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TOO COMPLEX?

Have we gone too far when it comes to the type of technology we're putting into today's vehicles?

TEXT HUW EVANS



One of the key issues that seems to regularly come up during conversations with industry professionals, especially at the service and collision repair level, concerns vehicle complexity. Over the last two decades, passenger vehicles have evolved into something that's almost unrecognizable. The average new car now has so many sensors and electronics, it puts a state-of-the-art combat jet to shame. The question is, how much of this stuff is absolutely necessary? I was in a service centre the other day talking with one of the senior technicians. He told me about a customer who brought in their SUV with a non-functioning centre stack. The trouble was, the vehicle's entire HVAC, as well as infotainment system, was operated through this screen. When the shop provided a quote to diagnose and repair the issue, the cost was significant. As a result, the customer was not happy, even though it was no fault of the shop—they were just trying to provide a solution to fix the problem.

More total losses

On the collision side, this growing complexity continues to drive up severity, and more vehicles are being written off as total losses. This isn't good for the shops, for the insurers, and ultimately for the OEMs, since it means lost revenue and

business for the shop, higher claims costs and premiums for the insurer, and higher replacement costs for the consumer, who is more likely to switch vehicle brands or choose used over new—that is, if they choose to replace the vehicle at all. And if there are fewer vehicles that are repaired, that means fewer on the road, which means fewer opportunities to service them. And with fewer vehicles in circulation, the cost and inconvenience of transporting people and goods will increase, which given that our industry is already struggling with inflation pressures, adds fuel to the fire.

A simpler option

While I understand the need to make vehicles safe and reliable, there is also a case for simplicity, especially in the lower-end of the market. Although this is only a personal opinion, I feel there is merit in offering a significant chunk of the market lower cost and simpler-to-own and repair vehicles. It would help ensure affordable transportation remains a viable option for a good deal of the population, while ensuring a steady stream of work and opportunity for the entire automotive ecosystem. Given how much the auto sector contributes to the economy, that is something to consider. ○

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DEALERSHIPS



Keyloop

Inside Fusion Live

How Keyloop is leveraging 50 years of industry experience to redefine the Future of Automotive Retail.

TEXT JACK KAZMIERSKI

As Keyloop celebrates its 50th anniversary this year, this milestone serves as more than a look back. It offers a window into the sweeping transformation of automotive retail. From paper-based workflows to AI-powered ecosystems, the company's journey reflects the industry's broader evolution toward digitization, integrated data, and a stronger focus on customer experience.

Despite decades of technological change, one principle has endured, as Keyloop CEO Tom Kilroy emphasizes. "Consumers still buy from people they trust. The tools have changed, but the human element, and the desire for mobility endures."

That theme resonated throughout Keyloop's Fusion Live event held in Toronto on April 22. Industry leaders took to the stage with a unified message: The pace of change is accelerating. Consumer expectations, technologies, and retail strategies are all evolving rapidly. What worked in the past is no longer sufficient, and both dealers and OEMs must adapt or risk falling behind.

Innovation & integration

At the heart of Keyloop's offering is its Automotive Retail Platform (ARP), Fusion - designed to integrate seamlessly with existing dealership systems. The platform is structured around four interconnected "domains," each addressing a critical area of operations while working in tandem with the others, all enhanced by AI capabilities. ➤

Keyloop CEO Tom Kilroy said he is delighted that Canada is the launch market for Sales Hub.

The “Demand” domain helps retailers and OEMs maximize profits with the help of e-commerce tools, omnichannel-enabled sales operation software and intelligent retention initiatives. The “Supply” domain helps retailers, OEMs and fleet suppliers proactively manage their vehicle supply via intelligence inventory and asset risk management software. The “Ownership” domain offers omnichannel-enabled resource and workshop management tools that increase efficiency and boost customer satisfaction. And the “Operate” domain provides financial automation, reconciling accounts, automating payables and produces OEM statements.

During the event, Keyloop introduced a major addition to its platform: Sales Hub, a comprehensive end-to-end sales management solution tailored specifically for Canadian dealers and manufacturers.

Sitting within the Demand domain, Sales Hub supports every stage of the omnichannel sales journey, from lead management and deal structuring to trade-ins, financing, and digital signatures. It also enables communication through customers’ preferred channels, including email, SMS, WhatsApp, and dealer portals.

Dealers can integrate Sales Hub seamlessly with Keyloop’s existing and future product suite, Acquisition Hub (end-to-end ecommerce) and Vehicle Hub (real-time inventory management).

“We’re delighted that Canada is our launch market for Sales Hub,” Kilroy told *Autosphere Mag* during the Fusion Live event. “This is a market that is very dynamic, very tech-forward, but



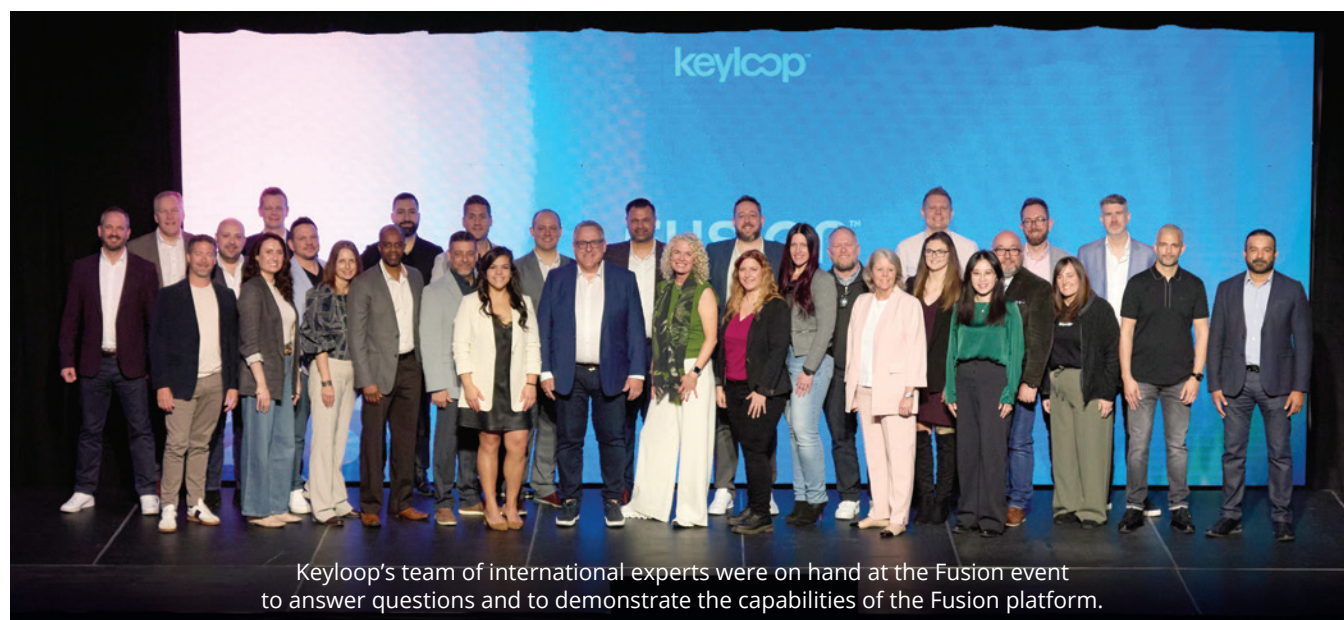
A standout moment at the Keloop event was a panel discussion featuring early adopters of the Fusion platform.

it’s also one where it’s been crying out for an integrated system, which really works through the sales process. So, the whole idea is to improve the experience for the consumer and make it far less fragmented and easier.”

