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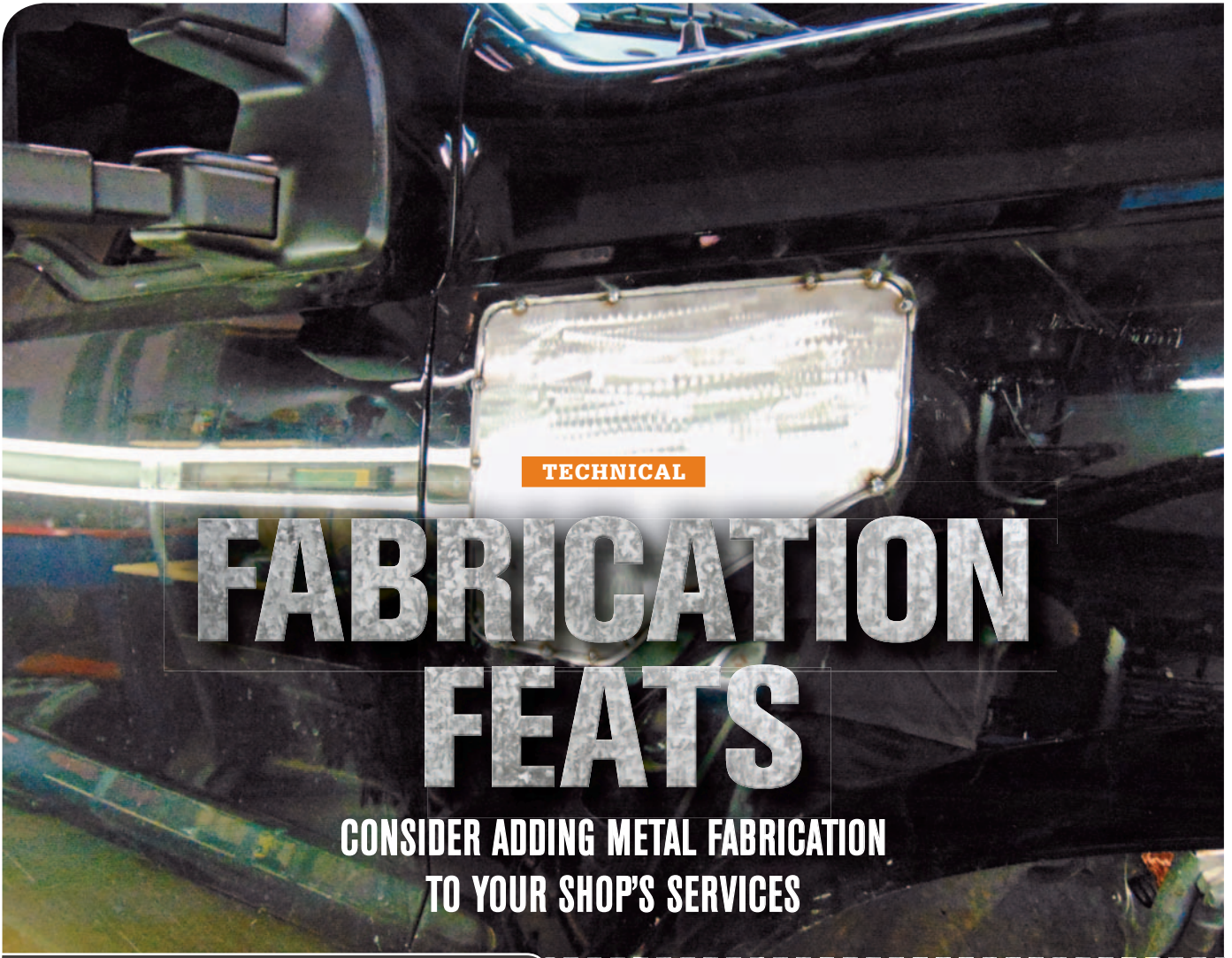
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VOLUME 55 | NUMBER 2
FEBRUARY 2016



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TRENDING



REPAIR TRENDS

ALUMINUM CONTINUES TO IMPACT COLLISION REPAIRS

BY BRIAN ALBRIGHT | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Aluminum components are going to have an increasing affect on the type of work collision repair shops see over the next several years.

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The One Touch Rule is focused on training your staff to understand your quality expectations, then teaching them to do each job right the first time. This will result in fewer do-overs and will positively impact your return on investment.

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EDITORIAL

MICHAEL WILLINS
GROUP CONTENT DIRECTOR
mwillins@advanstar.com
(440) 891-2604

KRISTA MCNAMARA
CONTENT CHANNEL DIRECTOR
kmcnamara@advanstar.com
(440) 891-2746

CHELSEA FREY
SENIOR ASSOCIATE EDITOR
cfrey@advanstar.com
(440) 891-2745

LARRY MONTANEZ
TECHNICAL ADVISOR

STEPH JOHNSON-BENTZ
ART DIRECTOR

STALIN ANNADURAI
GRAPHIC DESIGNER

CONTRIBUTORS

BRIAN ALBRIGHT
b-albright@sbcglobal.net
(614) 237-6707

MICHAEL GIARRIZZO, JR.
mgiarrizzo@dcrsystems.net

MIKE LEVASSEUR
mikel@keenautobody.com
(484) 257-5410

JAMES E. GUYETTE
jimguyette2004@yahoo.com
(440) 564-9180

KEVIN MEHOK
k.mehok@comcast.net
(708) 516-2936

KEITH MANICH
Kmanich@autotraining.net
(888) 471-5800

TIM SRAMCIC
tsramcik@yahoo.com
(303) 475-5869

JOHN YOSWICK
info@crashnetwork.com
(503) 335-0393

EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD

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PUBLISHERS

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GROUP PUBLISHER
tmcmenamin@advanstar.com
(610) 397-1667

LISA MEND
ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER
lmend@advanstar.com
(773) 866-1514
Fax: (773) 866-1314

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[URL ABRN.COM/OEPARTS]

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CREATING A successful acquisition culture

Brad Mewes, financial consultant, discusses non-financial ways to increase the value of your business.

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VIDEO SPOTLIGHT

BUILD A culture of learning

AMI's Jeff Peevy discusses the importance of training in the success of your shop.

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TRENDING



ONLINE COVERAGE

THERE'S MORE ONLINE:

I-CAR LAUNCHES THREE NEW COURSES IN 2016

I-CAR offers three new courses: MIG brazing, rivet bonding and Honda and Acura electrical system repair. The MIG and rivet bonding courses are part of I-CAR's new Hands-On Skills Development program, a new line of hands-on courses conducted in-shop, while the electrical repair course is the fourth installment in an online series focused on Honda and Acura vehicles.

»» ABRN.COM/ICARCLASSES

PBES CONFERENCE REGISTRATION AVAILABLE

The Paint, Body & Equipment Specialists (PBES) segment of the Auto Care Association will hold its annual conference in Denver, May 10-12, with the theme, "Differentiate to Win."

»» ABRN.COM/PBES2016

FINISHMASTER COMPLETES PURCHASE OF COLORMASTER AUTOMOTIVE PAINT

FinishMaster Inc., a distributor of paint and related products and a subsidiary of Uni-Select, has acquired the assets of ColorMaster Automotive Paint Inc.

»» ABRN.COM/COLORMASTER

PARTSTRADER, AXALTA INTEGRATE

PartsTrader will integrate with the ProfitNet Management System from Axalta Coating Systems. The partnership will be a two-way electronic interface that will help eliminate redundant tasks between the two systems.

»» ABRN.COM/PROFITNETPARTNER

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CADILLAC CT6 MIXED-MATERIAL STRUCTURE



■ Aluminum
■ Steel

REPAIR TRENDS

Aluminum continues to impact collision repairs

BY **BRIAN ALBRIGHT** | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Aluminum components are going to have an increasing affect on the type of work collision repair shops see over the next several years, and training and certifications will be an important part of being able to accept jobs that involve more mixed materials. Cadillac announced its own training program, the Cadillac Aluminum Repair Network, which launched in December 2015 in anticipation of the release of the new Cadillac CT6.

The CT6 uses a mix of aluminum, traditional steel, and high-strength steel as part of its lightweight design. According to the company, the aluminum intensive structure (about 65 percent of the vehicle is aluminum) includes a mix of 11 different materials.

According to John Eck, collision manager for Cadillac's wholesale dealer channel, the bulk of the vehicle's body is aluminum, with traditional steel in the floor pan and high-strength steel in the A and B pillars. The vehicle also includes aluminum sheet on exterior components, aluminum extrusion along the rocker panels and front rail, and aluminum cast in the front wheel wells toward the cabin.

"In terms of joining techniques, in the manufacturing process we use self-piercing rivets and flow drill screws, along with aluminum resistance spot welding and laser welding," Eck says. "We also have 590 linear feet of adhesive in the car. The repair process won't use the self-piercing rivets, but structural blind rivets and flow form rivets instead."

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BREAKING NEWS

OEM CERTIFICATION

CERTIFICATION STANDARDS LACKING BY 90 PERCENT OF SHOPS

Less than 10 percent of the industry is able to meet the collective certification standards set by Assured Performance Network, according to the company's certification and recognition statistics achieved in 2015.

The administrator of the country's largest Certified, OEM-Recognized Collision Repair Network, Assured Performance certification aims to raise technical repair capability and ensure each repair business has what is necessary to properly repair new model vehicles manufactured by participating OEMs.

Shops achieving certification status and official recognition by various auto manufacturers must pass stringent and comprehensive business requirements and provide

>> CONTINUES ON PAGE 8

Photo: Brian Albright

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>> CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

ALUMINUM CONTINUES TO IMPACT COLLISION REPAIRS

The vehicle does include an aluminum ribbing in the castings, which Eck says created some minor challenges in terms of fastener locations. "But we have specific repair procedures to address that, and we'll have 3D imaging on all the procedures to help the repairer," Eck says. "However, Cadillac does not allow repairs on castings, so any damage done to those castings will require full part replacement."

There are 13 such castings in the vehicle that have not only reduced the vehicles' weight by nearly 200 pounds, but also reduced the number of total parts and lowered the number of stress points. The vehicle uses 20 percent fewer parts than the previous platform design.

Dealership and independent body shops that want to be certified to repair the new vehicle will be audited annually through an extensive verification process to ensure they meet all requirements for training, tools and facilities.

