOR

ABRN: How did the idea to create TalentMonger.com develop?

GM: The greatest challenge in running my shop has always been finding qualified employees. Last year, we prepared to open an addition to our facility. To staff the new space, we had an immediate need for six new employees. I spent \$1,600 in one week on generic online and newspaper ads, interviewed 12 candidates, and STILL found no one of value. Driving home after another failed interview, I thought about how much our industry needs a new way to connect with the people we need to hire.

ABRN: How does the site work?

GM: Technicians create a free, anonymous profile listing their experience, training and qualifications. Shop owners create a free account to search this collection of profiles based on whatever criteria they'd like. Owners can subscribe to the site and reach out to as many techs as they'd like. If the tech accepts the interview, the site sends the owner the tech's contact information and the rest is up to them.

Our "Willing to Relocate" option allows techs who are looking for a job, but not tied to a specific market, show

up in searches around the country. This grants owners access to techs they would never see in local searches.

ABRN: What is the long-term plan for the site?

GM: The site is a bridge among the techs, shop owners, trade schools and associations around the country. We are working with schools to promote the site with their students and alumni. We are reaching out to shops through trade associations and industry events. We have even been approached by members of the mechanical service industry who are looking for techs. While our primary focus is growing the site within the collision industry, we do hope to be able to roll out a mechanical version in the very near future.

ABRN: You also run a repair shop during the day.

GM: I have been the collision manager at Budd Baer Collision Center, just south of Pittsburgh, since 2005. We are a new car dealership shop that is part of a GM, Mazda and Subaru auto group. We employ 27 people in the collision center and will finish 2014 at just under \$4 million in total sales.

ABRN: Your shop endured a fire several years ago. What happened and how you were able to rebuild?

GM: In October 2003, a short in a paint recycler sparked a fire that destroyed the shop and a large part of the dealership complex. Thankfully no one was injured, but it left the shop without a facility. Our owner, Mark Baer, found a temporary building in town for us to work out of until plans for a new facility could be realized. In 2010, we moved to our current location and have been lucky to experience a tremendous growth since then.

ABRN: What has the industry response been to TalentMonger.com?

GM: The response has been great! The site went live in October, and in the first 60 days we had thousands of people view the site and just under 200 users register on word of mouth alone. We have had a great reaction from tech schools, who are eager to get techs into the system. And there has been an outpouring of support from industry groups, publications and vendors. Everyone seems excited for a tool that can help the industry hire effectively. ☺



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COLLISION REPAIR INDUSTRY Stats & Trends

Of **5.6 million** car crashes in 2013, **4 million** were property damage-only crashes, according to Kim Hazelbaker, Senior VP of the Highway Loss Data Institute.



Shining a light on the need for social media

Are you in the dark when it comes to optimizing your online presence?

BY MICHELLE BIZON | ABRN BLOGGER

Let's say you've been delaying attending to your online presence. It's uncharted territory for you, so it's natural to be weary and even doubt whether you'll be successful there. Still, with a larger and larger percentage of your customer base being glued to mobile devices, you know you can't afford to not be active online. So, what do you do when learning to navigate the social media landscape feels like a full-time job?

Sure, it's tempting to hop on the bandwagon of the newest flashy trend, but putting all of your proverbial eggs in one basket can hurt your bottom line over the long haul. With so much competition, that's not a risk you can afford.

The platforms might ebb and flow in popularity, but you'll notice your activity here will revolve around two main functions: publishing content and managing your reputation.

Content sites

Gone are the days when just having a Facebook page would put you ahead of your competition. Quality is now the name of the game, and it's a do-or-die struggle. Remember, you're not just competing with the body shop around the corner. Your messaging is up against posts from your customers' family members and friends, as well as from businesses of all sizes in other industries.

Social media is about your audience. Content sites, especially Facebook, tailor home feeds in response to user behavior, so you need to cater to their preferences. Essentially, you're playing in someone else's sandbox. So, what's a business owner to post?

Your foundational content should be entertaining or educational — or, better yet, both. Create and curate content your customers would thank

Continued on page 14

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Top shop resolutions of 2015

By 3M AUTOMOTIVE AFTERMARKET
Many New Year's resolutions involve your health, like getting in shape or eating healthier. But are you making New Year's resolutions that improve the health of your body shop?

Changes in the tools, solutions and systems that you are using in your shop can have a significant impact on your shop's performance in the year ahead — from productivity to margin improvement, KPI performance and the ability to repair the advanced materials found on today's new vehicles.

Here are the top five resolutions you might want to consider as you plan for 2015, courtesy of 3M Automotive Aftermarket, which works with thousands of body

shops across the country to help improve performance and profitability.

Resolution #1 — Make more money in the paint booth!

The paint booth is frequently the leading culprit when it comes to waste in the body shop. From solvent waste, paint waste and wasted time for cleaning and maintenance, it adds up quickly. But simple changes in the paint booth can contribute to the bottom line annually. Doing more accurate paint measuring, or more fine tuning on your spray gun settings can add up to big savings.

Resolution #2 — Get ready to repair advanced materials.

Preparing for aluminum and advanced materials is a big challenge. They key to aluminum repair is a dedicated clean room with separate tools for welding, bonding, riveting,

sanding, grinding and structural procedures on aluminum components. Separate safety equipment is also important, as technicians will need dedicated respirators, eye protection and gloves for aluminum repairs.

3M Automotive Aftermarket Division now offers Standard Operating Procedures for aluminum repair. Visit 3MCollision.com/aluminum for more information.

Resolution #3 — Make tough jobs more efficient with the right tools.

The right tools can make tough jobs faster and more efficient. Designed for ergonomic comfort, durability and performance, 3M has a host of tools to help shops complete jobs efficiently from start to finish.

Resolution #4 — A solution for texture matching

For automotive professionals, matching textures on rocker panels has always been a challenge. And the current technology for applying these textured coatings and undercoatings means painters not only struggle with coating thickness and overspray, but also product waste and cleanup.

The 3M Body Protection System reinvents how repair technicians spray textured finishes on today's vehicles for rock protection and sound deadening. It leverages the 3M Accuspray spray gun to give painters the accuracy and control to match OEM textured finishes with fine, medium, coarse or splattered patterns.

Continue reading at ABRN.com/3Mresolutions.



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Shining a light - Continued from page 12

you for. Then, get fans talking by asking questions and running contests with valuable prizes up for grabs. Keep the selling to a minimum.

With organic reach growing more difficult to earn, you also might want to consider investing in social ads, particularly on Facebook. You'll increasingly need to pay to play in the social media world, but that investment also gives you options. By allotting some of your budget to ads, you can target your ideal customers where they're already hanging out online.

The other players

Beyond the behemoth that is Facebook, you'll also want to take a look at Twitter, Google+ and, perhaps, Instagram. As you expand your social presence, keep in mind that it's better to do a few things well than a hundred things poorly. Take the time to get to know the platforms you're adopting, so you can follow each one's best practices to engage with your audience sincerely and successfully. Continue reading at ABRN.com/SMLight.

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Mark Salem, owner of Salem Boys Auto in Tempe, Ariz., has been in the industry for more than 35 years. He discusses the difference between turning wrenches and running a repair shop. He also weighs in on what is most important for shop owners to know in order to successfully run their business. He also discusses recent changes at Salem Boys, where service writers are now known as consumer advocates for the customer.
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- Team approach to profits**
Jack Stack, founder, president and CEO of SRC Holdings in Springfield, Mo., author of "The Great Game of Business," and winner of ReMaTec News Remanufacturer of the Year speaks about the principles of open-book management and the great game of business.
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Noteworthy

READER FEEDBACK TO ONLINE DISCUSSIONS

Shirley Martin, shop owner: What can a shop do if an insurance company writes a check to both the customer and the shop, but the customer does not want the vehicle repaired, rather just the check signed over to them?