Kilroy added that the platform was built with both customer experience and dealership performance in mind. “In the end, that’s the important thing - a better customer experience, and more sales for the dealership. If we can help our customers do that, that’s all we want to do.”

Compelling testimonials

A standout moment at the event was a panel discussion featuring early adopters of the Fusion platform. Moderated



Keyloop’s team of international experts were on hand at the Fusion event to answer questions and to demonstrate the capabilities of the Fusion platform.



by Jacqui Barker, Keyloop's VP of Global Engagement. The panel included Brent Wees, Certified AI Trainer and Marketing Strategist with idea.meet.plan; Eric Vant Spyker, Dealer Principal and Managing Partner at Trillium Ford Lincoln; and Andy Caletti, owner and GM of Erin Park Lexus & Toyota, and Belleville Toyota.

Vant Spyker highlighted how dramatically consumer behaviour has shifted, noting that traditional sales processes are no longer effective. "They're coming in ready to buy," he explained. "So we need to be able to get them the information they want, along with the pricing, faster than we ever had to before."

He emphasized the importance of meeting customers wherever they are in their buying journey. "So we need the tools that are flexible enough to be able to do that," he added, "and that can be a challenge, because customers can be demanding."

Caletti echoed this sentiment, pointing out that today's consumers are highly informed. "They're even doing the research right in front of us," he said. "They're using AI tools right in the dealership, asking AI if this is the best deal they can get on this vehicle, or if there are similar vehicles nearby."

With AI empowering consumers, dealerships are feeling increasing pressure to keep up. While Fusion's AI-driven capabilities can help level the playing field, Wees noted that hesitation still exists. "There's a lot of fear out there," he said. "Some people are afraid that AI is going to take their job, but I find that dealers, by and large, are eager to learn more about these technologies."

Wees believes firsthand experience is the best way to overcome skepticism. "The first time you ask something like

ChatGPT how to do something, and you get a comprehensive answer back that makes sense, you'll see the advantage of AI." The same can be said about a powerful platform like Keyloop Fusion.

Supporting this perspective, the CADA's Canadian Automotive Retail Technology Study (CARTS) revealed that while 58% of respondents have yet to adopt AI, 93% of those who have report increased efficiency. The most common applications include customer communications, vehicle descriptions, and research.

For Caletti, the benefits of Keyloop's ARP Fusion became clear through cost savings and operational efficiency. "Take one month's worth of bills, and take a look at all of the vendors that you're paying to take your data, scrub your data and send that data back to you so that you can read your data with your current DMS," he said. "When you see how much inefficiency there is in terms of the dollars that are being spent, and how many times we're touching that data differently, it makes sense to have one provider with a full 360 solution."

Vant Spyker reported similar gains, particularly in time savings and reduced stress for his team. "There has been an incredible benefit to our business, and to our team's time," he said.

He acknowledged that hesitation is common among dealers when it comes to adopting new technologies. "As a group, we're all like penguins at the edge of the ice looking over to see who is going to be first," he said. "But once our peers hear our stories and see how we benefited, then there's a stampede to sign up."

He also highlighted the platform's accessibility. "The question many dealers ask themselves is, 'Where do I start?'" he said. "But with this solution you don't have to worry about picking a spot. Keyloop can show you how to do it all at once, without asking you to recreate the wheel, because they offer tools that you're already familiar with."

The next 50 years

Keyloop's 50-year journey underscores not only its own evolution, but the rapid transformation of the automotive retail landscape. As technology continues to reshape how vehicles are marketed, sold, and serviced, the industry faces both challenges and opportunities. The message from Fusion Live was clear: each dealer's success will depend on embracing innovation while preserving the human connections that remain at the heart of every transaction. 🔴

Pre-Owned Options

Dealers are facing a unique environment today when it comes to used vehicles.

TEXT HUW EVANS

There's no question that the 2020s are, so far, turning out to be a highly unpredictable decade. For dealers trying to navigate through the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic, the rapid rise in interest rates to combat inflation, and then the issue with tariffs and trade disputes—plus most recently, the erupting conflict in the Middle East that's again impacting oil prices and global supply chains—has resulted in an operating environment that can best be described as challenging.

Hybrids and EVs

A big question for many Canadian dealers is the used market surrounding EVs and hybrids. At AutoTrader, Baris Akyurek notes that interest in EVs has been particularly focused around incentives. Now, with the Government of Canada announcing a new round of incentives, consumer interest in battery electric vehicles is trending upward again. On the used side, however, Akyurek says he's seen notable declines in pricing on battery electric vehicles, since range anxiety and infrastructure challenges still remain. Hybrids, on the other hand, continue to see strong demand. "Pricing has been pretty stable," he says, acknowledging that for a good deal of the consumer base in Canada, hybrids represent the best of both worlds, offering electric propulsion in urban settings, and then having the advantage of internal combustion engine power and range when needed. Plus, with the recent crisis in the Middle East impacting oil prices, traction and interest around hybrids (both new and used) is only likely to grow in the coming months. At LGM Financial Services, Jake Stacey agrees. "Consumers are saying they want to save at the pump, but many aren't ready to make the switch to full battery electric. They want a vehicle that represents the best of both worlds, and I would say that family-oriented hybrids, such as small and mid-size SUVs are where the market is likely going to be."



A range of factors are currently making conditions challenging for dealers in the used vehicle market.

Sourcing inventory

When we look at used cars, traditionally an area of dealer operations that can serve them well in both good times and bad, this decade has witnessed its fair share of unpredictability. Today, a key issue for many dealers is sourcing used inventory.

Brent Ravelle, President of the Ravelle Group of Companies, which owns multiple rooftops in Ontario, says that in his case, lack of available inventory from trade-ins and strong competition is making it harder to source good quality used vehicles. With multiple stores in one municipality, Ravelle says he's been focused on consolidating used car operations from different dealerships into a combined group.

Additionally, he's created a new role within this combined used car group to handle pre-owned inventory. This means managing the flow of used vehicles coming in, including what's purchased, what is wholesaled and how quickly these vehicles can be reconditioned and prepared for resale on the lot.