However, since many shops have

already received training and certifications in aluminum repair through other entities, the Cadillac program will take that experience into consideration. "There's nothing unusual about the repair processes needed for the CT6," Eck says. "The replacement of factory resistant aluminum spot welds with structural rivets will add a level of complexity, but the procedures spell out the specific steps to address each weld. It's crucial you read and understand the repair procedures prior to working on the vehicle so you can handle the spot welds."

Program training will primarily be web-based and managed through a partnership between General Motors and I-CAR. GM will offer CT6 collision repair information at no charge. Axalta Coating Systems will provide implementation and ongoing support for the program.

The required web-based training will include a course on general knowledge of fastening techniques, and a second course specific to CT6 body fastening. There are also three required I-CAR courses: welding (WCA03), aluminum intensive vehicle repairs (ALI01), and aluminum exterior panel repair (APR01).

"We're also looking at other OEM certifications, so if you have aluminum welding certifications through Audi, Mercedes or Tesla, we'll look at that as acceptable," Eck says. "We know that Audi and Mercedes, for example, go through a very extensive welding training program. Our vehicle uses less welding, so that training is sufficient. We're trying to be market friendly and not put a burden on shops. I-CAR and other luxury brand courses that we've reviewed will adequately prepare them."

Shops will need to have that certification in order to purchase aluminum repair parts through Cadillac dealerships. "For structural parts we'll have restricted distribution," Eck says. "The shop can order as long as they have a VIN and an authorized repair network account number for each facility."

Information on the Cadillac Aluminum Repair Network will be available at the www.genuinegmparts.com site in the first quarter of 2016, including technical documents, service bulletins, paint information, warranty information, VIN and other data.

>> CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

CERTIFICATION STANDARDS LACKING BY 90 PERCENT OF SHOPS

proof of compliance through an annual onsite inspection-audit. Certification is based upon meeting "business requirements" as well as the necessary tools, equipment and training needed to properly and safely repair the latest model vehicles for the participating OEMs. So far, less than 10 percent of the industry is able to meet the collective certification standards.

Less than 2/3 of shops applying for certification are approved. To date, nearly 3,500 shops have applied to

become Certified-Recognized, with just over 2,000 successful in making the grade. Regardless, all shops are given the opportunity to participate in an optional Assured Performance "Business Improvement Program" to assist the shops in attaining compliance and higher levels of performance.

The certification standards set by Assured Performance combine all participating OEMs' specifications, allowing shops to be certified once, and simultaneously recognized by several OEMs through one comprehensive program.

"Our ability to achieve 7-10 times the shop participation of other programs is

a testament to the joint-effort strategic approach," says Assured Performance Chairman and CEO Scott Biggs. "It takes this kind of demographic and geographic coverage to realistically offer consumers and insurers a certified repair provider anywhere and everywhere that might need one."

Shops will either be certified or have to compete with the shops that are. Therefore, all shops must improve their technical repair capability, says Assured Performance Network. The result is the industry is quickly meeting the challenge to properly and safely repair the new generation of vehicles being manufactured with advanced technologies.

GLOBAL EVENTS**IBIS 2016 aims to drive forward thinking**

The IBIS Global Summit 2016 – May 23-25 at the Hilton Diagonal Mar in Barcelona – aims to build on the success of 2015, delivering more world-class presentations and industry leading information to assist delegates in their forward-thinking approach to business and strategy. IBIS will continue to advocate a global need for safety, skills and standards.

After a successful pilot at the 2015 Global Summit, three

roundtable discussions will precede 2016's conference giving a chance for insurers, vehicle manufacturers and multi-site collision repairers to discuss our industry, each group led by an IBIS Board member. The findings, while anonymous, will feed into a Day 2 session, giving delegates a chance to hear the very latest information from three key sectors of the market.

David Smith, VP supply chain/procurement at US collision repair chain Caliber, will be discussing the MSO's journey to becoming a \$1.3 billion organization and how such a business makes buying decisions. IBIS organizers say every area of our industry could benefit from this session, which is sure to be inspirational as well informative.



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LABOR RATES

NEW 'WHO PAYS FOR WHAT' SURVEY RESULTS SHOW WIDE ALUMINUM LABOR RATE RANGES

BY JOHN YOSWICK | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

It would be easy to say that the national average labor rate for aluminum repair being charged by OEM-certified shops is about \$92 per hour, but that wouldn't quite tell the whole story, according to newly-released findings from the quarterly "Who Pays for What?" survey series conducted by CRASH Network and Collision Advice.

Nearly 800 shops participated in the latest quarterly "Who Pays for What?" survey this past October, and 130 of those shops that are certified by one or more of the automakers to repair aluminum vehicles reported their hourly rates for aluminum repair. Surprisingly, those labor rates spread over more than a \$100 range.

At the low end of rates for structural aluminum repair, a small percentage of shops reported charging only a few dollars more per hour than their regular repair rates. Near the top, there are shops charging in excess of \$145 an hour for certified structural aluminum repairs.

The complete survey findings, now available at www.collisionadvice.com/survey, show hourly labor rates for structural and non-structural repairs (broken down by percentiles) for shops certified by nine different OEM aluminum certification programs.

The 75-page survey report also includes information on:

- what shops estimated they spent on equipment, training and facility changes to meet OEM aluminum repair certification requirements;
- mark-up rates reported by shops for sublet work such as glass, towing, etc.; and,
- payment frequencies among the eight largest insurers for 29 different shop supply estimate line items, such as seam-sealer, panel bonding adhesive and weld-through primer.

Also available at the website are survey findings and analysis of earlier "Who Pays for What?" quarterly surveys, which focused on "not-included" frame/mechanical operations, and "not-included" refinish operations.

Each of the reports also includes analysis and resources to help shops better understand and use the information presented.

"I'm hearing from shops every week who say participating in the surveys is helping them improve their estimating and repair planning," Mike Anderson of Collision Advice said. "This aluminum repair labor rate information is particularly interesting to me. We will continue this series of surveys in 2016 with four more surveys to help shops understand what's happening in the industry."

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Moving on, moving up

A true leader has the ability to know when to turn responsibility over to others

For several columns I've been talking about lessons I learned early in my time in this industry, and what those lessons have meant for my career. Regardless what stage of your career you are in, the experiences of others can lead to valuable knowledge for continued growth and success.

I can easily point to perhaps the most pivotal day in my career in which I was given an incredible opportunity and a lesson in leadership from Don Keenan, the second-generation owner of the company I joined in mid-1993.

Back then, Keenan Auto Body was just opening its second location in the Philadelphia area, and I was hired to run that new location. While this was of course a great opportunity, the defining moment I'm speaking of actually didn't occur until four years later.

In the intervening years, I worked to implement at Keenan Auto Body West many of the same processes and systems I'd used at the dealership body shop where I had previously worked.

This was in the days before there was anything close to the sophistication of the shop management systems we have today.

I used a manual scheduling process that worked on the theory of moving forward with the end in mind. In other words, I'd determine when a car needed to be done, and work back from there to determine when it needed to be done in body and move to paint, etc. It wasn't high-tech, but it worked. That and the other processes and regular meetings with staff we had eventually had that shop humming along.

About four years in, we started to see customers coming in who I actually would have expected to go to our original shop, Keenan Auto Body East, based solely on location. I couldn't figure out why that would be. I asked Don, and he didn't understand it either.

Over time, I figured out that the processes and culture we'd developed at the

company's second shop had helped it develop a reputation for quality and on-time performance. It wasn't that those things were lacking at our original location; we were just using different systems and management styles. And Don's focus was naturally split between running the original shop and expanding the business.

So in 1997, as the company was about to open a third location, I summoned every bit of courage I had and asked Don to consider handing over responsibility for operations to me. Among the points I tried to make: As we open up another location, we really shouldn't have three different processes at three different shops. And by turning over operations to me, it would free him up to get more involved in the industry and focus on the types of CEO responsibilities the growing company needed.

Somewhat to my amazement, Don did just that. I don't think the ego of many company owners would allow them to do that. But Don understood the importance and value of process, calibration and consistency, and I give him a lot of credit for the company's subsequent success (and my career). I couldn't appreciate more how he responded to my question, and I was extremely grateful he was willing to "turn over the keys to the car" to me.

I came away with two lessons. First, as an employee, look for opportunities that could allow you to help the company improve, and if you are confident in your abilities to perform, ask for the additional responsibility and advancement you would like.

Second, what I saw and learned from Don that day is that successful leaders need to understand what their company needs most from them. They work to focus on those things, helping develop others who can take on and excel at the other needed leadership roles within the company.

Thank you, Don. 📧

“THE PROCESS AND CULTURE WE’D DEVELOPED AT THE COMPANY’S SECOND SHOP HAD HELPED IT DEVELOP A REPUTATION FOR QUALITY, ON-TIME PERFORMANCE.”

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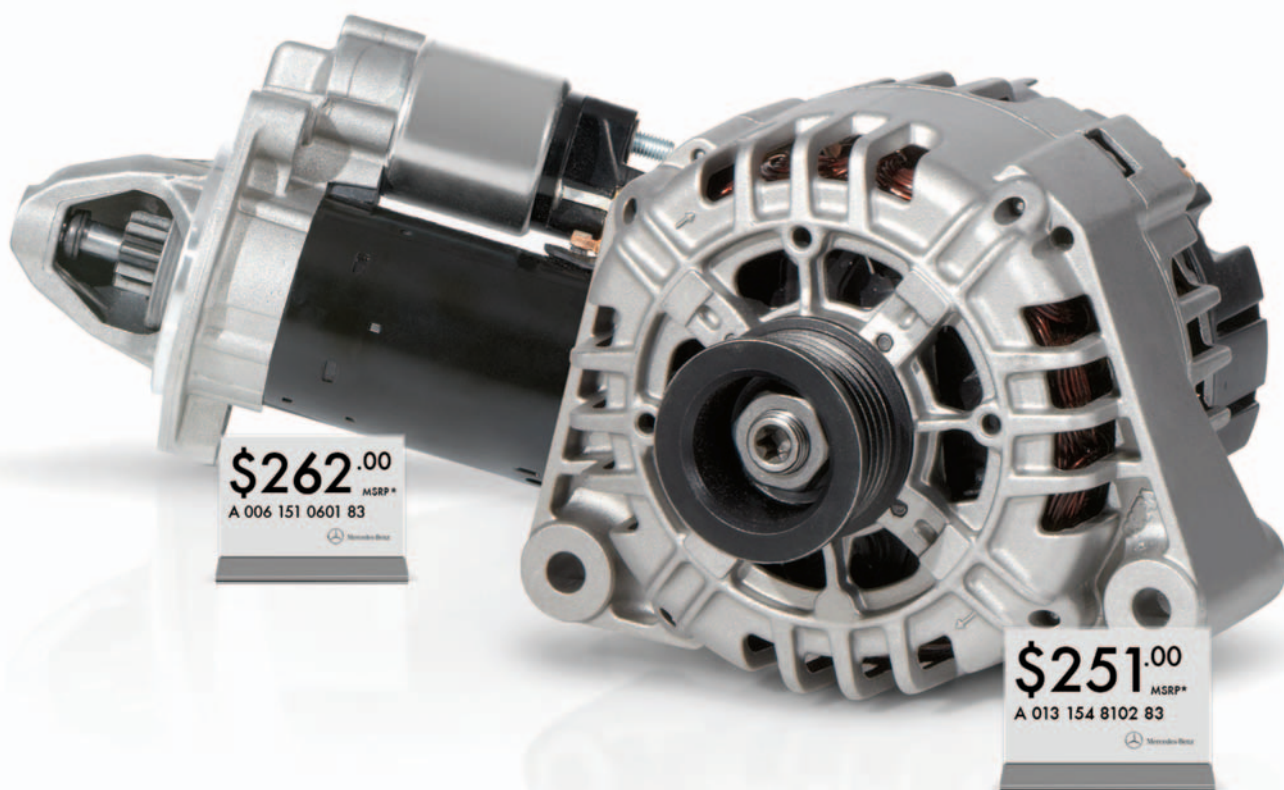


If there's a topic you'd like me to address, I'd love to hear from you.