Vladimir Gersht, the CARS Company, Ltd.: It depends on the circumstances. Is the vehicle in the shop? Did the shop perform any services for the vehicle owner - stored the vehicle, developed a repair plan, interacted with an insurer on the VO's behalf? If answer to any of the above questions is "yes," the shop is entitled to compensation, so it is justified in getting paid before signing the insurance check over to the customer.

Craig Totten, Global Jig North America: My philosophy when I ran shops was that if I wasn't doing the work, I NEVER signed the check over to the vehicle owner. Doing that without repairing the vehicle could be considered fraud as there is probably a lien holder involved, and you are also putting yourself at risk of having to pay taxes on money that you never received. I always called the insurance company and told them they needed to reissue the check as the vehicle owner was not having me repair the vehicle.

Tommy Hufnagel, Tommy's Auto Body: Signing over a check is just signing over a check. I have no contract with the insurance company. My name should never have been on the check in the first place. How is that fraud?

Jerry Dalton, Dalton Collision, Inc.: If you sign a check for work not performed, it is fraud. If you are doing this, I would consult an attorney.

David Knight, Rieser Brothers Inc.: I agree not to sign and hand an insurance check back to a customer. With the 1099 issues, lien holders, lack of guaranteed payment for services rendered and other business reasons, but I miss seeing where it is fraud. Too many headaches, but there is no contract of repair with the insurance company; the contract is with the vehicle owner, you bill for parts and labor you perform; and unless you are giving him a receipt for work you did not perform, I am not seeing fraud.

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I-CAR's Mike Miller and Jeffrey Poole provide an overview of aluminum and the unique repair techniques required for working with aluminum. Gain a glimpse into some of the content found in I-CAR's shops, hands-on aluminum GMA (MIG) welding course and the instructor-led aluminum-intensive vehicle repairs course.
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• **Ensuring DRP compliance**

Darrell Amberson, ABRN director of MSO relations, and Cheryl Magers, compliance manager with LaMettry's Collision, discuss ways to stay compliant with DRP agreements while still maintaining a profitable business model.
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APRIL 17-18

• **Southern Automotive Repair Conference; Biloxi, Miss.**

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Repairs done right, every time

Third-party verification offers employee coaching, peace of mind for management

Several months ago, I wrote about the need for all of us to do the right repair the right way on every car ("Scary, but necessary, thoughts," November 2014). There's too much riding on it to risk doing anything less than a 100 percent repair, 100 percent of the time.

I mentioned that one of a number of ways my company ensures that this happens is through third-party verification. There are several options shops have for a third-party verification system; we happen to use VeriFacts Automotive, but my point here is not to promote a particular provider, but to understand why we find an outside verification service so valuable.

We've been working with VeriFacts for more than seven years. One of the first things they do is check to make sure you have the proper equipment, ability and quality control processes to repair a car correctly. That's important because while the right facility, training and equipment don't necessarily result in quality repairs, they increase the likelihood that cars will be fixed correctly. Lacking any of those certainly lowers the odds of quality repairs.

Whatever outside verification system you use, your employees should be educated on what to expect. VeriFacts representatives conduct in-shop seminars explaining the program to employees, emphasizing that they would be there to coach, not to criticize.

Now the technician assessment providers come into each of our shops once a month, unannounced. They dig pretty deep into the vehicles being repaired. They're not just looking for color match or tape lines or dirt in the paint. They'll certainly point those things out, but they're going beyond the cosmetic.


They're checking to see if we had the proper documentation for the welding and sectioning procedures. They're inspecting welds and looking for corrosion protection. Are we taking off too much e-coat when grinding? Are the quality control sheets filled out correctly and up to date?

How do technicians feel about someone reviewing their work like this? In the beginning, our technicians were a little apprehensive about it, naturally. But after one or two visits, they were perfectly fine. They get to know the coaches, who in our case are very knowledgeable. Now the technicians view the coaching as helpful.

On several occasions, we've hosted in-shop clinics conducted by the VeriFacts coaches. We bring together our employees and some guests - we usually invite some insurers - for more in-depth training on a particular subject. As hybrid cars were becoming more popular in the market, for example, that was a subject of one of our first clinics, making sure all of us had the information needed to repair those vehicles safely and correctly.

The main value in all of this for me is the peace of mind. I know we have the ability to fix every car correctly. This helps ensure (and boost my confidence in the fact) that it is actually happening. It feels good to see we're getting a good score month in and month out through a third-party verification. And if a new technician application or technique are not 100 percent, this helps ensure they understand (and can meet) our expectations for quality.

It also puts us a step ahead of the competition that isn't doing this. It gives us credibility being able to show reports of this sort of activity. It's not just us saying we do quality work; it's evidence from a third party that's ensuring that we do. More than a dozen insurers have acknowledged that shops that meet one of VeriFacts' quality verification programs, for example, meet those insurers' direct repair program qualifications for training and certifications.

If you've ever taken a flashlight and mirror into your shop and taken a hard look at the cars your shops is repairing, you know there's value in doing that regularly. Having a third party do it ensures that such review is being done consistently, in a way that helps technicians, and gives you the assurance and evidence things are being done right every time. 

"I KNOW WE HAVE THE ABILITY TO FIX EVERY CAR CORRECTLY. THIS HELPS ENSURE (AND BOOST MY CONFIDENCE IN THE FACT) THAT THIS IS ACTUALLY HAPPENING."

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

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28 The Shop Profile

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MINDING YOUR BUSINESS

TEACHING
DOLLARS
AND SENSESHOPS FIND WAYS TO REDUCE
COSTS WITHOUT SACRIFICING
QUALITY, PRODUCTIVITY OR
CUSTOMER SERVICEBY JOHN YOSWICK |
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

BY DIGGING into his shop's financials, Mark Stewart found one basic way he could cut costs: He reduced his staff overhead somewhat, taking on a few more responsibilities himself.

Stewart purchased Cathedral City Collision in Cathedral City, Calif., less than four years ago after spending two decades as a service writer at a nearby dealership. In addition to learning the many nuances of the collision repair industry, he's also still learning about business in general – aspects that he didn't have to tackle when running a department within a dealership. Another way Stewart hopes to shave some costs from those financials: He had the shop's electrical utility provider replace all the lighting and ballasts in the 8,000-square-foot shop.

"That should reduce our electric bill, and it makes us more green by being more conservative with energy," Stewart said.

Even with the economy rebounding, many shops learned tough lessons during the recession. The cost-cutting they were forced to do then may thankfully feel slightly less necessary now, but the tough times then still has many shop owners, like Stewart, continuing to look for ways to reduce expenses.

Digging into costs

For example, Shane Courtney of Jim Stevens Autobody found that even though his shop in downtown Portland, Ore., was still fixing plenty of cars, its bottom line had eroded.

"I'd been doing the same thing for 18 years, and all of a sudden it wasn't working," Courtney said. "The workload hadn't changed, but the prices had gone up."

Courtney started as an apprentice technician at the shop 27 years ago, eventually moving into the office and then into ownership. He said that managing the financial end of the business has never been one of his core strengths.

"I can do production standing on my head," he said. "I enjoy working with customers and with employees. The accounting stuff is work. But the business side of the industry has changed, and you really have to keep an eye on the books, which have become the lifeblood of the company."