Ravelle says that having a specific group among his stores tasked with the responsibility for used vehicles prevents internal competition for used cars between dealerships within the group, which could limit choice and purchase options for consumers.

Competition

Additionally, Ravelle says that some Canadian dealers are finding it hard to source good inventory, particularly for vehicles manufactured in North America that are subject to the terms of the CUSMA agreement, because they are still competing with U.S. buyers for a relatively small pool of used cars. Additionally, there are still low volumes of lease returns, which were decimated during the COVID-19 pandemic when OEMs idled production, stunting sales for new cars from 2020 through 2023.

That said, there are signs that the market is beginning to stabilize. Data from AutoTrader is showing that in 2025, both the new and used vehicle segments performed relatively well. “We saw growth in both segments,” explains Baris Akyurek, Vice President, Insights and Intelligence at AutoTrader, “particularly in the first half of the year, as consumers sought to take advantage of buying new vehicles before tariffs began impacting prices.”

Reversing trend

On the used side, while prices have been trending downward overall since the early part of the decade (around 10% since 2023 to an average of \$36,816), in 2025, the announcement of U.S. trade tariffs impacted pricing, bumping used car values up by approximately \$800 during the course of the year. This represented a reversing of the typical 12-month trend in which used prices tend to start at higher levels and trend downward during the course of the year.

As we enter further into 2026, Akyurek says that there are indicators to show that used car prices are likely to remain relatively flat, at least through the end of 2027. “We don’t fore-

cast a significant decline in prices because inventory is scarce,” he says.

Stabilizing depreciation

At LGM Financial Services, Jake Stacey, Executive Vice President, OEM Sales and Performance concurs, noting that prices have, and will continue to be constrained by used inventory levels. That said, she expects depreciation to stabilize, so the sky-high used prices we saw during the COVID-era aren’t likely to return.

Nevertheless, she urges franchised dealers to exercise caution when buying inventory, and says they should focus on “streamlining and closing the gap between their new and used vehicle operations.” Additionally, depending on where they are located, dealers can face different scenarios, driven not only by consumer preferences, but taxation and regulatory requirements. “More than ever, dealers need to adjust their buying habits, not only to regional differences in consumer demand, but what’s going on [specifically] in their market. You have to turn your vehicles quickly,” she says. “You have to have a good staff, and you have to have a great customer experience on both the new and used car side.”



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Maple Volkswagen

Past Success, Exciting Future

In business now for over a decade, this store is looking forward to a whole new era in automotive retailing.

TEXT JACK KAZMIERSKI

In 2022, Maple Volkswagen celebrated a major milestone—their 10th year in business. According to Jim L. Garofalo, General Manager & Managing Partner, the store is number one in Canada in sales volume.

In addition, Garofalo is very proud of the fact that his store has been consistently recognized by Volkswagen Canada with the coveted Wolfsburg Crest Club award. The honour is bestowed upon dealers who have met

Volkswagen's standards for sales and service excellence, and multiple awards are testament to the level of service the dealership provides.

Investing in people

Garofalo believes that his store has consistently delivered award-winning service and sales figures because of the quality of the people he has hired. "I think we invested in

the right people,” he explains. “We hired the right personalities, and we allowed them to develop and grow into their positions in this business.” Contrary to conventional wisdom, Garofalo and his management team did not recruit staff from within the industry. “I wasn’t big on hiring experienced staff,” he adds. “We felt it would be more advantageous to hire the right personality traits, and then teach those people how to do the job.”

That approach has certainly worked for Maple Volkswagen, and Garofalo says his store has a very low turnover rate. “A lot of our employees have been with us for many years,” he adds.

The future

As proud as Garofalo is of his store’s success, he’s aware that the future will present challenges that everyone in the industry will have to deal with.

“As we think about the future,” he explains, “one of the biggest challenges and changes is electrification. That’s a whole new era for us, and we’re all going to need to learn about it, and understand it, as we enter this next phase in our industry.

We’re also going to need to make sure that we can still operate. It’s going to be an interesting time for our service departments and our parts departments.

“The next several years are going to be an interesting chapter in everybody’s life in the automotive retail business,” he adds.

“As we think about the future, one of the biggest challenges and changes is electrification. The elimination of the internal combustion engine is going to be an interesting chapter in everybody’s life in this business.”

JIM L. GAROFALO
GENERAL MANAGER & MANAGING PARTNER,
MAPLE VOLKSWAGEN

Part of the family

Maple Volkswagen belongs to the family of dealerships that are part of the Zanchin Automotive Group, which includes 19 brands, 39 locations, and more than 1,800 employees.

Garofalo is quick to point out that he is proud to be part of the Zanchin family of stores. Described as a “close-knit company,” the Zanchin Automotive Group has been a key part of the automotive landscape for more than 50 years, and according

to the company, they “have not changed the core values and reputation” they have built over the past five decades. Much like Garofalo, they are known for going above and beyond to deliver the kind of truly memorable experience that keeps customers coming back. 🍁



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Steve Flamand, Hyundai Auto Canada

Agility, Product and Momentum

One year into his role as President and CEO at Hyundai Auto Canada, Steve Flamand shares some key insights with *Autosphere*.

TEXT HUW EVANS

Hundai has been making waves over the last few months. The year opened with record high sales for both Hyundai and Genesis in Canada, while the new 2026 Hyundai Palisade was recently named the Automobile Journalists Association of Canada “Utility of the Year,” following on from its North American “Truck of the Year” award in January. Additionally, Hyundai Hope on Wheels recently announced its partnership with the C17 council, which aims to strengthen national collaboration in paediatric cancer care across Canada. This includes a new \$1 million Research Grant Fund that will support four Canadian-led paediatric cancer research projects over two years, administered by the C17 Research Network. To get more details, we sat down with Hyundai Canada’s President and CEO Steve Flamand, who is celebrating his one year anniversary at the helm.

Autosphere: Thank you for taking the time to chat with us. Tell us, how have things been over the last 12 months?

Steve Flamand: It has definitely been an eventful year. It’s been a turbulent time for the whole industry with tariffs, changes in policy regarding EVs and incentives, so there have been a significant number of headwinds. That said, we are fortunate that we are surrounded by a robust data network and a strong leadership team. We’ve been able to pivot quite quickly, which has been good. We’ve also been able to effectively leverage our ability across the globe, which has allowed us to shift production around and bring new vehicle configurations and trim levels to market. This proved to be very successful for us at Hyundai, as we are able to adapt to the realities of the marketplace, which translated into a record year in 2025. We ended up with an 8.1% share, which was our fifth year in a row of shared growth. We are very proud of our team being able to accomplish that, and we’re looking forward to even greater success in 2026.