ABRN.COM/LEVASSEUR

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THE NEW AMi

THE NEXT GENERATION OF AMi SEEKS TO
FOSTER THE LEARNING CULTURE, MORE OPPORTUNITIES

BY **CHELSEA FREY** | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

WITH THE onslaught of technological advances and new information in automotive repair, shops are struggling to stay ahead of the curve. Jeff Peevy, the new president of the Automotive Management Institute (AMi), is using his vast experience of leadership and his passion for education to lead AMi to provide more opportunities for learning and education for the collision and service repair industries. *ABRN* conducted an interview with Peevy to discuss the new AMi, includ-

ing its initiatives for 2016 and beyond and the importance of having a learning culture in your shop.

AMi's mission

Since AMi's inception in 1989, its mission statement has always read, "The Automotive Management Institute identifies, provides and promotes qualified business education for the success of automotive service and repair professionals."

Historically, the organization has reviewed and approved management

and leadership training programs, providing credit hours toward the AMi professional designation known as the Accredited Automotive Manager (AAM). AMi has also developed a series of specialty degrees for the service and collision repair segments.

The overall goal for AMi has been to recognize those who have taken the personal initiative to improve their knowledge, specifically in terms of management and leadership — a goal that Peevy was attracted to and sought to expand.

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DIGITAL with QCC RPS cups 0.3 l, 0.6 l, 0.9 l, 1 ea.	211094	-	211110	211128	211136	211151	211193	211201	211219	-	-
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-JEFF PEEVY [AMi]

The learning culture

AMi's emphasis on the importance of personal growth partners well with what Peevy garnered from his experience of almost 17 years with I-CAR. I-CAR provides much needed technical training for the industry, but throughout his time with the organization, Peevy noticed a connection between a shop's management culture and the willingness of the shop's technicians to participate in training. Peevy explains,



Jeff Peevy,
President of AMi

“My experience at I-CAR helped me better understand the challenges and cultures within the repairer segment that drive the range of behaviors and attitudes to-

ward training and education. One of the things I began to really see was that management tended to be the greatest hurdle a repair operation had to get over in order to change the attitude toward training and education.”

For Peevy, the transition to management-focused AMi was a great way to help both sides of the shop. Peevy states, “When the opportunity came to lead AMi, the idea to influence the management and leadership mindset, and ultimately support them with the challenges they face, interested me.”

As it turns out, the route to changing the outlook on training partly involves altering the words one uses. Peevy explains, “My experience has taught me to speak more in terms of ‘learning’ as opposed to ‘classes’ or ‘training.’” Of course, it's not just a matter of words,

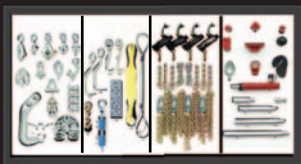
but of concepts — while learning and training go hand in hand, there is a big difference between how they are perceived. Training is often viewed as a benefit to the business, whereas learning is thought of as improving and developing the person. Peevy sums up the divide perfectly: “Training is seen as a requirement and often isn't culturally connected to learning. Many will question the need to attend a class, but few question the need to learn,” he states.

AMi's goals

Looking forward to the future goals for AMi, Peevy stresses the importance of spreading awareness about the learning culture. “I see it as our duty as a nonprofit to serve our industry in the most relevant ways possible. AMi will be very focused on assisting owners

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and managers with maximizing learning in every way that we can. You will see us push the belief that learning is truly the only source for a sustainable competitive advantage. I know firsthand how understanding and embracing that belief begins to transform managers and businesses," Peevy explains.

Beginning with the roots of learning, AMi will offer various tools at no charge to help owners and managers better understand how they and their staff learn best, as well as tips on how to get the most out of the various learning delivery methods, such as online, virtual and live instructor-led training.

AMi has multiple initiatives to implement the maximization of the learning culture, and the institution plans to carry them out by continuing to make industry connections. Peevy continues, "We will grow our collaboration with anyone offering high quality management and leadership learning opportunities, and through our new business model, we will be able to do more to serve the student and the training pro-

viders. We currently have a call for programs to review and receive AMi credit hours. We also plan to support consultants who often find individuals within an operation needing specific training in an area, by providing training organized in structured competencies."

The next generation of AMi will offer professional recognition and designations for roles specific to service repair and collision repair in customer service, office management and general management, including a masters-level general management program.

Consistent with the theme of learning, AMi will begin collecting Training Provider information through a survey on AMionline.org. AMi is asking anyone offering training, whether it be an individual or a company, technical or management, to complete the survey. The information will then be available to the industry in a searchable database that AMi will maintain and provide free to the industry. Visitors to the database will be able to search for technical or management training

in both service repair and collision repair, how the training is delivered and registration.

Finally, AMi will be launching the Leadership Foundation Program, enabling companies and individuals to support the relevant work of the new AMi. This program will recognize tax-deductible donations from those interested in the future success of their customers by enabling low-cost quality management and leadership training and professional recognition programs.

AMi plans to begin launching its "next generation" initiative, as well as a new website and updated logo, in the later part of first quarter of 2016.



CHELSEA FREY
SENIOR ASSOCIATE
EDITOR

Frey is the Senior Associate Editor for *ABRN* and for its sister publication, *Motor Age*, in the service repair segment.


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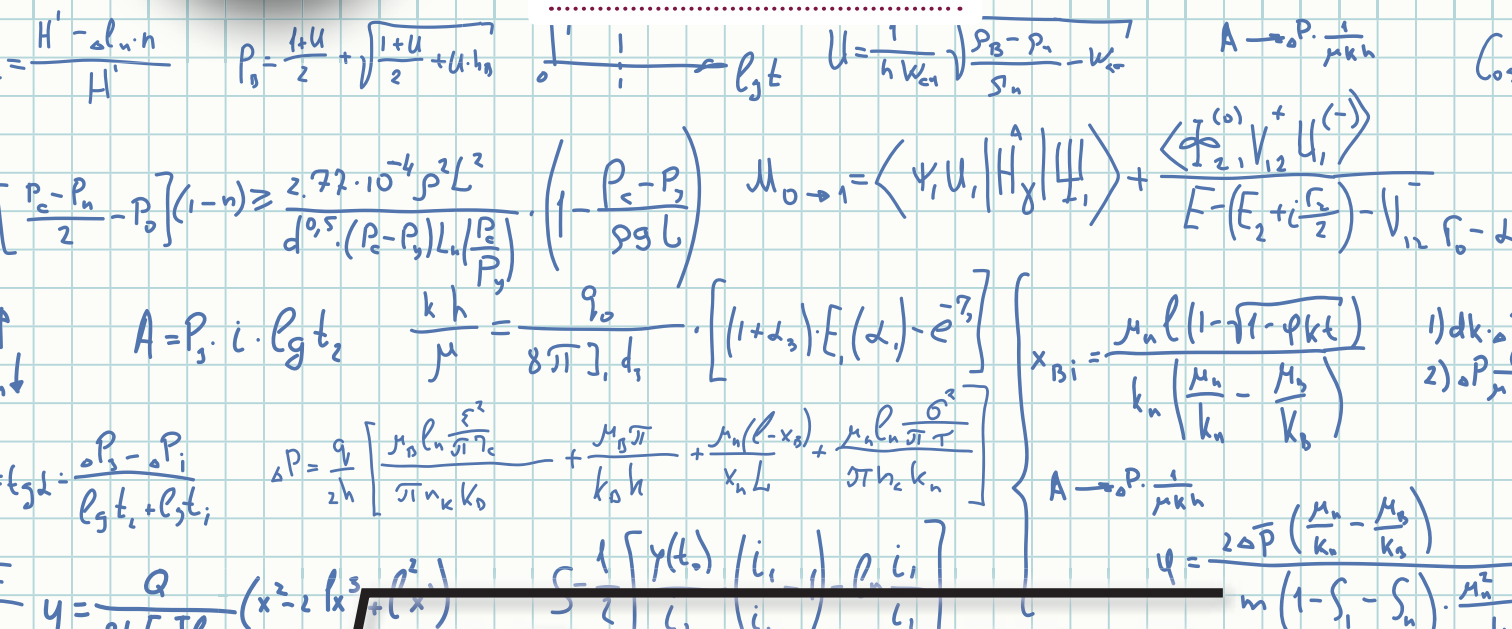
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FORMULA RE-EVALUATION

COLLISION INDUSTRY CONFERENCE COMMITTEE WORKING ON NEW 'CYCLE TIME' FORMULA

BY JOHN YOSWICK | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

AT THE Collision Industry Conference (CIC) in Las Vegas last November, a CIC sub-committee announced that over the coming year it will work with any interested insurers on developing a new formula for estimating cycle time (or “length of rental”) on initial repair estimates.

A panel discussion at CIC in 2014 focused on the challenges currently posed by the wide-ranging formulas some insurance companies use (or require their direct repair shops to use) to determine length of rental,

some of which set unrealistic expectations for consumers. The committee cited examples of formulas that various insurers require shops to use to determine an expected delivery date on the initial estimate; they ranged from one day for every three hours of labor on the estimate to one day for every six hours of labor on the estimate. If the insurers’ goal is to drive performance, one panelist said, that’s one thing, but when it establishes unrealistic expectations for the consumer, and requires multiple adjustments to completion date information

by the shop and rental car company, that impacts efficiency and customer satisfaction.

