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Auto Supply Co. continues to thrive by focusing on distribution fundamentals

by Dick DeLoach

Los Angeles— Auto Supply Co. (ASC), now with four locations, has been serving the Los Angeles community for 77 years, making it L.A.'s oldest independent family-owned auto parts business, Co-owner David Scher said.

"In 1932 our grandfather Sam opened an auto salvage business in what is now our parking lot," Scher said. "And we've continued to thrive by focusing on the basics: personalized, expert service, good value, and reliable parts availability."

"In 1961 our father, Stan, closed the salvage business and opened the auto parts store," said David Scher's brother and co-owner, Steve Scher, adding that he has worked at the store most of his life.

The Los Angeles location has continued to grow since then, David Scher said. It now covers nearly a half-block and houses a fully-stocked warehouse with hundreds of radiators, motor and transmission mounts, batteries, and electrical parts, he said. Plus, the business has a large retail showroom and a recently modernized machine shop, he added.



Many of ASC L.A.'s experienced counter staff have served their customers for 32 years, Co-owner David Scher said.

"We had a choice—close the machine shop or invest in modern equipment," Scher said. In the past 15 years, many traditional stores with machine shops have been replaced by major retailers who don't even have brake lathes, he said.

"So we invested \$80,000 in new equipment, and the investment is paying off," he said. "For example, our new pressure tester allows us to check for cracks without disassembling the heads, and now we can weld cracked heads immediately."

"Over the years, ASC has grown through careful acquisitions, rather than starting stores from scratch," Scher said. Their

second retail location was purchased in the late '70s in East Los Angeles, he said, and their Bell Gardens location was added in 1999; in 2000 they purchased a store in Huntington Park.

"Today our L.A. store accounts for about 50 percent of our business, East L.A. about 25 percent and the other 25 percent is split about evenly between Bell Gardens and Huntington Park," Scher said.

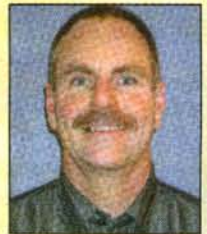
"Our business is about 55 percent retail and 45 percent wholesale right now because people are keeping their cars longer and

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FinishMaster assists progressive shops with the conversion to waterborne basecoats through its WaterMasters brand as well as offering new tools and products to help shops become more profitable.



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FinishMaster grows by helping progressive shops find the right tools and products

by John Yoswick

When it comes to assisting shops with the conversion to waterborne basecoats, FinishMaster is perhaps the most experienced in the country.

"WaterMasters, our brand for waterborne conversion, has helped convert 453 collision repair centers in California alone, and an additional 84 others nationally," said Herb Butler, national waterborne project manager for the Indiana-based company.

"WaterMasters represents the experience and processes we've developed through more than 500 conversions and the passion our team members have for showing collision repair shops the opportunities attached to waterborne conversion," Butler said.

FinishMaster, the company behind WaterMasters, began in 1968 as a single distributor of automotive paints, said Mike Sheedy, vice president of sales for the company's Northwest region. Today it is the largest player in that field, with more than 175 sales outlets and more than 1,500 employees in 29 states, he said.

Sheedy said the company has evolved from its early days, when shops expected little of jobbers other than to deliver product.

"Today, we try to really understand the profit centers within the collision shop and work hard to deliver solutions to help shops become more profitable," he said. "If the shop, jobber and paint manufacturer are not working together to understand each other's businesses, we will all end up going it alone, and that puts all of our survival at risk."

"The industry needs healthy and profitable shops, jobbers, and paint manufacturers. We have recognized this for a long time and work hard to meet and exceed the expectations of our shops and vendors."

FinishMaster offers a full line of products from three paint manufacturers—BASF, DuPont, and PPG—as well as a wide variety of paint, body, and equipment products, Sheedy said.

"We also provide a large menu of value-added services that include online ordering, managed customer inventory, certified technical representatives, financial analysis,

process assessment, and waterborne conversion, just to name a few," he said.

With the deadline for waterborne conversion in some California markets arriving this fall, it's a topic that has been on the minds of shops there for some time, Butler said.

"We have converted about 72 percent of our customer shops in the two Northern California (air quality) districts, and the rest have been scheduled, and it is our plan to complete this well prior to the enforcement

date of October 1," he said.

"It is inevitable that there will be a rush to conversion in the last month, and WaterMasters is prepared to offer conversion to shops in need."

But Butler and Sheedy said they also have seen a lot of interest in conversion to waterborne by shops throughout the country.

"It's all about taking advantage of the opportunity to be a market leader and differentiate themselves from their competition, the opportunity to support a

'green' marketing program, the opportunity to enhance productivity and profits, and the opportunity to stay out in front of regulations," Butler said.

"All of this is possible to accomplish just by converting to waterborne," he said. "But the window for most of these opportunities is narrow. Several air quality regulators around the country are reviewing the success of waterborne products in California and Canada, and are considering adopting

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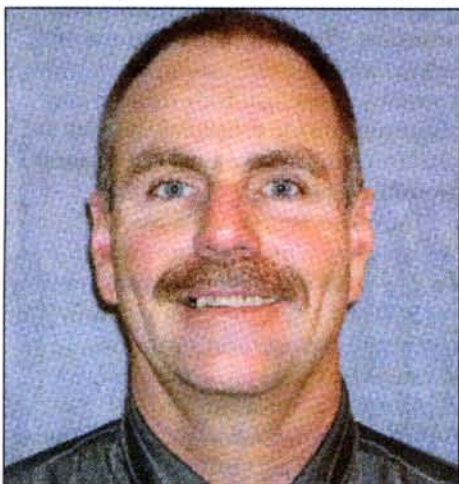
Irvine
(Orange County)



San Diego



Phoenix



Herb Butler is the national waterborne project manager for WaterMasters.