Steve Flamand, President and CEO, Hyundai Auto Canada with the award-winning 2026 Palisade SUV.

AS: Were there any core products that you feel played a significant part in your sales success during 2025?

SF: One strength Hyundai has is our depth and breadth to cover the whole market in Canada. The launch of the new 2026 Palisade SUV was game-changing for us, and adding a hybrid model has been a big win, given the current growth in that sector of the market. In January, it was also the best selling SUV in its segment, and when we hear that, and see the numbers, it indicates that our products are indexing well and resonating with Canadian consumers. Additionally, when we look at EVs, the IONIQ 9, our three-row BEV SUV has also been an important launch for us. Looking at our other core entries, the Kona, has, and continues to be very well received, and has been number one in its segment for a long time. Additionally, we are continuing to reinvest in our product lineup to keep it fresh, to keep it relevant, and to electrify our products where the market demands it. Our goal is to have a vehicle for every customer in the Canadian market, whether it’s powered by an internal combustion engine, utilizes a hybrid or plug-in hybrid powertrain, or comes

PHOTO HUW EVANS



as a pure EV. We are also exploring fuel cell technology with the NEXO, though currently, it's targeted exclusively for fleet sales. As previously stated, our objective is to cover the entire market in Canada.

AS: Looking at things from a dealer perspective, we've seen that Hyundai has developed a strong relationship with its dealers over the last decade. It seems to be a winning formula, combined with desirable and popular product offerings. Can you tell us a little about the momentum on the retail side?

SF: We've seen that our industry tends to shift a lot, especially this decade. Within that context, it's important for us as an OEM to be very agile, and in order to do that, you need to have the best possible communication and alignment with your dealers. We talk with them every day. In fact, we just had our latest dealer council meeting in Toronto where we talked through the issues facing our dealers. We put everything on the table with the mindset of finding solutions. It's important that we listen to our dealers, since they represent

what's really happening in terms of day-to-day interaction with customers. We've been focused on adjusting at both the OEM and retail level, and that's resulted in an agility that's been tough to match in the market. We've seen the benefits of this approach, and we are extremely thankful to all our 225 dealers working with us. There is a real sense of being teammates in this journey, and when we work and play together, the results tend to reflect that, and we've seen this manifest itself in some of our best ever years in terms of sales and growth.

AS: Shifting gears a bit, and looking at Hyundai Hope on Wheels, we would love to hear about some of the latest developments, since it's really seen momentum over the last few years?

SF: While our core mission is to manufacture vehicles and sell and service them through our retail network, overall, it's about doing the right thing for society. There is no better cause than helping kids fight cancer, and that's why we, as an organization and our dealers have rallied behind Hope on Wheels. We've raised over \$4 million, and last year, we added another program to it. We will be continuing to push forward, and we will be announcing another initiative that feeds the Hope on Wheels program. The overall objective is to feed all the paediatric cancer research centres around the country. This is something that comes right from the heart, and we believe that both at the corporate level and with our dealers, we can make a big difference in children's lives with the work we do. Our partnership with the C17 council, which we announced at the Canadian International AutoShow represents a major step in helping do that.

AS: Anything else you'd like to mention related to Hyundai, the brand, product or retailing?

SF: At this point, we are fortunate that we have a strong brand, strong product and a strong and supportive dealer network. When we look at product specifically, customers want connectivity, convenience and safety. Our goal is to continue pushing the envelope and bringing to market products and solutions that customers want. Our Palisade Hybrid is a good example. It offers the highest horsepower output in its segment, and also delivers the best fuel economy. Our focus is on performance, practicality and responsibility—providing vehicles that consumers want. So far, that's been reflected in growing sales volumes and market share. 🍷



Canadian International AutoShow

Excitement and Variety

The 2026 Canadian International AutoShow had something for everyone.

TEXT HUW EVANS

From February 13-22, the halls of the Metro Toronto Convention Centre once again played host to the Canadian International AutoShow. Following the media preview and VIP gala reception, the show opened to the public, and on that first day witnessed record attendance with 23,885 people visiting. This represents a 37% year-over-year increase from 2025, and reflects not only the AutoShow's premier status as a leading consumer expo in Canada, but also that interest in cars and trucks continues to be strong within the Greater Toronto Area and surrounding locations. By the time the 2026 Canadian International AutoShow closed its doors on February 22, a record 374,678 visitors had attended, with Saturday, February 21 having the highest attendance figures for a single day at CIAS - 58,232.

Vehicle of the year winners

In 2026, there were some very significant announcements. During a special press conference prior to the AutoShow's opening this year, the Automobile Journalists Association of Canada (AJAC) announced the winners of the coveted Canadian Car and Utility of the Year awards, along with the Electric Car and Utility of the Year awards. The winners in each category were the 2026 Honda Civic (Car of the Year), 2026 Hyundai Palisade (Utility of the Year), 2026 Porsche Taycan (Electric Car of the Year) and the 2026 Kia EV6 (Electric Utility of the Year).

Additionally, the press conference featured a special announcement from Hyundai Hope on Wheels and the C17 Council, which have teamed up for a new \$1 million Research Grant Fund.

This initiative, which is supporting four paediatric cancer research projects over a two-year period is part of Hyundai Auto Canada's wider commitment to help end childhood cancer.

New ownership at CTMP

Also featured during the press conference was a panel discussion with the new ownership team of Canadian Tire Motorsport Park near Bowmanville, Ontario. Peter Thompson, Christopher Pfaff and Alex Krstajic, along with session moderator and former racing driver James Hinchcliffe, discussed the iconic track, how it continues to remain in Canadian hands, and some of the future plans for the facilities, including maintaining and optimizing the track itself, as well as adding and upgrading facilities, including onsite garages, the pit area, and ensuring CTMP's long-term future by not only being a primary motorsport venue in North America, but also by hosting other events year-round, including concerts, outdoor activities, plus the possibility of creating an onsite motorsport museum.

What also struck the *Autosphere* team about CIAS 2026 was not only the sheer variety of vehicles at the AutoShow, but the creativity that went into displaying them. In the North Hall, Nissan had a winter theme, designed to illustrate the capabilities of its AWD drive lineup, while BMW once again unleashed its M Level Display between the North and South Halls. A life-size pink Cadillac, constructed from Lego Bricks, was a huge attraction, as was Camp Jeep, the McLaren display that featured the W1 Super Car (making its North American debut), as well as

the Chevrolet Corvette ZR1X, the Ford Mustang Dark Horse SC, and Multimatic assembled Mustang RTR. Formula 1 replicas from Audi and Cadillac signified the prominent position of the sport today, as well as the growing commitment from OEMs.

Popular icons return

The Stellantis exhibit in the North Hall proved to be hugely popular, with the 2027 Ram 1500 SRT TRX making its Canadian debut alongside the Ram 1500 REV, a range-extending, electric pickup that uses a Pentastar 3.6-litre V6 engine as a generator, plus the new Jeep Cherokee and performance-oriented (and assembled in Canada) Dodge Charger Scat Pack.