At the Las Vegas meeting, Pat O’Neill of the CIC Insurer-Repairer Relations Committee said some insurance companies — though he specifically named only Allstate — were planning to work on the creation of a new formula, so the committee “felt it would be very important that as an industry we had input into that process and were able to participate in whatever that outcome may be.”

O’Neill said the sub-committee wel-

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comes involvement by insurers or any others; those who have confirmed participation include Darrell Amber-son of LaMettry's Collision in Minne-sota, Mike LeVasseur of ABRA Auto Body, Frank LaViola of Enterprise and Aaron Schul- enburg of the So- ciety of Collision Repair Specialists (SCRS).



Pat O'Neill

O'Neill said the goal would be to develop an alter- nate formula by the end of 2016 that could be tried by some insurers, but he cautioned that the sub-committee can only offer in- put on the subject.

"This doesn't mean that the re- sult that might come up at the end would be something that CIC would completely condone, but I think it be- hooves us to at least be involved in what might be something that we're going to have to deal with," O'Neill said.

Are parts procurement sys- tems helping?

CIC's Parts and Materials Commit- tee throughout 2015 focused on the role that electronic parts procurement does — or could — have on improv- ing shop and parts vendor efficien- cy. At the Las Vegas meeting, long- time CIC participant Frank Terlep (now with Summit eMarketing Sher- pas) questioned — somewhat rhetor- ically — how much the systems de- veloped over the last 15+ years have actually benefitted any segment of the industry.

Terlep is not involved with parts procurement today, but in 1999 was with CarStation.com, a "dot.com com- pany" that raised \$67 million to build the first parts procurement platform in the industry.

"It failed miserably," Terlep said. "We spent \$47 million in eight months. We went from 13 people to 200 people and never got a product out the door."

But one thing CarStation did do well was gather data, Terlep said.

The company commissioned a very detailed time study that found the av- erage shop then spent about 13 man- hours per day on parts procurement.

"What we found back then, and I assume it's very similar today, is that some of the biggest areas for improvement were checking on parts availability, re-or- dering of parts, parts labeling, parts inventory, in- voice posting into shop management software, and re- turn and credit reconciliation," he said.



Frank Terlep

He suggested the industry might benefit from a similar study today, to quantify where there is still room for increased efficiency. But he said he believes the segment of the industry that needs the most help in terms of parts procurement efficiency is shops — which he said are "the entity that has the least amount of power but touches more parts than anybody else."

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His opinion: "Let's eliminate shops from having to manually import or post parts in their shop management system," Terlep said. "From what I've seen over the years, that's one of the most labor-intensive and error-ridden parts of the procurement process."

Need for ongoing training stressed

CIC's Education Committee in Las Vegas continued its string of panel discussions on the importance of developing more of a learning culture within shops and the industry. Dustin Harrier, a regional director of quality assurance for Service King, said technicians and shops that don't keep up on training are going to increasingly find themselves unable to repair certain vehicles.



Dustin Harrier

"I think everyone in the room is aware of how fast things are moving from a technological standpoint," Harrier said. "You look at the different mixed material platforms that many manufacturers are gravitating toward. You look at the electronics systems. Think about how many fewer things the average technician may be able to fix as the OEMs continue to move forward with all this technology. The individual's ability to flag the hours that he may be accustomed to begins to diminish."

Harrier said he's seeing more technicians reach that level of awareness and start to seek out more training and certifications.

"I think as we move forward in the industry, we really need to embrace that," he said. "Because as individuals and shop owners and an industry as a whole, we're going to watch that pool of dollars continue to shrink down."

Panelist Paul Maiersperger of Axalta Coating Systems said his company is working to address the growing need in the industry for technical education by trying some virtual training for painters. Maiersperger said an earlier discussion at the CIC meeting on some of the tri-coat and other unique finishes being used by automakers offers a good example of the need to get training to a technician at the appropriate time.



Paul Maiersperger

"The chance of getting a guy into a training class to learn about that when the car is actually there in the shop is slim to none," Maiersperger said. "He may learn it and forget it [before such a car comes in] or have that car come in but he's not been to the training."

He said Axalta is experimenting with using a trainer at one location to broadcast topic-specific training out to a half-dozen shops; the paint company's local representatives are in those shops at the same time to help with the hands-on portion of the training.

"We've done two such experiments," Maiersperger said. "We can then record these so anyone can access it at any time to review the content." ❏



JOHN YOSWICK
CONTRIBUTING
EDITOR

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

E-mail John at jyoswick@spiritone.com



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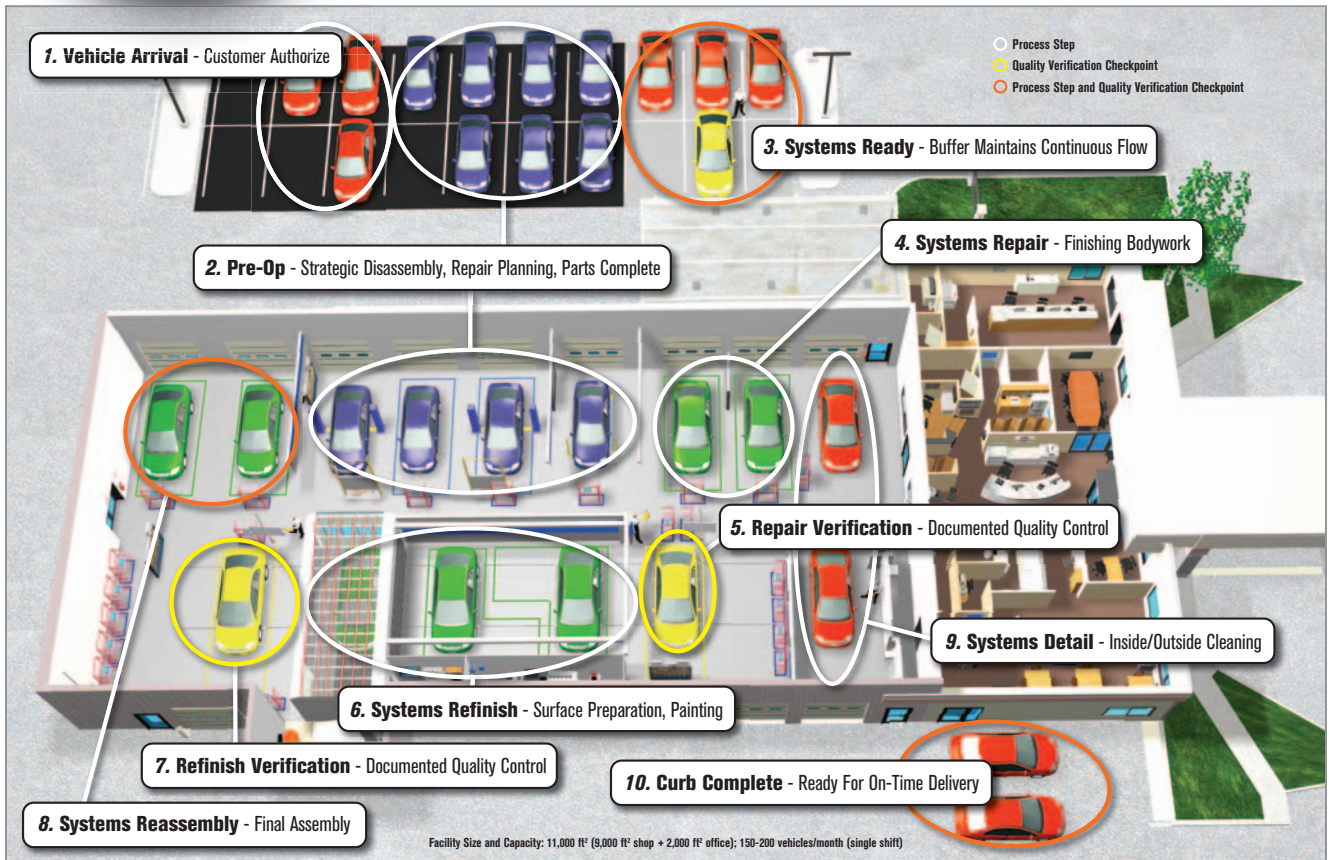


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MINDING YOUR BUSINESS



ARE YOUR TEAM AND CUSTOMERS ON THE SAME PAGE?

ENSURE YOUR BUSINESS VALUES ALIGN WITH THOSE OF YOUR CUSTOMERS

BY MICHAEL GIARRIZZO | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

DCR SYSTEMS — the business I started 11 years ago — was conceived and built around one simple objective: To completely dismantle the conventional collision repair business model and start thinking differently about every aspect of our operation in order to rebuild an environment that was process-centered and would alter the fundamentals that drive our industry.

That mentality, which presumes that

“there has to be a better way” has been at the forefront of our management thinking from day one. And while we’ve struggled from time to time to redefine the process, those speed bumps have ultimately steered us closer to achieving long-term success.

This calculated trial-and-error approach (commonly referred to as “continuous improvement” in lean-speak), when paired with an ever-changing marketplace, has led to some very im-

portant discoveries, which we’ve incorporated into our management thinking and business model. But amid all of the changes, the one key aspect of our market that has remained relatively unchanged is the value that the customer places on what we do.

In DCR’s dealer-based collision repair world, our customer is the vehicle owner. It’s the vehicle owner whose expectations you have to meet the moment they pull into your lot. It’s the ve-

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hicle owner who has to recall the details of their loss that led them to your place of business. It's the vehicle owner who gives the thumbs up (or thumbs down) on your work. And it's the vehicle owner who will tell the rest of the world how good you are at your job, and how well you've met their expectations.

The vehicle owner has their own set of values when they come to you, and if your team is not in tune with those values, you'll suffer in the long run.

Defining customer values

Rule #1 in the lean production world is to know, understand and respond to what your customers value and what they expect. Define exactly what those customer values are, then work to develop a process that is centered on those values.

Developing a process that encompasses customer value begins with a dialog among your employees to first define value, and then examining your entire production process to ensure that everything you do is in line with that definition.

A simple exercise to determine customer value

Here's a question for you to ponder: If given the opportunity, how would your customers redesign your business to improve their collision repair experience to meet their specific values and expectations?

If you and your team are trying to define value without getting your customers' input, then you're simply doing it wrong. Success depends on defining exactly what the customer wants, not what you think the customer wants.