Fortunately for Courtney, a source of help was as close as his company's name. Though retired for 20 years, company founder Jim Stevens came back in about three years ago to see what help he could offer Courtney. Together they made some personnel changes, and Stevens dug into shop expenses.



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"One of the first things he did was look at the bills," Courtney said. "The garbage bill sticks in my mind. He called the competition, and they said they'd do it for half. Our original provider said they'd do it for that. So we stayed with the original company, but it just took one phone call to cut that expense."

Other ideas came from the shop's eight employees. The shop's long-time painter took some training related to new environmental regulations and came back with the idea of using any leftover paint from one job as the ground coat on another job. "So our waste hauling expenses went down, and we're mixing less of the new color to finish that subsequent job," Courtney said.

Share the burden

There also can be power in shared sacrifice. One Southern California shop owner said that at the depths of the recession, he pulled his crew together and offered them a choice. He could either let one or two of them go, or else everyone, including himself, could take a temporary 15 percent pay cut. No one

was thrilled with the idea, he said, but they all agreed they should sacrifice a little to avoid anyone suffering a lot.

This type of cut is not a long-term fix, but it bought the owner the four months he needed to make other changes to improve sales and save money.

"And down the road, we didn't have to take the time and expense of trying to find people to replace those we'd have let go otherwise," he said.

As the shop owner looks at another double-digit increase in health insurance premiums, he said, he's considering working with his team to build a consensus on what everyone is willing to do in order to make it viable to continue the benefit.

"Nobody likes feeling like they are getting less than they were before," he said. "But if changes are made in a fair and across-the-board manner, people are willing to give a little for the good of everyone in the company."

Laundry list of ideas

Here are a dozen other ways that shop owners say they have reduced costs and

expenses without skimping on quality, productivity or customer service.

1. Cookie Landauer of Scottie's Auto Body in Hillsboro, Ore., said she recommends looking at expenses line item by line item. "We've reviewed stuff like uniforms, right down to what we were paying for bottled water," she said. "Just look at things more closely to ask, 'Do we really need that,' or 'Do we need to pay that much for that?'"

2. Consider if you're getting the most out of your shop management system. The manager of a dealership shop in Reno, Nev., said he felt the shop could forego having a stand-alone management system by analyzing and managing the business using the dealership's financial reports.

"The dealership has all the information we need," he said. "You just have to know how to read it."

On the other hand, Terry



Cookie Landauer

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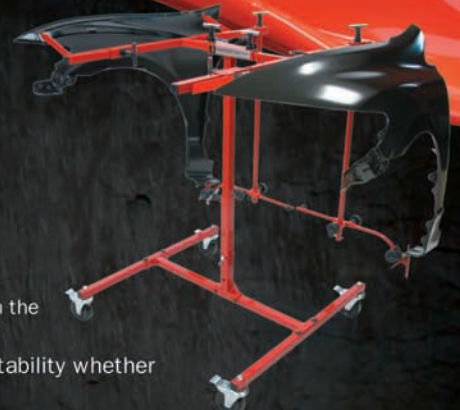
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Mostul changed the management system he was using for his three Artistic Auto Body shops in Oregon because the change saved him money.

"I'm very hands-on, and I loved the management system we had been using from the standpoint of production management," Mostul said. "I didn't want to give that up. But we switched because we essentially save a full-time overhead position. It was so much more efficient, requiring a fewer keystrokes to complete the administrative portion of the process."

3. Several shop owners said they have saved money by changing how they pay their shops' bills. One said he switched to paying as many bills as he can by a credit card, which he pays off every month; the change simplified accounts payable and reduced the number of checks to vendors the shop had to process.

Another said he began using a credit card that has no annual fee and offers cash-back rewards. The change trimmed more than \$1,000 off his annual expenses, he said.

4. Many shops have found that skylights in the shop dramatically reduce the need and expense for electrical lighting.

5. Paul Amato believes employees are far less likely to waste shop products – even down to a single piece of sandpaper – if they know they are being held accountable for any such waste. So all the paint preppers at Amato's Auto Body in San Diego have their own rolling cart with all materials labeled.

"So if I see a piece of sandpaper on the ground that's still good, I know which prepper it belongs to," Amato said.

6. You or your insurance broker should make sure your employees are properly classified in terms of your company's workers' compensation insurance because the premium for technicians is often five or seven times the rate for office employees.

7. It can pay to find and fix compressed air leaks promptly to reduce the amount of time the air compressor runs. Providing all of your technicians with garage door openers can reduce

the amount of time that overhead doors are open – and letting heat in or out.

8. There may be times when a subscription to a source for OEM repair procedure information can't be avoided. But using I-CAR's new Repairability Technical Support Portal may help you find a lot of repair information for free.

Jason Bartanen, director of industry technical relations for I-CAR, said the OEM Information section offers not just links to the automaker's repair information websites (and short videos explaining the navigation of each automaker site) but often some of the actual procedures, bulletins and information technicians or estimators may need.

The portal is available through the Technical Knowledge section of I-CAR's website – www.i-car.com – or directly at <http://rts.i-car.com>.

9. If you're in an area where companies must pay personal property tax,



Paul Amato

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make sure you get rid of any company-owned equipment or tools that aren't being used – and that you've taken anything you no longer have off the tax rolls.

10. Standardized processes and best practices within your shop can reduce costs. If different techs or painters use different processes or products, that's more items you need to stock. Reduce these choices by making sure all techs use systematized processes to save money and lower the learning curve for entry-level technicians.

11. Make sure you're getting the most out of every cycle of your paint booth. If your paint shop knows ahead of time of what will be painted that day, your team can maximize use of the booth by, for example, painting all four bumpers for the day in the booth at the same time rather than in multiple booth cycles.

12. Ask your vendors about any value-added services they offer. Steve Dillenbeck of Airport Auto Body in

Aurora, Colo., said one of the dealership groups in his market has contracted with a safety and compliance company. "As long as you buy parts from their range of dealerships, they give you that service for free," Dillenbeck said.

Go after pennies

If there was one recurring message from the shop owners, it was that one change to reduce your expenses significantly probably isn't out there. Instead, they said, look for multiple ways to save even just a little money. Those small reductions are easier to find and can really add up over time. ☞



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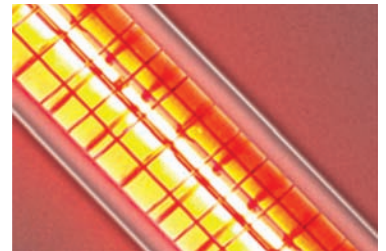
John Yoswick is a freelance writer based in Portland, Ore., who has been writing about the automotive industry since 1988.

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SHOP PROFILE

A snapshot of one of the industry's leading shops

ACTION COLLISION SPECIALISTS/GLENWOOD SPRINGS, COLO.



Climbing high

Colorado shop owners are making forward strides with sophisticated vehicle repairs

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

Steve “Tank” Burns acquired his hard-charging nickname while working at Boeing. His tasks included painting Air Force One for the President of the United States.

He also precisely coated all high-grade military and civilian aircraft.

“They called me ‘Tank’ because I blasted through problems,” says Burns, who went on to become co-owner of Colorado’s Action Collision Specialists along with business partner John Stock.

Highly skilled aluminum engineers and designers were a frequent presence on the line during Burns’ stint at Boeing. “The R&D guys would ask us about airplanes and seek new ideas, and they told us that aluminum was coming for cars,” he says.

An avid reader of the *Wall Street Journal*, Burns became aware that automakers were purchasing larger shipments of aluminum. That eventually steered him toward Action’s lucrative position as an industry-leading repair facility specializing in aluminum-clad vehicles and serving a high-end clientele.

