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**A LOOK INSIDE
MO' MUSCLE CARS**

PLUS:

2013 PROJECT VEHICLES

EXHAUST SYSTEMS

ENGINE OILS

WIRING

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Mo' Muscle Cars thrives in the Houston area by being dedicated to the needs of muscle car enthusiasts. With a 12-person staff, a bustle of activity happens each day in the shop's 16,000-square-foot facility where projects range from simple one-off upgrades to full custom builds. (Photo by Jason Cohen)



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On Purism

If there's one thing you as a shop owner can probably count on, it's that customers will always be looking for the same thing: a car that feels special.

For some, it's a "matching numbers" car that's either been impeccably maintained and preserved, or one that's been resurrected from a barn and restored to factory mint condition. Those machines are part of history. They speak to a bygone era of a different culture of craftsmanship and popular taste. They remind people of certain times and certain places. Whenever I see a 1956 Buick Special, for instance, I remember the road trip our family took when we moved from Long Island, N.Y. to Longview, Texas in 1962. All the smells and sights of crossing the country in that '56 Buick come back and today, it's just a pleasure to see one that's been taken care of.



Eddie Wieber
Editor

I know people have a lot of different ideas about how something like a '56 Buick should look, feel, smell and sound in the year 2013. But what's really interesting about a classic car is to imagine how it was produced and who produced it, especially considering the tooling and manufacturing processes that were employed when it was built. Long before computers enabled factories to manufacture engines with tight and repeatable tolerances, analog systems produced millions of engines using processes that might be automated now but were done by hand back then.

But from a practical perspective, those engines, drivetrains, steering systems, brakes and sound systems were no where close to as sophisticated back then as what can be done today.

So while some "matching numbers" purists might not take a '56 Buick Special with disc brakes and electronic fuel injectors seriously, another type of purist might want modern steering, suspension and air conditioning on their '56 Buick restoration. But those customers want everything to perform, not just look pretty. So the purism factor takes on a different blush when the standard is not so much historical accuracy but rather, reliable performance and ride comfort.

Knowing there are different ways to look at it and that people have different tastes, we've assembled this issue to help shed some light on those different faces of purism with articles that cover exhaust systems, engine oils, and wiring – along with a section of project vehicles that are excellent examples of how those concepts have been applied to real cars. We think you'll find a few ideas that will help make the best of what's available – whether restoring purely for history, performance, or both.

Have a great month...

QUICK LESSONS FROM THIS ISSUE . . .

"...In modified engines... the engine is creating more horsepower than it was designed for. So it's also important to choose an engine oil with good viscosity retention to maintain oil pressure, particularly under hot driving conditions..." (page 26)

"...Clean air is a national concern addressed by the EPA, but the laws governing how motor vehicle smog checks are performed, which vehicles are tested and how frequently, is handled at the state and local level..." (page 39)

"...Rather than serving simply as outlet paths for the exhaust, properly selected headers for a given application can and will increase engine efficiency..." (page 42)

"...Customers... have grown accustomed to electrical features in their daily drivers so they want these in their restorations, hot rods, Pro Touring cars and street rods..." (page 48)

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Mo' Muscle Magic

The next generation of restomod masters at Houston-based Mo' Muscle Cars are cranking out cutting edge classics with an eye to the past.

BY JAKE RISHAVY

PHOTOS BY
JASON COHEN

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Back in 2005, Houston-based classic car enthusiast Tim Meaux, like so many other recreational builders around the country, was fed up.

For a few years prior, he'd become accustomed to dropping his projects at a seemingly reputable shop, cutting a deposit check, heading home and waiting.

And waiting.

And waiting some more...

At times it could be years before progress was made and, even then, the work was rarely up to his demanding standards. Meaux knew shops were using his deposit to fund work on other vehicles and he despised the practice. Some would even go out of business before completing the work he had paid for.

In a video from that time, Meaux expounded on his vision with a trace of frustration in



PUTTING IN WORK

While he's passionate about all of the custom work his shop turns out, a few notable recent projects rise to the top of the pile for Mo' Muscle Cars' Blake Meaux.