New electric vehicle debuts were well represented with the Ford Mustang Mach-e California Special, Hyundai IONIQ6 N, Lucid Gravity Touring, Polestar 4 Arctic Circle, Subaru Uncharted and TrailSeeker EVs, Mercedes-Benz Electric GLC SUV and Toyota C-HR.

Also drawing the crowds were the enticing Oblivion display on the 700 level, which showcased a variety of iconic and familiar cars, SUVs and cultural artifacts from the 1980s and 1990s, as well as the very prominent (and extensive) Exotic and Supercar Collection, Cobble Beach Concours D'Elegance and classic car showcase (including a section of unique vintage minicars from the 1950s and 1960s).

A special premiere

A star attraction for many attendees was the appearance of actor Sung Kang, who provided a World Premiere trailer of his upcoming film Drifter. Kang, who is best known for playing Han Lue in the popular Fast and Furious film franchise, wrote, directed and stars in Drifter.

In the film, Kang works as a janitor by day, while being an aspiring Drift driver with dreams of reaching the highest levels of competition in his trusty Toyota Corolla GT (AE86). At CIAS, Kang hosted a special Q&A session with fans (as well as revealing an extended opening clip of the movie) in the John Bassett Theatre, adjacent to the North Hall of the MTCC.

Kang said he was not only “blown away,” by the enthusiasm from fans regarding the upcoming film, but also developed a real connection with the strong and vibrant car culture within Toronto and the GTA.

Jason Campbell, General Manager of the Canadian International AutoShow said, “We’re honoured that Sung chose the AutoShow to premiere this exclusive clip of the opening scene, of his new film, DRIFTER. We have such an incredibly strong and passionate car culture in Toronto—we see it every year, but we’re



Honda won the prestigious AJAC Car of the Year Award for the 2026 Civic.

particularly proud that Sung Kang had a chance to come and share his passion and film with us this year.”

Project Arrow concept

Additional highlights included a new concept vehicle in the Project Arrow Series, courtesy of the Automotive Parts Manufacturers Association of Canada (APMA). This prototype, named Borealis, is intended to showcase future automotive technologies, including autonomous driving, as well as signifying the capabilities and technological prowess of vehicle engineering and development skills and resources right here in Canada.

Asa Haglund, Global Vice President at Volvo Cars Safety Centre in Gothenburg, Sweden was on hand, and discussed Volvo’s relentless focus on its Zero Collision Strategy, and how innovation and technology is continuing to make vehicles safer.

Return of Indy Car

Frank Scarpitti, Mayor of the City of Markham, just north of Toronto, discussed the upcoming IndyCar race (on August 16), and how this represents an exciting chapter both for Markham and the IndyCar Series. Dubbed “the Ontario Honda Dealers Indy at Markham,” the race will take place on a specially-constructed street circuit in and around Markham Centre, and looks set to draw big crowds and investment to the region over the next five years. 🍷

Ongoing Learning & Development

Reimagining dealership profitability for now and the future.

TEXT JAKE STACEY



Ongoing training and development are essential for having happy and productive employees.

Now, more than ever, customers are making it known that they're willing to boycott businesses that aren't meeting their expectations. In fact, recent studies show that up to 78% of customers have walked out on a transaction due to a negative experience. In a competitive industry like automotive sales, customer experience is crucial to maintaining the reputation and financial health of a dealership. So, what is the common denominator that's creating poor experiences, pushing customers away, and tanking sales? The answer: poorly trained and unmotivated employees.

To grapple with heightened customer expectations, dealers are in dire need of a highly-engaged workforce, which 92% of employees say is achievable through comprehensive and routine workplace training. This is especially true for departments with notoriously high employee turnover rates, like F&I.

Empowering employees through training

Effective training is the cornerstone of positive employee experiences, as it motivates teams with growth and career development, and ensures everyone is aligned with a common goal. In an ever-evolving industry like automotive sales, the required skillsets for jobs have changed expeditiously, meaning there is even more appetite for learning and development. It is imperative, then, that dealership staff are equipped with the knowledge, tools, and skills to excel in their roles, making them more confident and fulfilled.

Ongoing learning and development are also the solutions to a ramped-up and expensive issue for many dealers: employee turnover. Lack of development continues to be the most common reason given by employees for leaving their job, but many employers are still not proactively investing enough in this area. Instead, they're forced to cover huge expenses to regularly fill positions. In fact, it can cost a dealer approximately 400% of an employee's annual salary to find their replacement, especially in today's scarce labour market. Recognizing this trend, it's clear that investment in developing skillsets is

not merely a discretionary expense, but a strategic imperative for talent retention.

Satisfied employees, satisfied customers

Notably, companies that excel in customer experience have 150% more engaged employees, a connection Forbes calls the unignorable link between employee experience and customer experience. Well-trained employees are enthusiastic about translating their learnings into action, and dedicating time to the needs of their customers. Dealers that are masters of the customer experience are also 93% more likely to have those customers return to their dealership, a pivotal driver for retention and sustained business success in automotive sales.

F&I training for dealership profitability

A key area for dealers to start implementing training is in the F&I department, an area that is too often plagued by employee turnover, and is historically considered an unfavoured part of the car buying process for customers. However, with investment in F&I training, not only can F&I staff become more engaged and customers can leave more satisfied, but the dealership can be up to 21% more profitable.

The best F&I training programs on the market regularly train Financial Services Managers to not only be product knowledge experts, but to also be emotionally intelligent, stay up-to-date with industry trends, and understand compliance. This training sets Financial Services Managers up to win over apprehensive customers by supplying them with products to enhance and protect the ownership of their second biggest investment, while also driving retention and profitability for the dealership. 



Jake Stacey is Executive Vice President, OEM Sales and Performance, LGM Financial Services.

MVRO

ACE: Relevance in a Changing Market

Annual conference and expo continues to grow in scope, while remaining true to the values that have defined it as a major event for dealers.

TEXT TODD BOURGON

On October 15 and 16, the Automotive Conference & Expo (ACE) returns once again to the Niagara Resort & Casino in Niagara Falls, Ontario. This event, which began more than a decade ago as Ontario Dealer Day, has grown to become a highlight on the automotive retail calendar each year.

When we originally set out to create this event, the objective was to provide a specific Canadian trade show for dealers, since previously, if you wanted access to the latest equipment, tools and solutions, most of the time, the only place to find it was at one of the big trade shows in the U.S. While we recognized that many would travel to the U.S. for events where they could attend a trade show and get real, relevant learning at the same time, travel logistics frequently limit the number of people from organizations who can attend, due to time and cost. Additionally, not all the learning you receive at these events is applicable to local regulations, particularly given the differences in dealer operations between Canada and the U.S.