“You have to keep yourself informed, and you always have to plan for the future,” he advises. “You have to look worldwide” to identify upcoming trends and challenges facing collision repairers as they address aluminum and other advanced materials.

“It’s coming and a lot of shops aren’t ready for it. They are too busy with DRPs and cycle times,” says Burns, predicting that within a decade, small shops and big chains alike will be forced to alter their focus on high-speed production and adopt a more measured and precise pace engineered to meet the “ultra-skilled technology” needs of vehicles.

Obtaining the latest in factory certifications will become a prime prerequisite as the industry moves forward, according to Burns. “The OEM manufacturers are taking back control.” Expect OEM-approved parts and procedures to offset a current insurance carrier-driven emphasis on rendering the cheapest and quickest fixes, he says.

“We’re the new niche, and we’re up with the high-end cars,” says Burns. All of Action’s staff is upgrading their certifications to include nameplates like Tesla, Land Rover/Jaguar, Mercedes-Benz, Volkswagen, Audi and, of course, the aluminum-embracing Ford F-150 pickup.

“We’re in the driver’s seat right now – we’re getting paid for what we do. It’s a whole new ballgame.” The shop has no

AT A GLANCE

Action Collision Specialists

Name of shop

Glenwood Springs, Colo.

Location

John Stock and

Steve “Tank” Burns

Owners

2, plus a satellite location

Number of shops

11

Years in business

7

Number of employees

25,000

Square footage of shops

15

Number of bays

\$12,000

Average repair order

\$50,000

Average weekly volume

22

Number of vehicles per week

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Paint supplier

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Frame machines used

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Estimating system used

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direct repair program (DRP) affiliations, nor does it want any. It charges, and gets, \$120 per hour for body/paint and \$150 per hour for structural/mechanical/frame, amounting to a net profit margin of 48 percent to 55 percent.

As for insurers attempting to drive down the price, "They've said some things, but they all pay it. I say to them, 'Where else are you going to get it fixed? This is it.'"

Building bridges

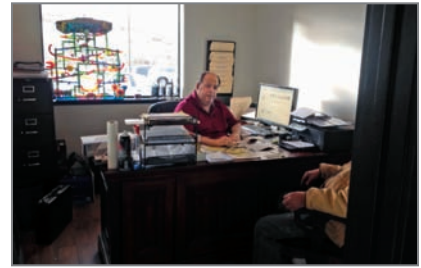
With locations in Glenwood Springs and Carbondale plus a satellite concierge site in Aspen, the company has exclusive certification territories throughout Colorado's Western Slope. Denver has become another hotspot of referrals, and Action continues to covet the Front Range region on the eastern side of the state.

This technological and marketing monopoly of sorts, combined with exquisite customer service, personal attention and an affable attitude, is geared toward ensuring a steady flow of highly satisfied patrons in the future while maintaining the current pattern of strong word-of-mouth recommendations.



A recent renovation of the Glenwood Springs location has accelerated Action's reputation and car counts. "We spent over a half-million dollars on equipment, and everyone thought we were crazy," he notes. Yet when coupled with the ongoing push for certifications, the investment in the beautiful venue stocked with state-of-the-art tools is bringing in the jobs, especially from dealerships.

"There's no other shop like this on the Western Slope," Burns reports. Few auto dealers in the region have in-house collision repair facilities, creating marketing options that Burns and Stock have pursued with vigor. "John and I personally go out and visit all the dealerships," he says. "We make their customers happy, and when



it's time, they'll buy a new car from them."

Invites are also issued for shop tours and fun-filled golf outings that have proven to be an effective marketing strategy. In addition to helping out at the shop, Tank's son, 26-year-old Chas Burns, is a golf pro who also happens to have Dad's gift of gab. "He's really good with people; that's why he's so good with golfers and customers," says Tank Burns, adding that Action does little advertising in the traditional sense, relying instead on hitting the links and sponsoring charitable and civic events. "It's all about relationships. I'd rather spend the money on that than on TV or radio."

Seeing the light

Burns, 57, began his career in 1978 as a

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collision repair apprentice with a knack for painting. He got involved in aerospace with the Boeing plane-painting experience and went on to hold a series of positions at body shops and insurance companies. A job with Mitchell traveling nationwide conducting educational sessions at shops gave Burns access to the best and brightest practices being imple-



John Stock, left, and Steve Burns

mented throughout the country.

"I was open minded to everything," he explains, pointing out that he takes pride in establishing the latest in industry innovations at Action.

The partnership between Burns and Stock evolved when Stock, who is now 70 years old, grew tired of fighting the DRPs and was seeking a new direction. (Experience counts: Head painter Angelo Bernal is still clocking in at age 68.) As Stock and Burns pondered their options, "a light bulb went on over my head," Burns recounts. He recalled working at a shop in Nevada that made good money specializing in the aluminum repair technology that he had witnessed at Boeing. And he remembered his aircraft engineer friends talking about how aluminum was the next big thing coming to cars.

An active participant in the Specialty Equipment Market Association (SEMA), NACE and I-CAR, Burns' constant enthusiasm for education has industry teachers ready to put him to work clapping blackboard erasers out back – or rather far loftier assignments at the front of the classroom.

"I took 72 I-CAR classes in the past year. That's a lot! And they want to make me an instructor, but I don't think I have the time right now."

Those I-CAR connections have served as a solid source for hiring top technicians. "I have a great crew," says Burns. "I have great guys who want to learn," which is a key factor in recruiting the right candidates. "Because we get a higher rate we pay them more, but they also have to take the classes."

Burns concludes by contemplating Action's latest business goal: "The next big thing is composites, and I'm already taking classes in that." ■



James E. Guyette is a long-time contributing editor to ABRN, Aftermarket Business World and Motor Age magazines.