If you can answer this question, then you're well on the path to operating a business model that is more customer centric and less this-is-how-we've-always-done-it centric. And you'll see your bottom line vastly improve.

What we've discovered in our journey to create the ultimate process-centered repair environment are two key values that our customers demand: predictability and dependability.

Customer value #1: predictability

Predictability simply reassures customers that there will be no surprises when their vehicle is returned to them. It provides peace of mind that the customer's "pains" have been heard at the outset by the shop and that those pains will

be rectified upon delivery. It reassures the customer that the greatest care will be taken in every step of the repair process to restore the vehicle to its original splendor. It guarantees that the vehicle will be delivered to the customer in the timeframe that was originally quoted.

Predictability begins at the initial diagnostic end of the process, and involves connecting with the customer on several due-diligence fronts, such as:

- Meeting with and listening to the customer to get him or her to talk about the circumstances that resulted in the loss (while recognizing their stress and confusion)

- Recording every detail of the incident to get a precise idea of the extent of the damage

- Asking the right questions to assess any potential secondary damage: Was there a passenger in the vehicle (seat belt repair needed)? Any beverages in the cup holders (stain removal required)? Was the vehicle pushed into the curb (structural or mechanical alignment assessment)?

- Preparing voice recordings of specific or unique facts from the initial damage assessment. These digital recordings are included in the job jacket, which will be reviewed by the repair planner.

It's these simple up-front steps (and many others) that not only will help you to accurately diagnose the damage, but will enable you to provide a realistic delivery date to the customer.

Predictability means no surprises. If you can provide a customer experience that doesn't include any surprises, then you've successfully connected with one of their core values.

Customer value #2: dependability

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Where's the waste in your process? Is it waiting times? Rework? Moving and identifying vehicles on the lot? Is it searching for that missing clip in the

assembly area? Is it matching color as the vehicle is in the paint booth awaiting paint? All of these wastes add a little chink to your process and slowly begin to erode dependability.

Dependability relies heavily on standards and validation, which begins (again) with precise diagnosis and feeds into all other process areas, including:

- Strategic disassembly (versus a traditional tear-down) to touch and feel for accuracy;

- Utilizing technical support specific to that vehicle to ensure correct parts are ordered;

- Using an estimating database to identify accurate repair costs;

- Mirror-matching parts and repairing the vehicle according to manufacturer standards;

- Establishing quality verification checkpoints throughout the process, which audit everything from the initial repair plan and customer info to parts, cart setup, color matching and beyond.

- Employing a team-approach to repair, which is fortified with ongoing "pitch meetings" or regular on-floor production sessions that constantly update team members while allowing them to point out bottlenecks, issues, inventory and other wasteful flaws in the process. The goal is to keep the process ever-moving (or 100 percent touch-time as we refer to it). If you can maintain a strong validation component throughout the process, you'll cut waste and move closer to dependability. Your customer seeks two simple core values when it comes to the quality and delivery of their vehicle, predictability and dependability. If you can operate a shop that focuses on and pursues these values, then you'll be providing a service that meets or exceeds expectations and thrills the customer. ☑



MICHAEL GIARRIZZO, JR.
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Michael Giarrizzo, Jr. is founder and president of DCR Systems (www.DCRsystems.net) and a pioneer in the utilization of lean production principles on the shop floor.

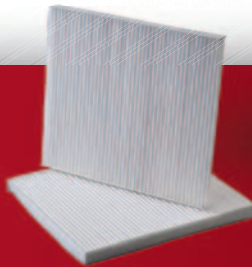
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SHOP PROFILE

A snapshot of one of the industry's leading shops

GUSTAFSON BROTHERS INC. /
HUNTINGTON BEACH, CALIF.



A shop free from stress

Alignment with core values shape this shop's main objective — to ease customer stress

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

At California's Gustafson Brothers Inc., they describe themselves as an all-inclusive vehicle repair operation, serving Orange County's motorists by providing a vast array of body shop and mechanical services along with hosting professional continuing education classes for repair technicians, insurance personnel and smog abatement testing technicians.

In addition to involvement with charitable and civic activities, much emphasis is placed on nurturing a strong team atmosphere specifically aimed at easing stress levels for employees and customers alike.

By pursuing these elements, Gustafson Brothers is able to deliver world class service; 97.5 percent of customers surveyed say that they would refer friends and family to the shop. Out of 1,071 online customer reviews, which can be notoriously tough given the anonymity afforded by the internet, 941 of them award the business five stars, with 77 others issuing a four-star rating.

"We pride ourselves on being cleaner, brighter and more user-friendly than our competition," says owner John Gustafson, who is a certified ASE Master Technician, a Bureau of Automotive Repair certified instructor, a certified I-CAR instructor and a state-

licensed continuing education insurance instructor.

He has been saluted with the Alumni Pillar of Achievement Award from Golden West College for his contributions to the auto industry, and in 2012 the Huntington Beach Chamber of Commerce bestowed its Business in Excellence Award on the shop. The operation was also honored as the Farmer's Insurance Shop of the Year in 2014.

"We work very hard to improve the image of body shops," Gustafson asserts. "We work as a team to deliver value correctly and on time. As a team we follow our core values and work daily to reach our objective to become the organization that provides world class customer service with zero defects and zero stress."

Gustafson characterizes his concept of delivering customer satisfaction as "a composite of many things — professionalism, courtesy, responsiveness, a

AT A GLANCE

Gustafson Brothers Inc.
Name of shop

Huntington Beach, Calif.
Location

John Gustafson
Owner

**3 (1 body shop;
2 mechanical shops)**
No. of shops

45
Years in business

72
No. of employees

3
No. of DRPs

27,000
Square footage

30
No. of bays

5 days
Average cycle time

\$2,500
Average repair order

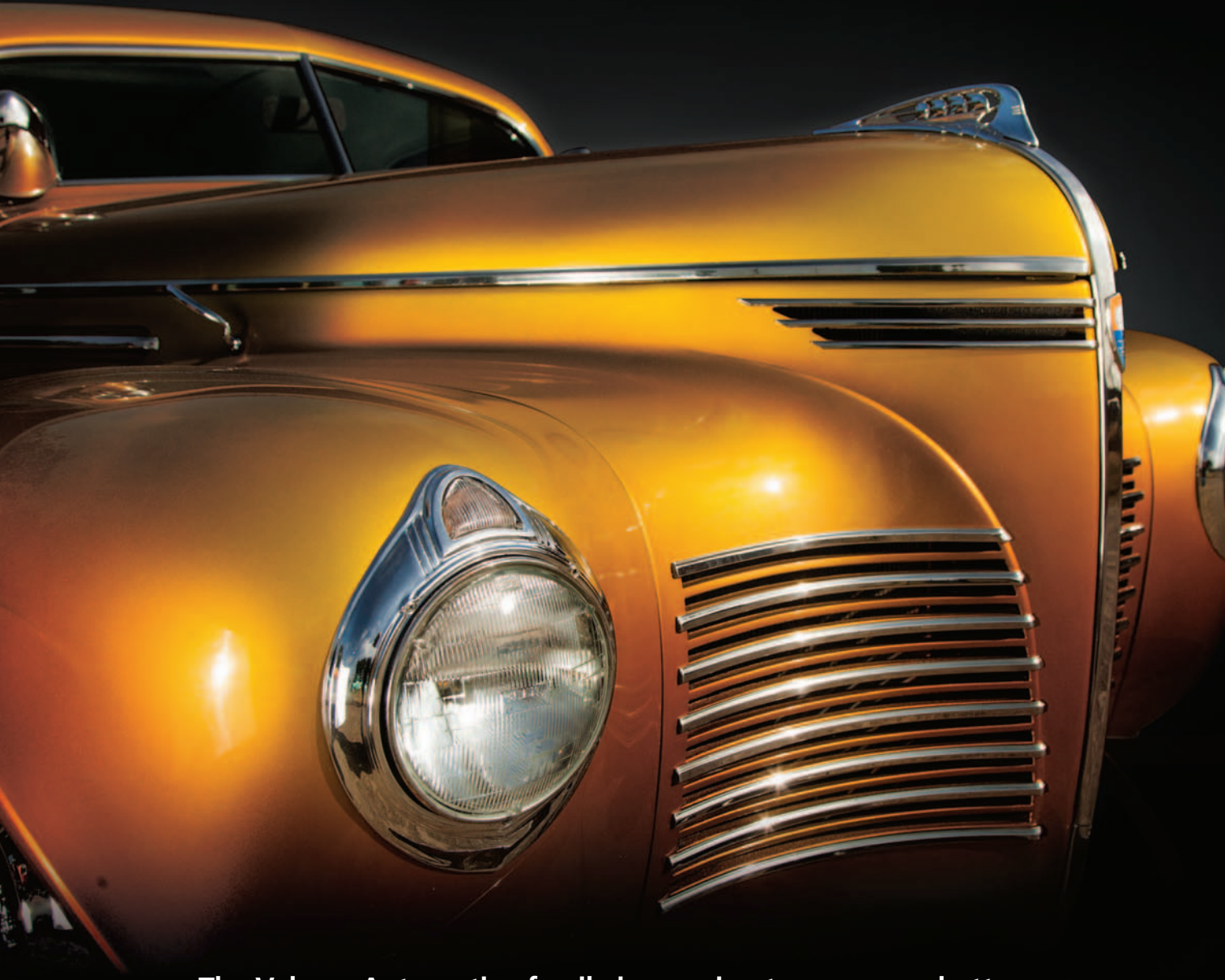
\$220,000
Average weekly volume

88
No. of customer vehicles per week

\$11 million
Annual gross revenue

neat appearance, a friendly atmosphere and a genuine concern for the customer — things that cost little, but are so important to the customers."

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Striving to consistently meet and exceed customer expectations, he notes that it is “the responsibility of every employee to be pleasant, have a positive attitude and provide prompt and professional services” to the patrons at all times.

“We care about our guests, and we care about each other,” says Gustafson. “Our biggest strengths are meeting the customers’ needs. It’s really as basic as that. To meet their needs we work toward our objective and keep each other in alignment with our core values.”

These core values involve adhering to “the highest standards of ethics and integrity,” according to Cynthia Varnell, the company’s marketing and public relations manager, who also assists in the human resources department. “The trust placed in us by our customers, our employees and our community is not taken lightly. We will not take either professional or ethical shortcuts. Since the future of Gustafson Brothers rests squarely on the knowledge, imagination, skills, teamwork and integrity of our employees, we value these attributes above all.”