"One of my favorites is one we recently finished, an 800-plus horsepower 1964-and-a-half Mustang Convertible," he says. "This car is bad to the bone."

The Mustang has a completely modern drive train with a modified 2007 5.4-liter Shelby GT500 powerplant with a Kenne Bell supercharger, custom built dash and console, electric power disk brakes, Control Freak independent suspension, hand-built headers, exhaust and tips, a modified hood to clear a blower and powder-coated trim to offset painted bumpers.

"It's really a super muscle car," says Blake. "It's putting out 820 horsepower at the flywheel and drives completely like a modern vehicle. This is our second build for this customer—we did a resto-mod '57 Chevy for him a while back, which took home the CASI Cup at the 2012 Houston Autorama—so we want to do our best.

"He's talked about doing a Power Tour event with it, but even if he doesn't, I know he will drive it regularly and enjoy it. It deserves to be driven. It's a mean, street-pounding machine."

Another special recent project was a 1967 Camaro, also recently completed.

"That was a really special build," he says. "The body was pretty bad on the car when we got it, so we upgraded it to a new Dynacorn. Everything except the sub frame is brand new."

Under the upgraded body, the '67 features a new LS3 engine with a 6-speed transmission and all modern components including a Hotchkis Sport Suspension, GM 12 bolt with Eaton Posi Differential, Classic Instruments Gauges, Vintage Air A/C, complete power windows, custom audio and more.

"It's an amazing vehicle; you drive it at 75 miles per hour and it's still riding at 2200 rpm," he laughs. "We call that a pro touring custom. With a modern suspension and drive train and a comfortable interior, you could drive it from here to New York and be perfectly comfortable, yet it's still got enough power to race it."

Blending classic style with modern conveniences like air conditioning, power steering and cutting edge audio has been a recipe for success for Houston-based Mo' Muscle Cars.

his voice and an entrepreneur's insistence on finding a better way and willing it into existence.

"The reason I started Mo' Muscle Cars is because I thought there was a tremendous need for the average muscle car guy to find a place that is dependable, does excellent work and stands behind their work," he says in the video, posted on the website of the company he launched in response (www.momusclecars.com).

"I want to be responsive to the customer," he added. "We want to be on the cutting edge of what's new in the muscle car business. We want to do top notch restorations in a professional way and a dependable way."

What had started as a hobby for Tim Meaux—he always had a stable of muscle cars, hot rods, motorcycles and boats, among other toys—became a mission of

bringing a greater level of professionalism to a sometimes unpredictable business. And in just the first few years it was apparent that there was indeed a great need for his approach.

The company opened its shop in late 2005 in the Houston suburb of Conroe, Texas, and business was gaining momentum. Right up until Tim's untimely passing in 2009.

The growing staff at Mo' Muscle Cars, including Tim's son, Blake, was understandably devastated. For the better part of a year, they powered through as best they could and strove to keep up the high bar Tim had set.

But without Tim's presence, it wasn't quite enough.

"It got to the point that our mission and vision wasn't being fulfilled," says Blake,

who had literally grown up at his dad's side working on high-powered custom toys. "At that point, I decided that it was in our best interest to start fresh. I took over operations of the business and from that point on we moved forward. Since then, we've been working hard to honor our mission and we're proud of what we've accomplished."

RIDING THE RESTOMOD WAVE

Today, Mo' Muscle Cars is a thriving business still dedicated to fulfilling the tremendous need of muscle car enthusiasts to find dependable, responsive shops that offer cutting-edge work.

The staff—now numbering 12 full-time employees including a shop manager, office manager and bookkeeper, two project managers, six mechanics and fabricators/bodymen, and a general assistant—bustles in the

SHOP PROFILE: *MO' MUSCLE CARS*



12 full-time employees including a shop manager, office manager and bookkeeper, two project managers, six mechanics and fabricators/bodymen keep the shop's 16,000-square-foot facility bustling.

shop's 16,000-square-foot facility in Conroe, working on projects ranging from simple one-off upgrades to full custom builds.

"In some small shops the owner is also doing all the work and there really isn't anyone dedicated to growing the business," says Blake. "But we run this business really professionally. We have different roles with certain people dedicated to management. We put trust in people and they earn it."