E-mail Jim at JimGuyette2004@yahoo.com

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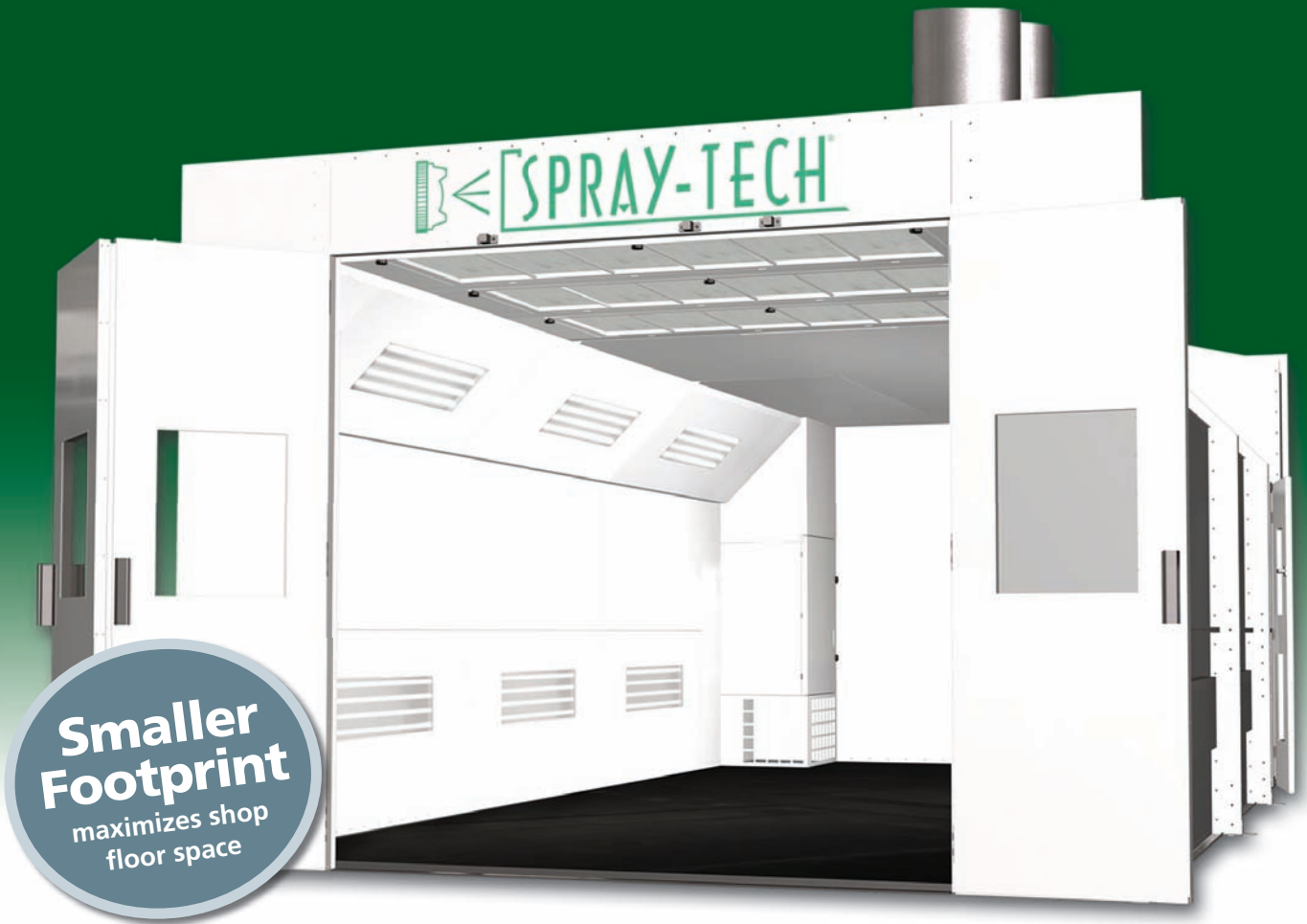
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BY LARRY MONTANEZ | TECHNICAL EDITOR

We have all heard talk about the new aluminum because of the 2015 Ford F-150. But aluminum is not new. What is new is that it will be the first time a mass-produced vehicle from an American company will be constructed from aluminum.

The first aluminum sports car was unveiled at the Berlin Motor Show in 1899. As far as a mass-produced, non-sports car, aluminum-intensive vehicle, the 1994 Audi A8 with the Audi Space Frame (ASF) is considered the first. Followed by the Acura NSX, Jaguar XJ and XK, Audi R8 and T.T. Last year Land Rover jumped into aluminum-intensive design. GM has claimed that the 2018 Chevrolet Silverado and GMC Sierra will be aluminum-intensive bodies with HSS steel full frames. I was lucky to be involved with the Audi aluminum program from its infancy and have been through all the trials and tribulations surrounding aluminum repair.

Aluminum can be very difficult, if not down right impos-

sible, to work with, and it is not because it is hard to repair. It is difficult because of human nature toward change. Aluminum is very different from steel, and we must change the way we think when repairing it. And as we know, many people do not like change. Aluminum vs. steel repair can be compared to the lacquer vs. urethane and urethane vs. waterborne refinishing processes. Many facilities remember difficulties with the change to urethane, and those who don't know all too well the issues of changing to waterborne. Aluminum is not hard or difficult, just very different.

Damage analysis

First and foremost, the kink vs. bend rule does not apply to aluminum, just as it does not apply to advanced high strength steels (AHSS), such as Martensitic steels and Boron alloyed steels. If an aluminum structural component is kinked or bent,



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it will be replaced in most cases. For outer panels, most of the deformities will not be repairable when compared to steel.

There are three types of aluminum component designs you will see:

Sheet aluminum is formed like sheet steel, where sheets of the aluminum material are stamped into shapes such as apron panels, pillars, rockers and

outer panels. They can be used for cosmetic and structural body components. Some of these components can be repaired, such as outer panels and certain select structural components. Damage indicators are, but not limited to, deformities, visual fractures (cracks) and tearing. They can be riveted, rivet-bonded, bonded and rope hemmed flanged, flow-drilled, clinched or MIG welded.

Aluminum extrusions are similar in design to the hydro-formed steel components we see on late-model steel vehicles. Extrusions are only used for structural components — to form inner reinforcements on pillars, inner roof rails, uni-rails (frame rails), frame rails (Corvette ZR1/Z06), suspension cradles and structural crossmembers. Generally they are not repairable. Again, damage indicators are, but not limited to, deformities, visual fractures (cracks) and tearing. Aluminum extrusions can be riveted, rivet-bonded, bonded, flow-drilled or MIG welded.

Aluminum casts have multi-thickness variations and generally rough surfaces. Cast components can only be used to make structural components — structural pillars, structural crossmembers, reinforcements, cradle support ends and strut towers and are never repairable. Damage indicators are generally obvious and include visual fractures (cracks) and tearing, but surprisingly, cast is ductile and will bend a great deal prior to fracturing. The amount of ductility a cast component has is dependent on the alloying agents and type of casting process utilized. Cast aluminum will almost always be MIG welded, but you will see other components attached with flow-drill screws.

Damaged aluminum-intensive vehicles will require pre-measuring, just like steel vehicles. Pre-measuring determines if there is collateral misalignment, which in the case of aluminum is generally unrepairable. Ford does allow some realignment for collateral damage. Conversely, most of the other OEMs say no realignment to damaged aluminum structure. So how do we inspect a collision damaged aluminum intensive vehicle? It is similar to inspecting a steel vehicle, but there are some special operations. The most important step is to check with the dealer or OEM to find out if the vehicle is restricted, which means the OEM has restricted the sale of structural components to only certified collision repair facilities. You would then have to send the vehicle to one of these facilities. If the vehicle is not restricted, then follow these steps:

1. Wash the vehicle. This is not only the first step prior to the commencing of any repair procedures; it will also ensure that no contaminants enter your spray booth.

2. Examine the entire vehicle by



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ally inspect the undercarriage. Obtain the vehicle measurements from the OEM and/or an information provider's repair data, and use a tape measure and/or tram gauge to verify the measurements of the vehicle. If any misalignment or deviation from the specifications is discovered, prepare the vehicle for three-dimensional measurements on a two-post lift or realignment apparatus. If no misalignment is discovered (taking into account the severity of the sustained damage, the description of the collision event and the function of the damaged components), then the vehicle might be a candidate for a non-structural repair, commonly referred to a fast-track repair (Skip to Step 11).

9. Disassemble the vehicle as necessary. Place on a two-post lift or structural realignment apparatus (SRA) and measure the vehicle with an electronic three-dimensional measuring system.

walking around it. Always start in the opposite corner or side away from the point of impact. This will make you start in areas where damage would not be anticipated and work into those areas where damage is anticipated.

3. Look at all panel gaps for symmetry. If any misalignment is found, inspect further to discover the root cause of the misalignment. With aluminum, this misalignment can sometimes be difficult to discover without measuring and some disassembly.

4. Check all closure panels for proper operation. If any component is inoperative or operates unacceptably, inspect further to discover the root cause. Remember with aluminum components, such as door assemblies, the door shell may have been deformed and the pillar may have sustained damage too.

5. Enter the interior of the vehicle. Check steering wheel position and operation (including tilt and telescopic). Statically test all seatbelts, buckle and unbuckle them, check the operation of seats and inspect seat tracks.