Such sentiments result in a pronounced pattern of sound relationships with insurance carriers. “We don’t have those battles because they know we’re honest and upfront, and we document everything.” Varnell adds that “we maintain strong relationships with our insurance providers by working together to ensure ultimate customer satisfaction. We believe that if we both work with the customer’s best interest in mind, everyone will be successful.”

The company’s vision and core values culminate in the customers expressing high praise at the conclusion of the repair. “The insurance company looks good and we look good.”

Adding value

As you might expect, maintaining positive relationships with parts and materials vendors is another key priority. “We keep an open dialog with all our external stakeholders,” Gustafson reports. “We share with them our world class vision and our ideas for growth and ultimate customer satisfaction. Together we work to accomplish those goals.”

Lean production strategies are utilized throughout the operation, aided in the implementation by guidance from

paint supplier PPG’s Green Belt consulting program. “We took it and ran with it,” he notes.

“We earn a profit from work that adds value to our customers’ lives,” says Gustafson. “Our ability to perform with excellence depends on maintaining a financial position that enables investment in the future. By providing technology and training for our employees, we give our customers the best value at every service or repair.”

It is especially important that the company is “recognized as a good corporate citizen and an asset to the community,” he says. A commitment to enthusiastically supporting an assortment of charitable and civic causes coincidentally enhances the shop’s marketing strategies while augmenting a significantly positive presence achieved through word-of-mouth recommendations.

“We believe in giving back to the community that supports us. Through our efforts we have not only improved the neighborhood in which we live and do business,” says Varnell, “but we have also built a reputation as an organization that is trustworthy and compassionate.”

She adds, “we have a steady stream of mechanical customers, and our body shop is always top-of-mind in the event they ever need our collision repair services. We also utilize social media, e-newsletters and direct mail.”

Attracting top talent

Ongoing efforts are employed to expand the shop’s training center “for the development of current and future team members and our industry as a whole,” according to Gustafson.

Leveraging educational reimbursement programs, I-CAR classes are conducted by the shop along with free instructional sessions for insurance providers. “Smog Tech Training” and “Smog Update” classes are also provided to interested students from throughout the area. “We are dedicated to helping our participants advance their careers in the automotive industry,” he explains, citing the satisfaction derived from offering these types of opportunities.

“Many automotive professionals are introduced to our facility when they attend one of the various training workshops we offer on site,” says Varnell.

“We have an excellent reputation in the industry, and quite often top talent comes to us. We maintain relationships with our tow drivers, delivery drivers and parts suppliers, and when there is a need we let them know.”

Recruitment opportunities are additionally posted in online forums. “We also offer a referral bonus to our employees if they refer someone who gets hired,” she says. “We believe this is our most successful tool because our employees understand our work culture and ethics. They also have a vested interest in helping the new hire succeed.”

Learning and adapting

The beginning of the business goes back to when brothers John and Frank Gustafson started repairing vehicles as part of their family chores as teenagers. “Neighbors began to take notice of the boys’ skills and started asking if they could repair their cars as well,” says Varnell. Volkswagens and Datsuns became a specialty of sorts in the 1970s.

“Once older brother John graduated from high school and started attending the Automotive Technology Program at Goldenwest, he decided to use his love of repairing cars to make some money. Frank would come in after school to work on the cars. The brothers became successful by meeting the customer’s need. As the demands grew, they grew; as the cars evolved, they evolved,” Varnell recounts. Eventually people started requesting body repairs, “and once again they adapted and learned” this aspect of the industry.

“Finally their dad got sick of them fixing all the cars in the driveway, so he told them they had to get out. John located a dirt lot in Huntington Beach, and that’s where Gustafson Brothers was born,” she says.

Continue reading at ABRN.com/Gustafson. ☞



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

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GET IT RIGHT THE FIRST TIME, EVERY TIME IN YOUR SHOP

Embrace the One Touch Rule and positively improve your return on investment

BY **MIKE JONES** | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

I often ask business owners, paint and body technicians, customer service representatives, estimators and other members of the team the following important question: “Why is there never enough time to do the job right the first time, but there is always time to go back and do it again?” It is absolutely possible to get it right the first time, every time.

Several years ago, I developed the “One Touch Rule,” which is focused on doing it right the first time, every time. If you follow this process, I promise you will have fewer do-overs, which will positively affect your return on investment (ROI).

We begin this conversation with the awareness that it does not matter what you say. What matters is what people hear. In other words, they will deliver what they heard, and it may not be what you said.

Unless you have taught these folks to perform to the standard of excellence you want, don’t assume they are envisioning the same picture in their head that is in yours when

you are telling them what you want. They see a picture that is connected to the way they were taught. If they are not producing the picture of excellence that you want, then shame on you, not shame on them; they do not know what they do not know.

Taking the time to show them what your picture of excellence looks like will slow down the process initially; however, it will speed up the process in the future, and they will get it right the first time.

Here are the six steps to the One Touch Rule:

1. Identify the outcome. Explain how to do an estimate, paint a car, greet the customer — essentially everything necessary to produce getting it right the first time, every time, and to your standards. This is the BIG picture.

2. Tell them, in detail, how to get to that outcome. Do not assume they know. Before moving on to the next step, have them repeat back to you, in detail, how to get to the outcome.

3. Show them the outcome. The outcome is the finished product. This is where you perform the steps that you just taught them to get to the

outcome. While you are performing these steps, it is important to tell them what you are doing while you are doing it. Be gentle with them and allow them to ask questions.

This is an infallible way to make sure that we are speaking the same language and looking at the same picture. For most of you, this process will require some patience, because deep within you, you feel that some of this stuff is common sense. So another question for you: if common sense is so common, why is it so rare?

4. See how you did. Now it is their turn to tell you what the outcome is.

5. Have them tell you in detail how to produce that outcome.

6. Now have them tell you in detail and show you how to get to the outcome.

At the end of the process, give them a grade on a scale of 1-10 and if the grade is not a 10, tell them where they need to polish the process. Now you can manage them to the outcome that you want because you know they are aware of what it will take to follow the One Touch Rule and get it right the first time, every time. ☞

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SOCIAL INSIGHTS



• How financially fit is your business?

Working capital is something that is scrutinized by almost every company but rarely talked about in the collision industry.

But every large MSO in your marketplace is actively managing working capital.

It is also something that major vendors will consider if you are negotiating for a pre-bate or other consideration for purchasing their product.

Banks look at it too. If you want to borrow money to grow, they will scrutinize working capital to ensure that you can afford the loan.

If you ever sell your business, it will be a hotly negotiated topic as well.

Most business owners do not look at working capital until one of the above situations forces a working capital negotiation. But that is the wrong time to start managing working capital. It is like going on a diet the week before your annual doctor checkup.

Understanding working capital will help you better manage your business, better manage your cash flow, and better manage both vendor and customer relationships. It will also help you better position your business for growth, for acquisitions, or for sale. Brad Mewes, *ABRN* contributor, collision repair consultant and finance expert, further discusses working capital and what you need to know.

ABRN.com/workingcapital

• Do your customers have enough good material to read while you work?

On LinkedIn, Rob Infantio, founder and CEO at Openbay, challenges shop owners to ensure their waiting rooms are up to par.

Infantio writes: “If you’re a repair shop owner/operator, you’re probably focused on managing your business. And while you have your head down working hard, you might not glance up often enough to see your waiting room through your customers’ eyes.

The last time we had our car worked on, we went to

a local shop, which has a small waiting room, and, rather than bury our heads in a smartphone, we took a moment to look around. There wasn’t much we could do to stay occupied, and we were wishing for some interesting reading materials.” Click on the link below to see Infantio’s suggestions on some reading items that should be in your waiting room.

ABRN.com/reading

• Handling the cold weather and your vehicle inventory

On Facebook, Scuderi Auto Body CARSTAR in Maryland offers a few tips on how to best handle the vehicles sitting in your lot and waiting for repair during the winter months.

The shop wrote: “Brrr, it’s finally gotten cold in Maryland. A few tips to take care of that cold car. Stay warm out there.

1. Idling: Letting the car warm up is a comfort more for us than the car. Best practice is to start the car, then drive very simply until the oil gets heated. It’ll heat faster driving at slow speeds without sudden acceleration than just idling in your drive. In extreme cold, however, many professionals recommend idling for a minute or two. Idling for 10-15 minutes, could dilute the oil with unburned fuel, resulting in increased engine wear. And it wastes gas.

2. Tire pressure: Having the correct tire pressure is essential for proper handling. A temperature change of just 10 degrees can cause a 10 percent reduction, or constriction, of air in tires. So tire pressure can be affected from day to night temperature. Check the optimal tire pressure of your vehicle on the label inside the driver’s door frame or in the owner’s manual. **DO NOT USE THE PSI on the TIRE!** That’s max capacity for the tire, not for your car’s specific load.

3. Battery care: The most common winter car malady is the battery not starting. The number one thing you should do for the night is shut off all accessories — the heat, radio, interior lights — any power source that could be a drain for the battery.

ABRN.com/Scuderitips

TRAINING EVENTS

FEBRUARY 23-24

• **Non-Structural Body Repair Techniques; Toyota**
 West Caldwell, New Jersey

MARCH 3

• **Estimating Solutions for Profit; Sherwin-Williams Automotive Finishes**
 Tampa, Florida

MARCH 18-20

• **AASP-NJ Northeast**
 Secaucus, New Jersey

MARCH 22

• **Refinish Technician Assistant Training; PPG**
 San Francisco, California

APRIL 14

• **AASP-MN Annual Meeting and Leadership Conference**
 Minneapolis, Minnesota

APRIL 20-21

• **Collision Industry Conference**
 Seattle, Washington

MAY 2-4

• **WIN 2016 Educational Conference**
 Tampa, Florida

MAY 23-25

• **International Body Shop Symposium (IBIS) Global Summit 2016**
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**IN LOOKING TO RETURN VEHICLES TO PRE-ACCIDENT
CONDITION, REMEMBER YOU CAN MAKE OEM-QUALITY
REPAIRS WITH SEAM SEALERS AND FOAMS**

Liquid-Applied Sound Deadeners (LASDs) dampen vibration and noise in floor panels, vehicle underbodies and inner cabins. The photo depicts the replacement of OEM (LASD) in a wheelhouse.

BY **DOUGLAS CRAIG** | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

The main objective for a collision repair shop technician is to restore a damaged car to its pre-accident condition. This will not only satisfy OEM and safety requirements, but will also guarantee customer satisfaction.