With a strong staff in place, Mo' Muscle Cars has been riding a trend in recent years toward building restomods, or restored classic vehicles with modern conveniences. With upgrades like modern fuel-injected engines, air conditioning, modern suspension packages and power steering, these vehicles provide modern conveniences and comfort while maintaining a classic appearance.

"Restomod builds are definitely the bulk of our work," he says. "Some people who have a true, numbers-matching vehicle might want a restoration back to original, but it's rare.

"I have some all-original cars myself and, speaking from experience, you're just very limited in what you can do with them. You can barely drive them on the highway, really, and people want modern conveniences so you can really enjoy your vehicle. If you have a car that is 40 or 50 years old and drives like a new 'Vette, that's just an awesome experience."

While complete custom builds get the glory, and earn much of Mo' Muscle Cars media exposure, it's the small jobs that keep the lights on, he says.

"The guys who might have a great project but a limited budget, they might want a partial restoration and we love those projects. We like that variety and it helps us stay consistently busy," he says.

And those small jobs often turn into the big jobs.

"They might do just a motor or just a suspension upgrade and they might be testing you," he says. "If they like the relationship, they'll do a full build. People are wary of shops because of the bad ones out there, and I understand that. People will test you and if you prove yourself it can turn into a great relationship."

STAYING POWER

With those great relationships, Mo' Muscle Cars business has remained strong, even in the challenging economic conditions of the last four years.

"The economy really hasn't affected us as much as it has a lot of other shops. People might spend a little less or complain more about the bills," he laughs, "but a lot of these folks are businesspeople or work for big companies. That demographic of customer has the money, fortunately, and they're passionate about their vehicles."

To make sure those highly desirable customers keep walking through the doors, Blake utilizes both cutting-edge and traditional marketing techniques.

"That kind of customer appreciates a professional shop, so we're very sharp with how we show our cars and we do a lot of promotion via social media and a good bit of targeted advertising," he says. "I do a lot of that myself, and you have to have your presence out there in the market to stay busy."

"It's difficult to tell where you get the best bang for buck in terms of promotion, but we market ourselves pretty heavily on Facebook, of course, and we take a ton of photography," he adds. "And we're always going to car shows. Social media is important, but when people see the vehicles in person, they really connect to it."

Blake notes that of all the mediums he uses to promote Mo' Muscle Cars, video may be the most impactful.

"We do a lot of video content with a company called Gearhead Flicks, and that has been really powerful," he says. "With video, potential customers can really see all aspects of the car in action. You can hear it run. We'll even put cameras on the cars and in them, and it brings the potential customer right into the car."

Even with a strong presence at car shows and online, however, there's one place he will rarely ever aim for a big visual impact: His shop.

"For our actual facilities, we're pretty hidden and we like it like that," he says, noting that while he has a full-time em-

ployee dedicated to cleaning and organizing the shop, it's generally targeted toward improving the experience for current customers. "It keeps people from just pop-

ping in off the street to check out vehicles, which can be really distracting."

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SHOP PROFILE: *MO' MUSCLE CARS*

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A tour through the Mo' Muscle Cars shop highlights the broad range of classic and custom vehicles that have become their specialty. At any given time, there might be upwards of 30 vehicles at various stages of the customization process.

And that can be very common in a place like Houston, where the custom car culture is alive and well.

“A lot of people are into these cars, and we don’t see that ending any time soon,” he says. “As people get older, they have sentimental ties to the cars from their childhood. People love these cars all their lives. That won’t ever die as long as there are folks out there who are doing great work bringing them back to life.”

A YOUTHFUL APPROACH

Blake says he also sees many younger enthusiasts both at shows and through the doors at his shop, which is an encouraging sign, to be sure.

“You know, young people love muscle cars, too, and more are discovering these great old cars every day,” he says. “There’s a

big age range among our customers. Some are in their 20s, a lot are the ones in their 30s who have a good job and can afford to do cool stuff. Many are in their 40s and 50s. Some are 70 or older.”

Even with customers ranging from 20 to 70 years old, Blake says his own relatively young age—he recently turned 28—hasn’t ever been an issue for customers.