Local access

Ontario Dealer Day began as a partnership between MVRO (TADA, as it was known then) and Consolidated Dealers Co-Operative (Co-Auto). Tom Langton, President of Co-Auto at the time, and I wanted to give dealers more access to the vendors operating right here in Canada, and that's essentially how it all began. Since then, the automotive landscape and the event have evolved, morphing to incorporate an increasing number of general content and workshop sessions relevant to the target audience. Today, ACE combines an expansive, dealer-focused trade show with high-quality, Canadian-driven and focused content sessions that comply with regulatory guidelines and focus specifically on business regulations here at home.

Each year, we pick content that is the most relevant to market conditions, and can be practically applied. From the outset, we've had strict conditions in that sponsors cannot buy their way onto the stage, and all content is vetted in advance to ensure it addresses business needs, and isn't focused on selling a brand or product.

We've also committed to having only the best-in-class when it comes to speakers and entertainment. MVRO prides itself on

delivering first-class events and we have consistently committed to not wavering from this. As a result, we've been fortunate enough to attract some very high profile names to this event over the years, including Chris Hatfield, Peter Mansbridge, Rick Hansen, Prime Minister Stephen Harper, Kim Mitchell, Dwayne Gretzky Band, Tom Cochrane, Honeymoon Suite, Mark Messier, Curtis Joseph, Wendel Clark and Rachel Homan.

True partnerships

Additionally, feedback from attendees has demonstrably shown that the all-inclusive pricing and the combination of keynote sessions and workshops on day two of the conference are highly appreciated. It takes true partnerships and a long-term approach to build an event like ACE. It's simply not possible to run something of this size and scope on one-year commitments as the financial risk is too high if the support changes last minute. We are very fortunate to have a dedicated team that understands the needs of dealers, when it comes to sourcing relevant content and finding the right people to deliver it, as well as great partners and sponsors who understand this and have committed to us year after year.

ACE 2026 will continue to build upon the core values that have established the event as the premier go-to dealer conference and trade show in Canada—one that continues to grow every year. At MVRO, our objective (as a non-profit association) is to serve the interests of our members, and we feel that ACE represents a strong example of that—a conference where the emphasis is on quality content, networking and business opportunities, not sales pitches conceived for profits benefiting third parties. As ACE 2026, edges closer, we look forward to sharing more updates, and of course, seeing you there! 



Todd Bourgon is CEO and Executive Director of the Motor Vehicle Retailers Association, an association representing more than 1,000 new car dealers in Ontario. You can reach him at toddb@mvro.ca

TIRES



Unimax

Offering Strengthened in Eastern Canada

Tire distributor Unimax is investing in expanding its network capacity across Eastern Canada.

TEXT MICHEL BEAUNOYER

Jean Novak, President and Chief Executive Officer of Unimax, has long been clear about his strategy to solidify the company's presence in key Canadian markets while offering customers a stronger tire selection. At its core, this strategy means better service and faster, more reliable product availability across every territory.

Concrete actions and significant investments are backing up this vision.

An example is the 2023 agreement with North Country Tire, a major distributor operating primarily in British Columbia, Alberta and Manitoba, which strengthened Unimax's position in Western Canada. The two companies had already been working together for several years, and for Novak, that kind of established, well-respected partnership is exactly the right foundation for continued growth. ➤

Unimax President Jean Novak wants to support all Canadian customers by expanding the company's tire and wheel offering.

Unimax has deep roots in Quebec, where its partnership with Stox has provided solid distribution coverage for years. That presence has gradually expanded into Ontario and Atlantic Canada, creating a strong base the distributor now intends to build on. The strategy has always been to do things right, by supporting the product offering with a thorough analysis of market needs.

Supporting growth in the East

Unimax is currently rolling out a series of concrete initiatives to strengthen its presence in Ontario. “We want to bring inventory closer to our customers and increase our operational capacity where demand warrants it,” says Novak. Both past and upcoming investments reflect this reality and Unimax’s determination to deepen its presence in the region.

Ontario is currently a key market, both in terms of volume and the diversity of its customer base. Unimax already has a team on the ground there, recently bolstered by a dedicated regional leader. This structure enables close, hands-on work in the field and supports more agile decision-making in response to the constant changes in this particularly dynamic market.

“Being in Ontario matters. It lets us build stronger relationships with our customers and make sure they have access to the best possible product portfolio,” says Novak.

Investments in Eastern Canada are therefore aimed at increasing storage capacity, improving product availability and enhancing the overall experience for both current and future customers. In other words, Unimax is putting infrastructure in place.

Bricks and mortar

To meet the demand for more products and faster execution, Unimax has launched or completed several major projects for the 2026–2027 period. First, the Ottawa distribution centre has been operational since early 2026, immediately improving coverage in Eastern Ontario and Western Quebec for the distributor.

Sudbury, for its part, will be home to a brand-new facility designed to support growth in that territory, with an opening planned for early 2027.

The new Vaughan facility, dedicated to RSSW tires and wheels, will open in late spring 2026. This means approximately 175,000 wheels and 160,000 tires will become accessible to the greater Toronto area.

Novak notes that the 2025 acquisition of the RSSW division supports Unimax’s vision of becoming a Canadian



leader in tire distribution by adding steel and alloy wheel offerings to its catalogue.

A portion of the new Vaughan building will be reserved for these wheels, streamlining inventory management and optimizing distribution across Ontario, Novak adds.

Quebec is not being overlooked: Unimax has invested in a major expansion of its Chicoutimi facility, set to be operational in fall 2026, adding 25,000 units of storage capacity.

Getting closer to customers

In Atlantic Canada, Bedford, near Halifax, saw its capacity increase by 30,000 units with its 2025 expansion. If there were any doubt about Unimax’s commitment to service, Newfoundland puts it to rest: a new distribution centre opened in Pasadena in 2025, capable of storing 24,000 units.

“What we’re doing in Newfoundland is a great illustration of our vision. We offer a service built on solution-oriented people, giving Newfoundlanders fast access to our



The investments aim to enhance storage capacity, which will have a direct impact on product availability.

products,” says Novak. A facility with that kind of storage capacity on the island naturally transforms service quality and significantly reduces delivery times for customers across all categories.

In total, all of these projects will add 294,000 units of additional capacity in Eastern Canada.

Meeting every need

President Novak believes that better tire and wheel availability paired with a proximity distribution strategy is a win for everyone: retailers, dealerships, tire and mechanical shops, and

Point S merchants alike. “These entrepreneurs who are well established in their communities want quality products from

us, but they also want service,” adds Novak. “We are passionate about this industry and we work with experts and professionals.

Every action we take, every investment we make, is aimed at strengthening the quality of our business relationships with all our customers.”

