



BUILDING MORE THAN CARS

New York's B&C Auto Restoration knows that projects can lead to lasting friendships.

By Jake Rishavy

HOT ROD & CUSTOMIZATION



When William “Bill” Kilpatrick Sr.’s nine-year-old restoration company, B&C Auto Restoration & Paint Inc., set out to create its first project, the company was little more than 1,000 square feet at the end of a warehouse and a DBA designation, to serve as a legal entity and allow him to open a business bank account.

Yet it didn’t take long for the Ontario, New York-based company to start making a very real impact on customers and associates.

“Our first job was for a 19-year-old boy who wanted to give his grandfather back his 1963 Buick, restored as a Christmas gift,” Kilpatrick says. “That was a complete frame-off restoration in that small space. The gift was completed on time and was delivered with a DVD of the pictures as it was being restored, formatted in a slide show with his favorite music.

“We got the phone call with tears from his grandfather and we have been friends ever since,” he adds. “That 19-year-old is now 27 and just got married. In this business we build more than just cars; we build friendships.”



Bill Kilpatrick and wife Tricia Ruffino (the shop’s office manager). “I really get to do what I love and love what I do!” says Kilpatrick.

EXPANSION

Within the next years, the growing business outgrew a number of shop spaces. In the first year, it moved to a larger, 2,500-square-foot space in the same building. Then less than two years later, into a 7,500-square-foot standalone space, but one that was still rented.

“We needed to grow and be in a cleaner environment,” he says. “This one was a much better facility and we started having open house and hot rod events every year to show off our space and work.”

Even that larger space didn’t accommodate B&C’s rapid growth for long, though,



The shop specializes in media blasting, full-line body work and start-to-finish show-quality paint jobs.

and the company finally decided it was time to purchase something permanent. Kilpatrick’s enthusiasm about the progress is undeniable.

“It was time to buy our own building and we made the move last year!” he exclaims. “We now have open house and hot rod events with live bands, food, rods, classics, pinstripers—and it’s all free!”

The events feature between 300-400 cars and more than 500 attendees who roam around the sprawling 10,000-square-foot facility, spread across 1.5 acres. The space features three buildings under one shared roof with full walls and overhead doors separating each shop (mechanical, body and paint), so customer vehicles never have to feel the outside elements.

And expansion still remains in the company’s immediate future, says Kilpatrick with delight.

“We are completely out of space and looking to buy the building in front of us,” he beams, noting that he is looking to purchase another building so that he can start a training center for welding and body work, helping locals get certified and B&C find employable help.

REPUTATION IS KING

To what does Kilpatrick attribute this remarkably steady growth over just nine years in business? Building a great reputation with customers.



B&C's 10,000-square-foot shop features plenty of room for customer vehicles, with separate areas for mechanical, body and paint activities.



B&C's seven full-time employees work on everything from full frame-off restorations to custom hot rod builds down to small dent or mechanical work.



HOT ROD & CUSTOMIZATION



"I can tell you the biggest part of growing a great business—any business—is building a great reputation. That is what we pride ourselves on at B&C. We do every job one way: the best way, top shelf, high quality, top performance. For us, there is no such thing as just a driver."

That approach has seen B&C's staff grow to seven full-time employees, working on everything from full frame-off restorations to custom hot rod builds down to small dent or mechanical work.

The company partners with top product

providers like American Auto, TCI, Wilwood Brakes, Vintage Air, Boyd Wheels, Forge Wheels, BMD suspension, Hotchkis Sport Suspension, Magnum Force, Dart Products and Strange Engineering, to name a few.

Using these industry-leading parts allows the company to offer engine upgrades including LS conversions, full wiring harnesses, and more.

"Everything under the hood," says Kilpatrick.

Additionally, the shop specializes in media blasting, full-line body work and start-to-finish show-quality paint jobs.

Ask Kilpatrick what he loves about his typical job and he replies in an instant.

"Typical? There is no such thing as typical! Every job is very different and very specific. We are all very proud of every

project that comes out of our shop or it doesn't leave."

FRIENDSHIPS FOR LIFE

When pressed to name a memorable job, Kilpatrick quickly recalls a particularly touching project.

"One particular job came to us from a customer about an hour-and-a-half away," he recalls. "It was delivered to us in pieces in crates and the frame and wood were warped and charred from a fire. It is a 1955 MG TF, meaning every piece had to be hand-made or found and the interior had to be fabricated and sewn. It was to be an amazing birthday gift from a husband to his wife.