“I thought some of the older customers might doubt a younger guy at first, but once people see what we’re doing and see how much passion we have for muscle cars and see the equipment and the quality of our work, they trust us.”

And being young for a shop owner also has its advantages, he notes.

“One advantage I have over older shops, I grew up with computers and technology,” he says. “When it comes to digital

design or even 3D printers, technology can give you a great advantage in turning out top-notch work. We have these dreams of things we could do, and with those tools, we do it.

“With 3D printers, it won’t be long until shops without a CNC machine are printing custom parts from plastic, test fitting them to the vehicle and then sending their custom products off for mass production and resale.”

FOCUSED ON THE FUTURE, WITH AN EYE TOWARD TRADITION

Even with his focus on technology and the future, Blake says doing good business and staying true to his father’s vision for Mo’ Muscle Cars means relying on some pretty traditional values as a business owner.

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SHOP PROFILE: *MO' MUSCLE CARS*



That's why a conversation about his company rarely fails to include talk about leadership and relationships. That helps keep the talented staff at Mo' Muscle Cars happy and productive, he says.

"Finding and keeping great employees really comes down to the reputation you have as a company, and that comes from treating people right," he says, noting that Mo' Muscle Cars employees receive benefits including health and vision insurance. "Sometime you have to give other guys the glory. Everyone here does stuff to make us successful and the guys deserve to get the glory for our success. Everyone has a part of each build, so it's important they get the exposure."

That approach to leadership has earned Blake a loyal staff, with a number of long-time employees and very little turnover.

"People generally don't quit businesses; they quit bosses," he says. "And there's a difference between a boss and leader: Bosses stand behind you with a whip. Leaders get out front and lead. When people trust that you have



"Our plan is to just keep building the baddest cars we can build and to get better every day," says Blake Meaux. "We want to continue to grow, probably expand the shop, but at the end of the day it's about building great cars."



ON DEALING WITH DAY TO DAY CHALLENGES:

"Challenges are something that all business owners will face but in the end you just have to tackle them and move forward."

"One of the biggest challenges we face is that a lot of the parts we need are not available or the quality is just not there. We tend to have to modify them to make them fit correctly or just make them from scratch. Sometimes you have no choice but to try the part but it's very important to order from reputable companies that treat you well if you have an issue. Warranty work is not cheap so you have to try to minimize it as much as possible."



their best interest in mind, they'll do the things that need to be done to be successful."

At Mo' Muscle Cars, friendships exist between employees and between Blake and the rest of the team, all of which contributes to a general stability.

"We want people to feel stable and comfortable, because that's why people stay," he says. "Relationships are a big part of that. We're a team here and to function properly and efficiently; that takes relationships. That's why a lot of us end up hanging out together outside of work, too. We'll go fishing or paintballing or go-carting. We'll go to car shows on the weekends. We legitimately consider each other friends, in addition to building great cars together."

Those friendships have Blake excited about the future. He says the shop's work

continues to improve and he hopes that continued success will allow him to bring in-house some of the work he currently shops out.

"Our plan is to just keep building the baddest cars we can build and to get better every day," he says. "We want to continue to grow, probably expand the shop, but at the end of the day it's about building great cars."

"When we finish a car, especially a full build that has sentimental ties to the customer, it can be a pretty emotional thing," he adds. "We sometimes have grown men tearing up about their vehicle and the memories they have with it. That can be a pretty overwhelming thing."

On a personal level, Blake regularly feels those strong emotions as well. Especially when he looks around the shop and

sees his dad's personal vehicles or his dad's good friends who still come around.

"I'm really fortunate to be able to continue what my dad was doing here," says Blake. "I used to come here just to hang out, so there are a lot of memories for me. I can still feel him here, which is a really cool thing."

With all those important reasons providing the "why" behind doing what they do, Mo' Muscle Cars seems to be in a great position to thrive in the future. That poses an obvious question: What would Tim Meaux think of the business his son is not just running, but growing?

"I really wish he could see the place today," says Blake. "He would have never dreamed that we could do some of this. Or maybe he could. Either way, I know he'd be proud of it." **HRR**



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