6. Take measurements of the wheel positions. For the rear wheels, measure from the rear lower edge of the rocker panel to the center of the wheel on the left and right side. For the front wheels, make sure the steering wheel is centered and the front wheels are straight, and then measure from the front lower edge of the rocker panel to the center of the wheel on the left and right side. If any misalignment is noticed, take notes. This is especially important with four-link suspension vehicles.

7. If no misalignment is discovered, skip to Step 11.

8. Place the vehicle on a two-post lift, remove any undershields and visu-



This is an aluminum uni-rail from a 2010 BMW. It is constructed of sheet aluminum with a cast front-mount bracket welded to it. You can see multiple deformities on the component, and in the "kinked" area where the metal has folded over itself you see stress cracking. The opposite side of the kinked area you can see a bend to the component. None of this damage is repairable.

IMAGE: LARRY MONTANEZ

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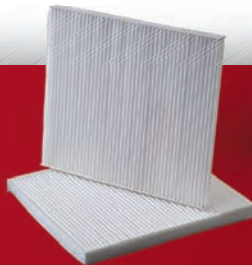
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10. Measure the vehicle completely to ascertain the root cause of the misalignment discovered during the quick-check process. Once the root cause is discovered, determine the proper repair processes, according to the OEM, to correct the misalignment. Generally with aluminum-intensive vehicles, this will either be full component replacement or sectioning may be allowed.

11. Fully disassemble the vehicle as necessary, in preparation for parts ordering and repairs.

12. Protect and store all reusable components.

13. After the triage of the vehicle (diagnosing), have the damage assessor, parts manager, shop foreman and structural repair technician discuss the repair plan and review the required OEM repair procedures, materials and components. After all parties understand the repair plan, notes should be written on the vehicle, commonly known as "blueprinting."

14. Store the vehicle, as no repairs should be attempted until all replacement components and materials arrive. Seal and cover all openings.



This is an extruded aluminum bumper reinforcement. In the severely kinked area you can see multiple indications of stress cracks and even fracturing of the material. Even at the bent area there are visible fractures.

IMAGE: LARRY MONTANEZ

By following the above analysis steps, you ensure that you have:

1. Prevented overlooked, hidden damage and damaged components
2. Ensured all OEM protocols are adhered to and discussed
3. Determined if a vehicle is a total loss or not, up front
4. Lowered overall cycle/touch times

5. Increased your technicians' efficiency/production output

6. Increased your net profit by eliminating the waste

Although the above triage and blueprinting procedures will assist your facility in diagnosing sustained damage, you need some additional, and very important, information. The damage

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assessor(s), foreman and techs need a full understanding of the following for an aluminum intensive vehicle:

1. Vehicle design engineering
2. How a vehicle is constructed — sheet, extrusion and/or cast
3. How it is designed to react in a collision event
4. How collision energy travels through the vehicle
5. Which components are designed to deform or transfer energy
6. Mechanical and electrical component operation and diagnosis
7. Vehicle joining methods and materials (rivets, rivet-bonding, clinched, MIG welded)
8. Steering and suspension operation and diagnosing
9. OEM repair protocols and position statements and how to interpret the information

If we all thought this way, there would be fewer mistakes during diagnosis. Adopting these SOPs will make

our assessments easier for steel vehicles, but is paramount for aluminum-intensive vehicles. The most important thing in the diagnosis assessment is knowing what is actually damaged. The only way to know the amount of sustained damage is through a thorough triage and blueprinting process. We must rise to the level of professionalism required to repair today's advanced-engineered vehicle designs and must possess advanced training though education and hands-on work experience. Repair facilities must purchase the proper equipment and computerized programs necessary to ensure the vehicle can be diagnosed and repaired correctly.

Judgment times

All of the certified aluminum programs require specific structural repair apparatuses. Celette is the most required, followed by Car-O-Liner and then Globaljig and CarBench, which round out



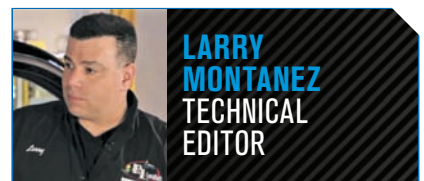
The all-aluminum body 2015 Ford F-150.

IMAGE: FORD

the top four manufacturers. Chief is only on the Ford program and cannot be used on any other certified aluminum collision repair program. Currently there are no other structural repair equipment makers on the programs, although Spanesi is in testing now for a few OEM programs. Set up on this equipment can be four to eight hours for an aluminum-intensive vehicle, depending on the extent of sustained damage.

You may also see no realignment time at all (pulling), as most of the OEMs prohibit realignment. However, Ford allows some realignment for collateral damage. For outer panel damage, if repairable, times can be three to four times the amount of time for similar damage to a steel panel. Only through training and education will you be able to determine the amount of time required to repair aluminum. As with steel vehicles and the ROI for the training, education and purchases to repair steel vehicles, you will also need to adjust your labor rates for aluminum vehicles.

I hope this article, the first of a six-part series, has helped you understand some of the differences with assessing damage to aluminum intensive vehicles. This is an overview, and we will delve deeper into each area in our following articles throughout 2015. As always, if any questions arise, please feel free to contact me. 📧



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TECHNICAL EDITOR

Montanez is co-owner of P&L Consultants, which works with collision shops on estimating, production and proper repair procedures. He is also a certified technician for multiple OEM collision repair programs.

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ANCHORING CONSIDERATIONS FOR ALUMINUM-INTENSIVE VEHICLES

CONTRIBUTED BY I-CAR

Following the damage analysis and blueprinting process, aluminum vehicles will need to be mounted on a measuring and straightening system for repair. Even if straightening for repair will not be done, this best practice will allow for proper replacement part installation.

Anchoring aluminum vehicles can pose unique challenges. Some aluminum-intensive vehicles do not have pinch weld flanges that can be used to attach anchoring. Those that do have pinchwelds may have rivets along the pinchweld, making the attachment of conventional pinchweld clamps challenging. Fortunately, there are specialized pinchweld clamps available that are designed to encapsulate the rivets and provide the necessary holding.

To prevent possible contamination and galvanic corrosion between the steel jaws of a pinchweld clamp and the aluminum pinchweld, aluminum plates can be placed between the clamp and the pinchweld.

Some aluminum vehicles have pinchwelds that are horizontal, instead of vertical. A vehicle with horizontal pinchwelds will require a special clamp that is positioned horizontally. Some horizontal pinchweld clamps can clamp horizontally and vertically.

Additionally, many aluminum-intensive vehicles utilize castings in the center section of the structure, where fixtures or anchors may be attached. Castings can be extremely vulnerable to damage by the forces of pulling, and must be monitored very closely. If, during repairs, a casting is damaged, it must be replaced; there are no repair options, other than replacement, for aluminum castings on today's aluminum intensive vehicles.

Similar to steel vehicles, it is important to use multiple anchor points so that any pulling force is distributed over a larger area, reducing the stress at each anchoring point. All areas under stress from the pulling forces must be carefully monitored.

Following repairs, it is necessary to refinish the clamping area, if coatings have been removed, to prevent corrosion.

Each year, about 75 vehicles are debuted or redesigned, and with the accelerating focus on CAFE, many of these will be manufactured with unfamiliar materials and systems like aluminum. Knowledge is truly the foundation for complete, safe and quality repairs especially given the rapid advancements in vehicle technology and the use of different materials.

For more information on aluminum repair, visit i-car.com.