FinishMaster grows by helping progressive shops find the right tools and products



FinishMaster's San Carlos, Calif., location.

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regulations that would require the use of waterborne basecoats."

Butler said good preparation is the key to making the conversion a smooth one.

"FinishMaster helps eliminate this hurdle by completing a detailed 'waterborne-ready' assessment of our customer locations," he said. "All the recommendations we make for equipment upgrade, process enhancement, product changes, and

comprehensive training will result in a smooth and successful conversion."

But assisting with waterborne

conversions is only one aspect of what FinishMaster is doing to help its shop customers, Sheedy said. It has been a leader, for example, in the development of technology to help shops track product purchase and use, and in offering online ordering through its www.PBEconnection.com website.

In fact, BASF, which has long offered online ordering for its customers through a Web site, recently announced it is transitioning some of its www.bodyshopmall.com customers to FinishMaster's online ordering Web site, Sheedy said.

"One of our strategies for growth has been to help our customers grow their businesses and to provide them with services that make doing business with FinishMaster easier and more profitable for them," he said.

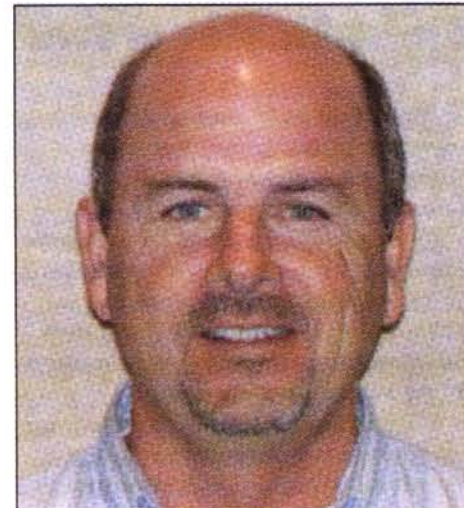
"I think well-run, progressive shops understand our role in the industry and in their businesses," he said.

"The pressures of our current economy have

forced us all to look more closely at each other's businesses and the need for us all to be profitable. It can't be a one-way street. In the long run, we would all lose."

Sheedy said he believes the current economic challenges will most likely continue through this year. But his advice for shops is similar to what has helped fuel FinishMaster's own growth and success.

"Keep investing in your people and in your infrastructure, and be careful not to make decisions for a short-term profit that will have a negative impact on your long-term goals," he said. "In other words, don't be short-sighted. Ask yourself where you want to be in one year, three years, five years and even 10 years. It is important to realize that the decisions you make today will determine the outcome tomorrow." ■



Mike Sheedy is the vice president of sales for FinishMaster's Northwest region.

"It is inevitable that there will be a rush to conversion in the last month, and WaterMasters is prepared to offer conversion to shops in need."

PPG and American Honda establish strategic alliance

Strongsville, Ohio—PPG Automotive Refinish has announced the formation of a strategic alliance with American Honda and its new Body Shop Recognition Program.

American Honda has approved the credentials of PPG's CertifiedFirst Network and MVP Business Solutions programs as qualifying refinish supplier performance programs.

"We are pleased to form this relationship with American Honda," said Steve Topczewski, PPG OEM business development manager. "Honda has a solid quality reputation and sets very high standards for its collision center network. Being selected to team up with them through our CertifiedFirst and MVP programs is something we can be proud of."

American Honda will recognize dealer-owned and independent body shops in the United States that:

- Participate in the PPG CertifiedFirst and MVP programs
- Adopt its OEConnection's CollisionLink software program
- Conduct a minimum number of transactions through the CollisionLink system

Collision shops meeting the above requirements will have their name, address, and contact information entered in a searchable database accessible by Honda/Acura owners as well as receive a plaque noting their commitment to refinish excellence.

Qualifying PPG-affiliated collision centers must be sponsored by a Honda/Acura dealer participating in the American Honda Collision Select Program. Additionally, eligible collision centers must adopt the OEConnection CollisionLink parts ordering software as a prerequisite to the program. ■

PPG expands online technical training

Strongsville, Ohio—PPG Automotive Refinish has expanded its online video technical training courses for collision center technicians, distributors and students.

Developed through a partnership between PPG Refinish and 3M's Automotive Aftermarket team, each on-line course is designed to teach an established standard technical repair process. The courses are available in the United States and Canada through the PPG Refinish website, www.ppgrefinish.com.

"It's always been our goal to extend our training reach, providing technicians with another resource on best practices for refinishing a vehicle," said Bill Troyer, PPG's director of training.

"Offering online training complements our instructor-led classes and has become an important learning mechanism for collision centers looking to standardize their repair operations," Troyer said.


"Today's technology allows technicians to access these courses 24/7 anywhere they

have a computer in the United States and Canada," added Robert Hill, PPG technical sales instructor supervisor for central Canada.

PPG's new Online Technical Training video courses are focused on teaching the best practice for a standard refinish repair procedure. Thirteen courses are currently offered, covering the most common refinish operations from light body repair, e-coat panel prep, plastic panel prep, priming and sealing, color identification, and personal protective equipment.

The online courses use a proven methodology for teaching students of varying skills and abilities and are available for PPG and Nexa Autocolor products. On completing a course and passing an associated quiz, the student receives a certificate of completion.

For more information about PPG Online Technical Training, visit www.ppgrefinish.com. ■



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