This deep understanding of each market’s needs is what will drive Unimax’s growth in Eastern Canada and beyond. “The growth and long-term sustainability of our network depend on our ability to supply it with quality products, at the right time and in the right

place, for all of our customers, wherever they may be,” concludes Novak. 

“Our investments in Eastern Canada are guided by a single priority: better serving our customers. More capacity, more products, and faster execution — that’s exactly what the market is asking of us, and that’s what we’re delivering.”

JEAN NOVAK
PRESIDENT, UNIMAX

Rethinking the Technician Shortage

Independent shops can still win the hiring game, if they change the rules.

TEXT JACK KAZMIERSKI



For years, the automotive industry has sounded the alarm about a technician shortage. However, according to Sophie Corriveau, Automotive Recruitment Advisor with *Auto-jobs.ca*, the issue is more nuanced than many shop owners think.

"Technicians are present in the labour market, but you need to know how to find them," she explains. "They are not always actively looking for a new job, and can sometimes be hesitant about change. It is therefore essential to attract them by offering working conditions suited to their reality and pace of life."

It's not just about pay

Corriveau is clear: Compensation remains a cornerstone of recruitment. However, the days when salary alone sealed the deal are over. Today's technicians are evaluating the full package. "They no longer settle for a base salary alone," she notes. "They evaluate the overall value of a position, including benefits, flexible hours, performance bonuses, continuing education, and career development opportunities." This shift reflects a broader workplace trend: Employees want balance. In a physically demanding trade, quality of life isn't a perk, it's a priority.

The dealership dilemma

Independent shops face stiff competition from dealerships and national chains, which often have significant advantages.

"National chains often have larger budgets and internal HR resources, allowing them to make their recruitment process faster and more structured," Corriveau says. "They can invest in advertising campaigns and recruitment platforms." There's also a perception challenge. "Many technicians believe that working for a large chain provides more benefits, job security, and career growth," she adds.

That said, independent shops can offer perks that the big chains can't. "Independent shops can offer equally attractive

conditions," Corriveau argues, "while providing unique advantages: a smaller, close-knit team, a strong sense of belonging, and proximity to management." That proximity matters more than many owners realize. Being seen, heard, and valued can outweigh corporate perks.

Culture is no longer optional

If there's one theme that runs through Corriveau's insights, it's this: Workplace culture is now a deciding factor.

"More and more workers are looking for a company culture that aligns with their values and where they can feel recognized," she says. That recognition doesn't have to be complicated, but it does have to be genuine. Corriveau emphasizes the importance of the human connection: "Take the time to talk with employees about both work and their life outside the job, building relationships that are professional, yet human and friendly." Retention, she adds, starts long before an employee considers leaving. "Create a sense of belonging so that no one feels like just a number."

Flexibility: the new gold standard

When it comes to benefits, the hierarchy has shifted. "Benefits that promote flexibility and work-life balance are among the most sought-after by technicians today," Corriveau explains. "Adapted schedules, weekends off, personal days, and some flexibility in work organization greatly improve quality of life."

Equally important is growth. "Technicians want to continue evolving and learning throughout their careers," she says. "Access to ongoing training and certifications helps them feel valued."

Finding talent in 2026

So where are successful shops finding technicians today? "It's a combination of strategies," says Corriveau. Specialized job

platforms, like *Auto-jobs.ca*, remain essential, but they're no longer enough on their own. "Social media plays a major role, allowing companies to showcase their culture, work environment, and employer brand, reaching candidates who may not be actively looking for a new job."

Your current team is another essential element of the bigger recruitment picture. "Word-of-mouth and employee referral programs are highly effective," Corriveau says. "Employees often become the company's best ambassadors, and can recommend reliable technicians and professionals."

Job posting essentials

If you're still posting bare-bones job ads, you're already behind. "A job posting is no longer just a description of a role or a salary," Corriveau says. "It must serve as a communication and attraction tool." Transparency is key. "Mentioning compensation is essential," she stresses, along with benefits, working conditions, and growth opportunities. The real differentiator is identity. "A posting that reflects the company's values, spirit, and vision allows candidates to identify with the organization and feel motivated to join," she explains.

Speed and sincerity win

Finally, Corriveau offers a piece of advice many shop owners overlook: act fast. "If you receive a promising application, respond quickly—top talent won't stay available for long," she warns.

Once you have attracted that top talent, you'll need to hold on to it. How? "Being attentive, available, and valuing your employees while maintaining authentic relationships is key to attracting and retaining the best talent in a competitive environment," Corriveau says.

In today's market, technicians aren't just choosing a job—they're choosing where they belong. And the shops that understand this, are those that will be most successful. 

On P24 -25 of the March issue we would like to acknowledge an error. P24 shows a picture of Jay Cawker from Kuhmo Tire, not Guillaume Martin. On P25, the quote is from Corey Parker, Groupe Touchette, not Jay Cawker as stated - Ed.



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Nokian Tyres

Stud On, Stud Off

Nokian Tyres reinvents the studded winter tires.

TEXT JACK KAZMIERSKI

What was once impossible is now a reality—a studded winter tire with stud on/stud off capabilities: the all-new Hakkapeliitta 01. Nokian Tyres invited the world's automotive media to their testing facilities in northern Finland, 250 km above the Arctic Circle, for the unveiling of this revolutionary new tire technology. *Autosphere Mag* had a front-row seat at the technical presentation, as well as plenty of opportunities to test drive and experience the new tire in a variety of winter conditions.

Concept tire

According to Mikko Liukkula, Nokian Tyre's Development Manager, he and his engineering team have been working on a tire that could deploy studs on demand for many years.

"In 2014 we came out with a concept tire where you could press a button to activate and deactivate the studs," he explained. "But the technology was so complicated that it would never reach production, and each tire was very expensive."

Nonetheless, since the concept tire received so much media and consumer attention at the time, Nokian Tyres was determined to find a way to bring this technology to market. "We tried so many different ways to make this concept tire into reality," he added, "but most of our attempts were a dead end, and we had to start all over again."

Finally, Liukkula and his team came up with the idea of a special rubber compound layer within the tire—known as the "adaptive base layer"—that would house the bottom flange of each stud. This layer would get hard when temperatures dropped, and remain soft and pliable when temperatures rose. When hard, the layer would keep the studs in the "On" position. When soft, it would allow each stud to sink into the tread, essentially switching the studs "Off."

In other words, when ambient temperatures are cold enough for ice to form on road surfaces, the adaptive base layer is hard enough to keep the studs in the "On" position. When temperatures rise to the point where ice melts, the adaptive base layer gets soft enough to keep the studs in the "Off" position.

Lab tests

Although Nokian Tyres wouldn't specify the exact ambient temperature at which the adaptive base layer makes the switch from hard to soft, and vice versa, their technical presentation, as well as our own testing during the "lab" portion of the program, seemed to suggest that the studs stay in the "On"

position at and below -5 degrees Celsius, and in the "Off" position when temperatures rise above 5 degrees Celsius.