TRAINING  IN FOCUS

HOT PRODUCTS OF 2015

ADD THESE SUGGESTIONS TO YOUR
MUST-HAVE LIST THIS YEAR

BY **TIM SRAMCIK** | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

When *ABRN* speaks with winners of its annual Top Shops contest (December 2014), the discussion eventually turns to investments in tools and equipment. Being among the nation's best shops usually involves investments that permit them to take on additional work, increase efficiency or cut waste (in materials and time). Here's a look at the products recommended by the latest round of Top Shops winners.

Aluminum workstations

Repairing the latest version of the country's best selling vehicle — the 2015 Ford F-150 — means working on aluminum. Many shops are already preparing with specialized training. The larger challenge might be affording the tools and equipment necessary to perform aluminum repairs. Shops are looking at costs of \$30,000 to \$50,000, and in some cases more.

To make these costs more manageable, manufacturers have begun bundling tools, such as with aluminum workstations. These stations typically include features such as portable welding carts with covered work surfaces, aluminum dent pulling parts, aluminum hammers and stud weld-



Aluminum work stations allow shops to bundle and store welding, dent pulling and other aluminum tools.

IMAGE: PROSPOT

ers. They can provide tool boards, air and electric outlets, storage drawers and shelves. Options include MIG welders and plasma cutters.

Rivet guns

Because aluminum is heat sensitive, non-thermal joining processes must be used to bond it. Self-piercing rivet guns use extreme pressure to remove, flatten and join rivets to connect two or more pieces of material. They're absolutely necessary for aluminum work, and can be used on other materials such as plastic and steel.

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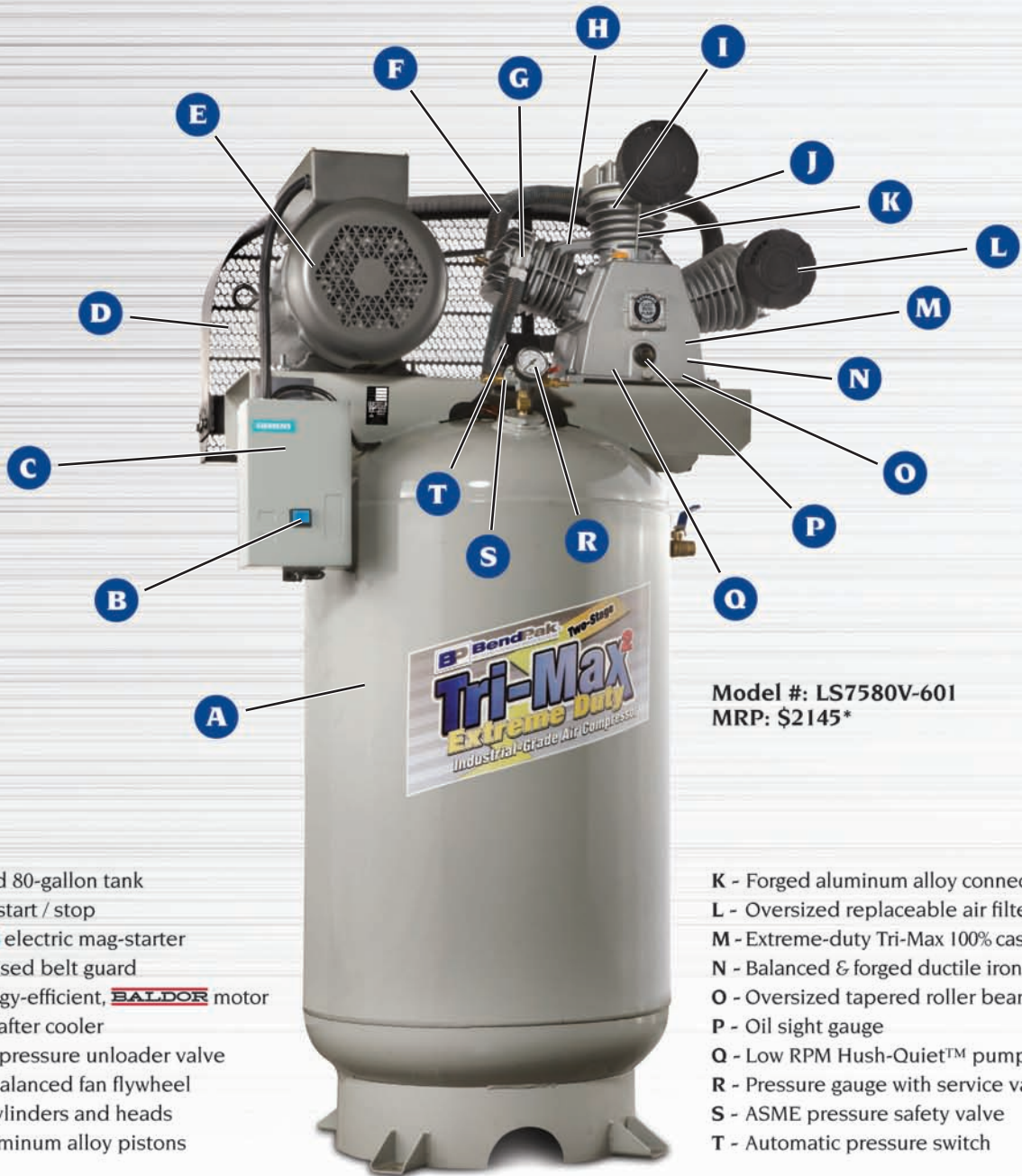
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Aluminum clean rooms/ accessories

Issues with material contamination require that aluminum and steel work be conducted in separate areas. Previously, shops often added on a new room or constructed a separate building for aluminum repairs, which can be expensive. The market has responded with affordable, mobile or pre-manufactured clean rooms and accessories.

Mobile clean room sets include frames, heavy-duty curtains and the necessary hardware. If you're looking

to save money, you can build your own frame and order customized curtains or suspend these curtains from your shop ceiling.

If your budget permits more of an investment, consider a curtained room with its own lighting and overhead ventilation, or a fully sealed room with ventilation, lighting and tool storage.

Prefab paint mixing rooms

In January 2015, *ABRN*, "Complete compliance: Make your paint department as safe as possible," noted the challenges in keeping paint mixing rooms up to code for OSHA and state and local rules. For shops expanding or needing to reconfigure their operations, a pre-fabricated mixing room might be the way to go. These rooms typically meet both OSHA and National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standards, along with other local rules. They come equipped with high efficiency air filters, provide balanced air flow and include spill containment. Some versions can be configured as standalone models or with add-ons,



Hooded supplied-air respirators protect against dangerous chemicals, while offering comfort and a full field of vision.

IMAGE: PPG

such as vestibules that attach them to spray booths.

Mechanical spray gun cleaners

If you're still cleaning your spray guns by hand, you're wasting time and money and not operating as environmentally sound as you could. Automated gun cleaners don't require disassembly and can clean multiple guns at once. They also provide a thorough cleaning in two minutes, rather than 20 minutes for a manual cleaning.



Rivet guns can be used on aluminum, plastic and steel.

IMAGE: PROSPOT

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Spray booth dirt control

One of the keys to producing a great finish is keeping your spray booth as contaminant free as possible. Manufacturers have responded with floor coating products engineered to capture particulates out of the air, away from the vehicle finish. Fewer particulates in the finish translates into less time spent buffing out paint jobs. This product can prove particularly beneficial where waterborne finishes are used since the low humidity and increased air movement required for drying stirs up more dust that can end up embedded in fresh paint. Floor coatings typically are water-based and applied once a day with a pump sprayer.