So, how do you return a damaged vehicle to its “as-built” condition? The answer is “by using materials that are equivalent to the original manufacture.” You can use repair seam sealers and foams that duplicate the look and performance of the original OEM products.

The long-term safety of the vehicle is the most crucial point to remember when performing repair operations. A

damaged vehicle must be properly sealed, corrosion protected and brought back to “as-new” condition to ensure the “crash-worthiness” of the car in three or five or seven years. Make sure you use the appropriate repair material in the right place to protect the longevity of the vehicle.

OEMs and NVH

Car manufacturers use seam sealers and foams to control noise, vibration and harshness/corrosion (NVH) almost anywhere in a vehicle body. OEMs primarily use one-component products, which cure during the e-coating process; however, two-component products

are sometimes installed in the paint shop after the e-coating has been cured.

Typically, two-component seam sealers and foams are used in the repair process, since the heat system needed to cure a one-component material is not feasible for a repair shop. Two-component products/materials allow the repair technician to achieve the same quality or characteristics that are evident in the component being repaired.

Here’s how OEMs use NVH products in vehicle production:

- Noise control – Foams eliminate air movement in the auto-body shell; when air movement is curtailed, noise is reduced

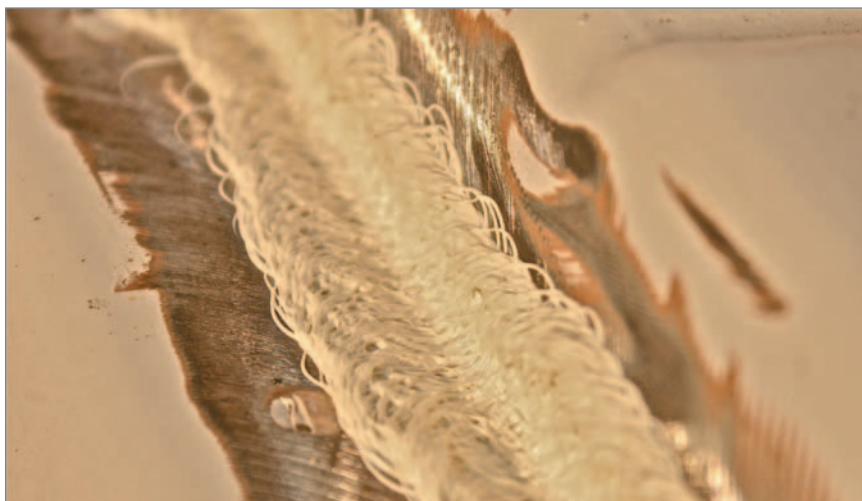
- Sound and vibration dampening LASDs (Liquid-Applied Sound Deadeners) are used to dampen vibration and noise in floor panels, vehicle underbodies and inner cabins

- Harshness – Sealers and foams are used to provide a “smooth” ride for the driver and passenger by eliminating air gaps that can lead to a “bumpy” ride

- Corrosion protection – Sealers and foams that are specially formulated to prevent various car parts from corroding

While it is not possible to exactly duplicate the seam sealers and foams used in OEM production, the repair products that are available will produce equivalent results. This is especially evident with two-component seam sealers and foams used for repair versus one-component OEM products. Different types or formulations of repair products can still provide the same outcome.

More often than not, an OEM will indicate that a sealer or foam has been used in a particular area of a vehicle,



Two-component seam sealers duplicate a factory appearance on truck bed seams, tooled door-skin seams, floor-pan seams and core-support seams. Two-component sealers cure quickly, allowing for improved cycle times and increased profitability. Some can be applied directly to bare metal for further savings.

but they might not always describe the type of product or specify which product to use for repair. However, more and more OEMs are beginning to identify options to use as repair products.

Seam sealer or foam?

How then does a repair technician know when to use a particular seam sealer or foam? A repair technician should always begin a repair opera-

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tion by reviewing the OEM's repair documentation to see if there is any indication given as to what products should be used for repair. The technician should next do the obvious — as you are dismantling a vehicle, look closely at the material that needs to be replaced. If OEM-recommended repair products are not specified, try to duplicate as closely as possible the material that you are touching.

Another valuable source for repair advice is your jobber's technical representative. The representative can help you choose the proper repair product that will closely match the OEM's product, and can also supply repair procedure documents, instructional materials and user safety information.

Repair product selection

Foam repair products are available in two-component formulations and two densities. Soft foams offer anti-flutter properties; and firmer, denser foams control air flow and noise through vehicle cavities. The dense foams are used in any area where an inner and outer layer of steel can cause a noise path.

Two-component foams come in a cartridge formulation and cure through a rapid chemical reaction, not heat. The repair materials, Part A and Part B, mix together as they are applied and will begin to expand and cure within seconds. They cure quickly, helping to speed repairs.

Sealers are available in both one- and two-component formulations. Two-component sealers will cure through a chemical reaction; one-component sealers cure through a moisture reaction. Older technology sealers cured through evaporation of solvents. Certain one-component sealers, such as windshield urethane, will not attain a strong bond directly to metal. For metal-to-metal applications, use DTM (direct-to-metal) sealers for the best results and corrosion protection.

There are three methods for using seam sealers:

- **Weld-through sealers** – The sealer is applied in the joint between panels. The sealer is welded through by resistance-spot welding or the panels are held together by mechanical fasteners, such as rivets.
- **Applied over a joint** to cosmetically hide or seal the joint

A SEAM SEALER AND FOAM GUIDE

There are many types of seam sealers and foams available for duplicating the appearance and performance characteristics of vehicle OEM production. Here are some of the various formulations a collision repair shop should have in stock for repair work.

- **Rigid Foams** – These can be used in automobile pillars, rocker panel areas and other locations to promote sound deadening and reinforcement. They match OEM hard-foam appearance and will not retain moisture.
- **Flexible Foams** – Can be used for sound deadening, sealing and filling door skins to crash bar, hood panels to supports, trunk panels to supports and gas-tank filler areas.
- **Direct-to-Metal Sealer/Adhesives** – Duplicates a factory appearance on

standing seams, cosmetic seams, truck-bed seams, tooled door-skin seams, floor-pan seams, core-support seams, brushed seams, and other applications requiring a non-sag cosmetic seam sealer.

- **Self-Leveling Seam Sealers** – Use on drip rails, trunks, core support for aprons, roof seams and quarter panel to rear deck.
- **Controlled-Flow Seam Sealers** – Can be used on roof channels, door seams, drip rails, trunk seams, and truck-bed floor seams. These sealers cure quickly and are sandable to a feather-edge.
- **High-Definition Sealers** – These products will duplicate the look and function of OEM sealers, including sound-deadening material, wheel-house coatings and “swirled” seam sealers. They can be used on bare and primed metal as well as SMC and Fiberglass®.

▪ **LASD – Liquid-Applied Sound Deadener** – a seam sealer applied to a panel to add mass or stiffen or create an insulating layer. The LASD can be applied by trowel or spray.


In some repair applications, a foam product used in production can be replaced with a sealer, if the foam's purpose was to close gaps between car panels. During car assembly, panels do not always fit together perfectly in order to provide the tolerances needed to build the car. In these instances, the OEM will apply a foam product to fill the gaps.

When not to use

Do not use a seam sealer if a structural adhesive or a crash-durable adhesive is recommended for repairing a vehicle. While “sealers” are technically “adhesives,” in general, they have much lower bond strength and material strength, and do not provide the robust characteristics of structural and crash-durable adhesives. Using sealers where adhesives are suggested could ultimately diminish the vehicle's capabilities.

Do not perform MIG welding operations on or near the application of a seam sealer or foam. Some seam sealers/foams are highly flammable, including not only aftermarket products, but those used in OEM production. Do not apply seam sealer material within

two inches of the joint to be welded. Since resistance spot welding does not have the danger of producing an arc as with MIG welding, resistance spot welding can be performed with a seam sealer or foam, although safety procedures should always be followed for any type of welding operation. Foams can be applied to a part and/or the adjoining area, after welding has been completed. Remember: Weld first; then apply the repair sealer/foam. In most cases, foams will be installed after panels have been permanently attached to the vehicle.

When the objective is to duplicate the appearance and performance characteristics of OEM manufacture, using the proper seam sealers and foams can help you reach that goal. Seam sealers and foams offer easy application, with quick-curing properties. The end result will be a repair that is done correctly and will garner customer satisfaction. 



DOUGLAS CRAIG
CONTRIBUTING
EDITOR

Douglas is the Technical Application Engineer & Collision Industry Liaison, Structural Adhesives Tech Service, with LORD Corporation.

 E-mail Douglas at douglas_craig@lord.com

TRAINING  IN FOCUS


FABRICATION FEATS

Metal fabrication services can help shops tap into both the custom modification and restoration markets.

CONSIDER ADDING METAL FABRICATION TO YOUR SHOP'S SERVICES

BY **TIM SRAMCIK** | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

I recently spoke with a retiring shop owner who bemoaned the loss of metal working skills in the collision repair industry. "We no longer fix metal," he stated. "At best, we simply replace parts." This is due in part to the widespread usage of high-strength steel (HSS) on outer panels and closure panels, which are more difficult to reshape and straighten.

The metal working part, or metal shaping techniques, has largely slipped away because manufacturers and insurers recommend part replacement most of the time due to cost and other issues, such as the performance of carefully calibrated safety systems and substrate tensile strength. That doesn't mean metal fabrication has no place in a modern shop. Some repairers practice this art as part of restoration services or race car building, or customization of a show car. In some rare instances, some shops will need to turn to metal fabrication when parts aren't available for customers looking to extend the lives of older model vehicles. These types of repairs are generally corrosion-related repairs.

These services can all provide valuable revenue streams and create opportunities to win new customers. Interested?

With assistance from the experts at the Eastwood Company, here's a look at a common metal fabrication repair, along with the basics you should know before performing this work.

Before beginning

Regardless of what level of fabrication work you intend to perform, your employees will need training and practice — lots of practice — to develop marketable fabrication skills. You'll need to set aside time and invest in materials and parts to allow workers to fine tune their fabrication abilities. You also should look for an instructor, fabrication expert or non-competing shop that offers these services you can call upon as a resource when you have questions.

Tools of the trade

Adding metal fabrication services usually doesn't involve a significant investment in equipment, since your shop probably already has most of the necessary tools. Review the following list of requirements to ensure your shop is properly stocked.