"They had purchased the car right after they had married, but then a barn fire and then two children and three grandchildren had happened. Now it was out of the barn, unknown to his wife, and Frank, the customer, had B&C Auto Restoration restore her back to original red with tan interior. The tears never stopped that day from all of them to all of us. Friendships for life were created that day."

The barn-burned project and the story around it illustrate a number of trends that Kilpatrick sees in his business regularly today.



In its new facility, B&C has room to host open house and hot rod events with live bands, food, rods, classics and pinstripers.



HOT ROD & CUSTOMIZATION

B&C's open house events feature between 300-400 cars and more than 500 attendees who roam around the sprawling 10,000-square-foot facility.



Customers of B&C Auto Restoration tend to be baby boomers either fixing up an existing vehicle or buying and restoring a vehicle for relaxation and enjoyment in their retirement years, he says.

Also, operating in the Rochester area doesn't always make finding parts—especially exotic ones—and finding them on time, an easy proposition.

“This is certainly not the largest city in New York, therefore we always seem to have parts issues, specifically getting them on time,” he agonizes. “Then when they do come in they may not be correct or in



the best of shape after delivery from across the country. The wait times and expenses for shipping are astronomical. The climate doesn't help with the fact that we only get three or four months, if we are lucky, to drive these great cars.”

BUSINESS = CHALLENGES

While Kilpatrick has experienced remarkable success in his decade or so in business, that's not to say that he hasn't run into challenges. And that's not just limited to finding great parts.

Finding talented employees to service the wide-ranging projects in the shop is also a regular challenge, says Kilpatrick.

“Finding good employees is one of the hardest aspects for any employer in the trades,” he notes. “For some reason they either don't have the skill set that is required to do the job or, if they do, they are requesting an unbelievably high amount for their salary. Finding employees that are dependable, reliable and responsible, that's the challenge. If you have those qualities you can be a great, trainable employee even if you don't have the complete skill set.”

Additionally, he notes that the art of esti-



A 1955 MG TF restoration was delivered to the shop in pieces, in crates. It became an amazing birthday gift from a husband to his wife.

mating in the restoration business is nearly impossible. His solution? He refuses to do it, emphatically.

“If you’re asking about estimating, we do not do that!” he exclaims. “It is impossible to look at a car and see what needs to be done. You can’t see through the paint. Once we strip the paint, we can see what is under it, which might be rust, rot, patches, glass, etc. There are too many unknowns to estimate accurately. Mechanically we can give some numbers, including motors, headers, interiors, wiring, but everything is done by the hour and at this point and time we are charging a flat fee of \$65 per hour.”

THE NURSERY

Finally, Kilpatrick notes that one of the most challenging parts of running a successful restoration shop is in its marketing and promotion.

“We are out there in the public eye as often as possible,” he says, noting that the shop also supports local school sports events and showcases the company’s logos at many of them.

“Every cruise night, local show, out of town show, we’re there and we bring business cards, brochures, T-shirts and hats.”

The shop is also on Facebook and Instagram, and its website (www.bandcautorestore.com) features a virtual tour of the shop and items for sale.

Beyond events and social media, B&C has an advertising contract with a hot local radio station, which runs its spots three times each morning and afternoon during drive time as well as additional plays throughout the day.

“This seems to have done very well for us,” he says.

Yet even with all the considerable pros and cons of running a restoration shop, Kilpatrick says he truly loves his work and it’s apparent.



HOT ROD & CUSTOMIZATION

“The best part of my job is that I really get to do what I love and love what I do,” he says. “When I have time, I get to work on my own projects, which right now is a ’71 Chevy pickup. My wife (Tricia Ruffino, who is the shop’s office manager) gets to work on her project ’66 Karmann Ghia.

“We both get attached to the people and the cars that come in for large or small jobs; we are very people-oriented,” he adds. “So seeing the customers’ faces when you hand them the keys to their beautiful car is the best reward an owner can have. It is like

handing over their new baby.

“In fact, we have a showroom in our office area that has a huge wall window. We call it ‘The Nursery.’ Whenever someone comes in, they cup their hands on the window to look in at the cars as if they were looking into a newborn nursery at a hospital!”

With such an apparent passion and love for the task at hand, it’s no wonder why Kilpatrick loves his work. And with that passion, it’s sure to continue for years to come. **TS**