Supplied-air respirators

A paint company rep recently told *ABRN* that he'd like to see every painter us-

ing a supplied-air respirator, which can offer advantages from the traditional and extremely effective respirators already at use in your shop. Among them — wearers are fully protected from the isocyanates and other dangerous substances that can pass through filtered respirators leading to serious health problems. Because the hooded versions of these respirators don't fit tightly against the face, they offer greater comfort. Additionally, hooded versions, because they offer a face shield, allow wearers to dispense with goggles and provide a full field of vision.

Glass removal power tools

The most physically demanding part of glass replacement is cutting through the old urethane bead to remove the glass. If your employees are using a traditional cold knife, they're risking injury from the awkward physical twisting and turning and brute force necessary to hack through cured adhesives. Glass technicians may choose to stick with the knives, despite the

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risks, because the available power cutting tools can be difficult to handle and sometimes cut into surrounding vehicle areas, causing significant and costly damage.

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Waterborne paint remains a hot product. Even if you've made the transition to these finishes, their formulas have advanced so much the past five years that you should see what your vendors and others can now provide.

IMAGE: BASF



A variety of curtained and full-shell aluminum clean rooms are available with options such as overhead ventilation and tool storage.

IMAGE: D-PATRICK BODY AND GLASS

grades. Greatly improved handling allows them to cut through old bonds far more easily than a manual knife, reducing removal times and employee injuries. Because they're easier to control, the potential for vehicle damage has been virtually eliminated. These tools come available in kits with a variety of blades that can be used in other vehicle applications — for example, removing trim, lights and other vehicle glass.

Digital measuring systems

Car Crafters, an Albuquerque, NM, multi-Top Shop winner, recently purchased the Tru-Point measuring tool. It uses a hand-held probe to measure control points such as body openings, roof lines, ball joints, pillar, wheel base and suspension. Tru-Point then generates a report of pre- and post-repair documentation that can be submitted to insurers.

The manufacturer says the efficiency and repair opportunities add an average of 3.5 billable hours per repair. At \$50/ hr. for labor and 15 repairs per week, that translates into \$10,500 extra revenue each month. Add in profits from part sales, and the number grows even more.

Waterborne paint

Even though waterborne finishes have been around for some time, they remain a hot product for two reasons. One, thousands of shops have yet to adopt them and experience the superior results, easier application and improved revenue they can provide. Second, for shops that do use them, they're worth a second look. Since introducing them, paint vendors have significantly upgraded their waterborne formulas. Today's products are significantly different from those available just five years ago. This makes it a good time to compare vendors and products. Also, attending some hands-on training sessions with your vendor will help ensure your shop is getting the full benefits of its finish products. ☺



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| ADVERTISER | Page # | ADVERTISER | Page # | ADVERTISER | Page # |
|----------------------------------|------------|-----------------------------------|--------|----------------------------|--------|
| 3M COLLISION | 35 | GLOBAL FINISHING SOLUTIONS | 27 | PRO SPOT | CV3 |
| ABRA AUTO BODY AND GLASS | 32 | IBIS | 14 | ROME TECHNOLOGIES INC | 47 |
| ADVANCED MEASUREMENT SYSTEMS | 36 | INNOVATIVE TOOLS | 22 | SEM PRODUCTS | 37 |
| AMI | 30 | KIA | 19,39 | SHERWIN-WILLIAMS | 16,17 |
| AXALTA COATING SYSTEMS | 5 | LUSID TECHNOLOGY | 40 | SHOP PRO | 31 |
| BASF CORPORATION | CV4 | MARTIN SENOUR AUTOMOTIVE FINISHES | 29 | SOUTHERN POLYURETHANES INC | 25,26 |
| BENDPAK INC | 9,10,43,44 | MERCEDES-BENZ CORP | CV2 | SPANESI | 38 |
| BLOWTHERM USA | 23 | AUTOMECHANIKA CHICAGO | 15 | SPRAY TECH | 33 |
| CERTIFIED AUTO PARTS ASSOCIATION | 13 | MOTOR GUARD CORP | 30 | STECK MANUFACTURING CO | 46 |
| CHIEF AUTOMOTIVE TECHNOLOGIES | 7 | PRIMA SRL INC | 24 | VALSPAR REFINISH | 21 |
| CJ INC | 45 | | | | |

| MANUFACTURER • Product | Page # | MANUFACTURER • Product | Page # |
|------------------------------------|--------|----------------------------------|--------|
| EMM International • Paint suit | 49 | SATA • Spray gun | 49 |
| Lusid Technologies • Genmax clears | 49 | TG Products • Rail repair system | 49 |

THE LAST DETAIL [✓]

Quite often when I'm working with a shop as a consultant, I will ask the shop owner about their goals for the coming year. They'll often say they are going to increase sales or improve their cycle time. So I'll ask them what they will be doing differently to make that happen. They often will say something like: "Well, our cycle time is so high that we keep getting poor CSI scores, so we're going to improve it." Or, "Our expenses have risen so much so we're going to do more in sales next year."

But folks, just because you say something is going to happen doesn't mean it will. "We're just going to..." isn't a goal. It's a wish. You can't just speak something into existence. That's just a wish something will happen rather than a plan to make it happen. A goal is when you actually have a written action plan on how to accomplish it.

That action plan answers the who, what, when, why and how questions. What are you going to do? How are you going to do it? Who will be involved? Why are you going to do it?

Let's take shop owner "Susan" who wants to increase her sales by \$200,000 a year to \$2.2 million next year. Susan and I sat down and built an action plan for how she is going to accomplish her goal.

One step, she decided, is to get an extra hour of labor on every job. At 75 jobs a month and a \$50 per hour labor rate, that would add \$3,750 per month (or \$45,000 a year) to her shop's annual revenue.

So how is she going to get that extra labor hour per job? The first Thursday of each month, she decided, she will have a meeting with her blue-printing and sales staff to go over two or three items that could be included on estimates to train her staff to include and negotiate for those items.

Think about that plan: It lays out what is going to happen, who is involved and why, when and how they are doing it. That's a goal, not just a wish.

But that only gets Susan \$45,000 of the added \$200,000 increase she wants in sales next year. So the other part of her action plan is to improve her shop's closing ratio.

Right now the shop has a 60 percent closing ratio. That means it is writing about \$277,000 in estimates every month, but only captur-

RELY ON GOALS, NOT WISHES

Creating an action plan is key to making desired business improvements

ing about \$166,000 (60 percent) of that potential work each month.

Susan set a goal of improving that closing ratio to 65 percent. That would mean the shop's sales would rise to \$180,000 per month (65 percent of \$277,000) without needing to get a single additional customer through the door for an estimate.

How will she accomplish that goal? First, she is going to work with her paint company to bring in after-hours sales training for her team. And every estimate for a job not immediately scheduled by the customer will be put into a bin; her customer service rep will be trained to call each of those customers the next day with a script Susan and her team develop to help get that job scheduled. If unsuccessful, that estimate will move into another bin for another follow-up call a day later.

The added labor hour per estimate will generate an additional \$45,000 in revenue next year. The improved closing ratio will generate an additional \$160,000 in revenue. That meets Susan's goal to hit \$2.2 million next year, and it's not just a wish. She has an action plan for how to accomplish it, with specifics about what will be done, who will do it and how and when. She will explain the "why" to everyone involved, because that improves buy in and follow through.

A couple last thoughts about wishes versus goals: Always put the plan in writing. Keep it to a manageable 3-5 action items. And delegate, but don't abdicate; get others involved, but don't just dump it on them. Make sure they understand the why, how and when, and then monitor for follow through.

You can hope your wishes come true. Or you can make your goals happen. Take charge of your destiny with an action plan. 📌

“Make a plan. It lays out what is going to happen, who is involved, and why, when and how they are going to do it. That's a goal, not just a wish.”

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