Metal cutting

- Tin snips — Straight, right- and left-hand tin snips (also called aviation snips) are typically color coded: yellow for straight cuts, red for left-hand cuts and green for right hand.
- Electric metal shears — A power version of tin snips, these shears use rotating jaws to slice through steel up to 18-gauge thick.
- Throatless shears — Throatless hand shears cut through 14-gauge mild steel and 18-gauge stainless steel using a rack and pinion gear design with an extended handle to significantly increase leverage and cutting power.
- Angle grinder — Used for rough cutting, cleaning up body work to be patched, and cutting patch panels from parts cars, a 4.5 in. abrasive cut-off wheel also can slice through multiple layers of sheet metal.
- Plasma cutter — A plasma cutter is needed for thicker metals and irregular shapes that can't be properly cut with metal blades.

Joining tools

- TIG welder — TIG welding is the

preferred method of welding patch panels since it burns cooler, and distorts panels less often compared to a MIG welder. It also is less likely to burn through the metal.

- MIG welder — MIG welders can be used for thin sheet metal work if the employee is experienced with this work. Usually, MIG welders are too powerful to weld body panels without burning through the metal.
- Clamps — Magnetic and mechanical clamps and holders keep fabricated patches in place. Intergrip panel clamps work best for butt welds.

Forming tools

- Hammer and dolly — Still necessary for most metal shaping jobs, these tools require significant practice to master.
- English wheel — Creates compound curved panels from flat pieces of metal. This tool also requires plenty of practice to master.
- Sheet metal break — Creates boxes, brackets and other simple shapes using only straight-edged bends.
- Bead rollers — These tools add strength to thin access panels, trunk



Metal fabrication services can help shops tap into both the custom modification and restoration markets.

floors, floor pans and other areas. They also can be used to make professional looking louvers for hoods and trunk lids and can form curved panels for things like roll pans.

Panel patching steps

The following steps describe how to remove chrome plastic fender vents and replace with a solid steel patch to create a more unique, sharper profile on a truck. This is a popular exterior modification. The directions here can

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serve as a model for performing other similar fabrication services.

Step 1. Pry off the vent using a plastic trim tool to reveal the recessed area underneath.

Step 2. Create a template for the replacement metal. Cut a rectangular piece of poster board slightly larger than what will be needed. Use masking tape to attach it to the fender fully covering the vent area. Using a marker and your finger, press on the edges of the recessed area and draw several plus signs, one in line with the edge and one perpendicular to the edge, to create an outline of the vent. Do this along the entire outer edge of the vent area. Use a ruler to connect all the intersecting points. Complete using a ruler and an exacto knife to cut out the template.

Step 3. Test the template by fitting into the vent area. It should sit as flush as possible to reduce the amount of filler and additional body work later.

Step 4. Carefully trace the shape onto a piece of 18-gauge steel.

Step 5. Cut out the shape with a plasma cutter using two pieces of 1/4 in. bar as a guide to make the cuts straight.

Step 6. Attach a 60-grit flap disc to a 4.5 in. grinder and remove the burrs and any surface rust. Bevel the edges to ensure the patch sits flush with the panel to help provide a much cleaner weld.

Step 7. Curve the patch piece to match the slight curve of the factory

with a bench top English wheel. Carefully apply only forward and backward pressure on the patch in line with the wheel. Placing too much side pressure on the patch will create a dome that will not match the contour of the fender. You can also avoid creating a dome by placing a rubber band over the upper wheel. Doing so reduces the side-to-side stretching of the metal since the band stretches in its place.

Step 8. Test the panel patch. Use a magnet to hold the patch piece in place. Examine the fit and gaps from multiple angles to make sure no corners are too high or out of place. If necessary, grind any unsatisfactory areas into shape. Spray the back of the patch with a self-etching weld-thru primer to prevent rusting from the inside.

Step 9. Prep the panel area. Place a flap disc on a 4.5 angle grinder. Remove the paint down to the bare metal all the way around the areas that will be welded.

Step 10. Fit the patch into the panel in the proper position. Using a TIG welder, tack weld the panel into place.

Step 11. Examine the weld. If the patch is no longer sitting flush, adjust it without cutting the piece out to save the welds. Using a wide flat-blade screw driver, put half of the blade on the patch and half on the panel. Press the patch so it sits just below flush with the opening; then place a tack weld right above the blade. If the panel sits too low in the opening, use a very fine flat-blade screwdriver to pry the panel up to the desired depth.

Step 12. Apply filler. Experts recommend contour short-strand fiberglass filler since it's much stronger than ordinary filler, allowing techs to apply it in much heavier portions to fill larger depressions and gaps. Before application, clean the area with a pre-painting product to remove any contaminants that can impede adhesion. Apply the filler on all the weld seams, as well as the top section of the patch (the lowest areas need the most support). Note that short strand fiberglass filler is very tough and hardens quickly.

Step 13. Begin sanding 10-15 minutes after the filler application using 40-60 grit paper to remove the high spots. Then, use 80 grit to level the rest of the area.

Step 14. Apply a contour glazing putty to finish the panel.

Step 15. Apply primer to seal the area. First, wipe down the area again

with a prep cleaner. Tape the area about 5 inches off the filler edge to prevent primer overspray. Apply a 2K urethane primer surfacer. Start from the outside and work your way in.


Step 16. Use 320-400 grit paper on a block to remove any imperfections.

Step 17. Prep the repair for painting. Block sand the entire repair area with 400-grit paper to remove sanding scratches. With a red scuff pad, scuff the existing paint to create a uniform painting surface that will help the basecoat stick. Wipe off the panel one more time with the cleaning product; then use a tack rag to remove any lint or dirt from the painting surface.

Note that fiberglass filler material can create more dust and contaminates than other body filler. You'll need to take extra steps to thoroughly remove these particles to avoid having them set into fresh paint. Always use a blow gun to move as much dust and dirt away from the area surrounding the panel and dust the floor thoroughly.

Other notes

While you continue to build fabrication skills, two areas you'll want to address are marketing and pricing. Your business will need to investigate what fabrication services will be most in demand in your area. From there, you'll need to address competitive pricing to make sure you're properly compensated. A quick audit of competitors' charges can help here. Labor rates should be superior to what you collect from insurance-paid work.

Considering your start-up investment will be relatively modest, metal fabrication can be a great fit for a number of shops, especially smaller, standalone businesses. Indeed, adding a service that can help these repairers survive in the shadow of growing regional and national MSOs is no small feat. 



TIM SRAMCIK
CONTRIBUTING
EDITOR

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.

 E-mail Tim at TSramcik@yahoo.com



The more difficult aspects of learning fabrication include mastering tools such as this bench-top English wheel.

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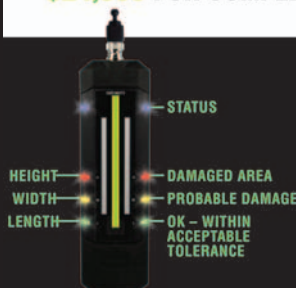
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T H E L A S T D E T A I L

Our industry is definitely in consolidation mode. If you read the daily updates from the trade press, acquisitions have become the norm. And all this consolidation is a positive sign that the industry is strong and growing.

But strength in numbers may not necessarily equate to an enhanced overall customer experience. A network of collision repair centers comprised of a bunch of newly-acquired shops spanning a number of states and sporting the same sign out front does not guarantee immediate bottom-line success. That guarantee comes from being able to replicate a positive customer experience at each shop and then extending that experience throughout the entire network.

I often hear the term "replicate" used in industry circles when talking about the future of consolidation and multi-store operations in our industry. And while I wholeheartedly acknowledge consolidation as well as the MSO business model, and applaud some of the efforts to make change in the industry, I'm cringing a bit because of the challenges that lie ahead for the more rapidly growing networks.

Integrating an independent shop into a larger network involves so much more than simply switching the sign out front and changing a few up-front processes. That's just the start of what will become a herculean effort to realizing true business and customer model replication.

In the marketing world, branding extends well beyond a familiar logo. It's the feel one gets — the emotions a customer experiences — from your product or service.

What's the first thing that comes to mind when you think of Ritz-Carlton? Nordstrom? Apple? Morton's Steakhouse? Volvo? Each brand has its own "experience." Whether it's amazing customer service, top-notch product design or unfettered safety and performance, the brand experience is what keeps customers happy and loyal. The real challenge is to replicate that experience across your entire network of shops, and that ain't easy.

It starts up front with familiar-looking environments, like inviting lobbies and other public environments that welcome customers. It's the consistent use of layouts and colors, of consistent messaging, of consistent care by the team members receiving that customer.

This type of consistency up front is achieved by establishing and documenting standard processes and company guidelines that are taught to new employees the minute they walk through the door, and strictly enforced throughout the entire network.

On the back end, it's a team-based, continuous workflow process approach that ensures replicated results. It begins with meticulous pre-planning to identify and secure every component needed to begin the reconstruction process. It involves regimented procedures and standards that are aligned with OE guidelines. It requires taking advantage of the many benefits of using OEM-specific materials and parts. It measures success by the quality work standard and on-time delivery, not by the individual technician efficiency.

But in order for the team to work as the proverbial well-oiled

CONSCIENTIOUS CONSOLIDATION


Replication requires "standard process" thinking inside and out

machine, its members have to be on the same page. That's where education and training enters the fold. The business must provide the resources that allow team members to:

- Possess a thorough understanding of repair methods
- Utilize proper equipment
- Maintain a high level of continuing education
- Have a complete understanding of the shop's production process and how it impacts cycle times, quality and output
- Keep a close eye on manufacturer bulletins
- Maintain credentialing from quality training sources such as I-CAR and ASE Training

Similarly, the business itself needs to:

- Invest in the latest technologies to streamline the increasing complexity of collision repair
- Utilize I-CAR and ASE certified technicians who are continually trained in the latest technologies and best practices
- Provide ongoing coaching, education and learning clinics for the team
- Stress consistency in all phases of production, from panel welds and bonding to grit choice and what can seem like documentation overkill
- Promote processes that closely follow OE guidelines and paint manufacturer guidelines

While the drive to acquire shops and consolidate the industry has vast appeal from a business perspective, the real challenge is to ensure replication throughout the network, which begins at the front of the shop and extends right through to vehicle delivery. Only then will you begin to realize true value from your brand. 

“Strength in numbers may not necessarily equate to an enhanced overall customer experience.”

ABRN.COM/GIARRIZZO



Michael Giarrizzo, Jr.

is founder and president of DCR Systems (www.DCRsystems.net) and a pioneer in the utilization of lean production principles on the shop floor.

Questions or comments can be sent to Michael at mgiarrizzo@dcrsystems.net



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