That leads to another interesting technical question: What happens when the ambient temperature is cold enough to keep the studs "On," but they're no longer needed because you're

"The 3PMS signifies snow acceleration, while the Ice Grip symbol signifies great braking on ice."

HANS DYHRMAN DIRECTOR OF MARKETING
NOKIAN TYRES NORTH AMERICA

driving on dry pavement?

Liukkula offered the following explanation: "If you are driving on a bare road in -20°C weather at 100 km/h, each stud hits the road 14 times per second, which causes the stud to be pushed in every time it hits the road. That small repetitive movement warms up the adaptive base layer, which softens it, allowing the studs to sink into the tire and stay there."

According to Nokian Tyres, the transition from "On" to "Off," and vice versa, takes very little time: "We have tested the tire by driving it out from a warm garage directly to ice grip tests, and it adapts immediately even in that circumstance," the company explained in one of their technical FAQ handouts.

Between the adaptive base layer and the tread compound is another key component, known as the "lock compound." It has been engineered to hold each stud firmly in place.



Nokian Tyres' Hakkapeliitta 01 is the world's first winter tire with on-demand grip.

New tread, new compound

In addition to the stud on/stud off technology, the Hakkapeliitta 01 boasts a new tread design and a new compound. This tire was engineered with smaller tread blocks than the brand's flagship winter tire, the Hakkapeliitta 10, in order to deliver better snow grip and more biting edges. It also comes with two different self-locking 3D sipes: shoulder and middle. The shoulder sipes improve steering precision and snow grip, while the middle sipes provide more stability.

Furthermore, the tread compound was engineered specifically to improve wet grip, and according to Hans Dyhrman, Director of Marketing at Nokian Tyres North America, the Hakkapeliitta 01 delivers 5% better wet grip than the Hakkapeliitta 10.

Stud layout for the Hakkapeliitta 01 has been computer optimized, with middle studs positioned to maximize both braking and acceleration capabilities, while the shoulder studs are positioned to maximize lateral grip, which significantly improves cornering.

The studs are the same as those used in the Hakkapeliitta 10, Dyhrman explained, but with a notable modification. "The pin is the same as the one we use in the Hakkapeliitta 10," he added, "but we changed the collar to give it more of a biting edge."

Aramid fibers (used in bullet-resistant vests) are incorporated into the sidewalls of the Hakkapeliitta 01 on all tires 18 inches and above, Dyhrman added. Aramid adds mechanical strength to the sidewalls for added durability, and

improves resistance to cuts and impact from road hazards, like potholes.

Key features

Nokian Tyres has incorporated a number of notable features into the new Hakkapeliitta 01, including a wear indicator, which makes it easy for consumers to tell at a glance how much tread is left: 8, 6 or 4mm. Each tire also comes with the brand's Electric Fit emblem. "It tells consumers that we have tested this tire on many different electric vehicles," Dyhrman said. "We've been testing for over a decade on electric vehicles."

The Hakkapeliitta 01 proudly displays the Three-Peak Mountain Snowflake (3PMS) symbol on the sidewall, right beside the Ice Grip symbol. "The 3PMS signifies snow acceleration, while the Ice Grip symbol signifies great braking on ice," Dyhrman added.

Finally, since no one wants a noisy winter tire, Nokian Tyres has added their SilentDrive technology to 24 leading EV sizes of the Hakkapeliitta 01. According to the company, this layer of acoustic foam results in an "up to seven-decibel reduction in road noise." In addition, the fact that the studs retract when driving on dry pavement, makes these tires much quieter than typical studded tires.

Consumer education and government regulations

The new Hakkapeliitta 01 was engineered to deploy studs only when they're needed, and according to the company, "this helps decrease road wear by ensuring gentler, more efficient road contact when maximum stud grip is not required."

In other words, this tire shouldn't damage bare pavement the same way traditional studded tires can. So in theory, these tires should be permitted in places where traditional studded tires are currently forbidden—on public roadways in certain provinces, and in some private garages.

However, as Wes Boling, Senior Communications and Content Manager for Nokian Tyres explained, "these are still considered to be studded tires." This means that many Canadian drivers still won't be able to purchase these tires for their personal vehicles without risking a fine.

The Hakkapeliitta 01 represents a bold step forward in winter tire innovation, transforming a once impossible concept into reality. By automatically deploying studs when they're needed, and retracting them when they're not, Nokian Tyres has created a tire that promises improved safety, reduced road wear and quieter operation. 

Michelin Tires

Evolution of a Market Leader

How Michelin took the X-Ice Snow tire and pushed performance, longevity and efficiency even further with the new X-Ice Snow+.

TEXT JACK KAZMIERSKI

For years, the Michelin X-Ice Snow has been one of the go-to winter tires for many Canadian consumers. Words like “impressive,” and “amazing,” and “excellent” have often been used in online reviews by those who purchased a set to describe the X-Ice Snow, further emphasizing just how much consumers love this tire.

Michelin recently gave X-Ice Snow fans even more reason to rejoice when they unveiled a new and improved version: the X-Ice Snow+. While the name hasn’t changed much (except for the addition of the “+” sign), and the tread pattern remains the same, Michelin says this new tire is better than the original in a number of ways.

Michelin DNA

“We launched the X-Ice Snow six years ago,” says Omer Waysman, Vice President of B2C Marketing for Michelin North America, “but our DNA at Michelin is to continuously innovate.”

Waysman says that they challenged the engineers at Michelin to take an already excellent tire, and make it even better. “What I’m most proud of is the fact that we didn’t make any compromises,” he adds. “We just improved several elements of performance—on wet roads, on dry roads, on ice, on snow—and we improved fuel-efficiency, as well as wear.”

Michelin points out that this tire was built to last, promising “more than 26% longer tread life than three leading competitors.”

While that may be impressive, the real question is how does the new tire compare with the original? According to Waysman, the X-Ice Snow+ delivers improved grip and braking capabilities over the original tire: It performs 1% better on snow, 4% better on ice, 14% better on wet road surfaces, and 7% better on dry tarmac.

Michelin’s “secret sauce”

While the tread design is pretty much identical, the new tire benefits from a new compound, as well as the “secret sauce” that Michelin calls, “the advanced FLEX-ICE 3.0 tread compound.”

David Griese, Product Category Manager, Winter Segment, Michelin North America explains that this is the company’s newest compound, developed specifically for the X-Ice Snow+ tire.

“Although we keep our material recipes a secret,” Griese says, “I can tell you that every tread compound has three main

ingredients: An elastomer, which is the backbone of the rubber; other materials like plasticizers and additives, including oils; and filler materials, including silica. For this new tread compound, we have changed or tuned all three.”

Finally, since winter tires are sure to spend at least part

of the season driving on dry paved roads, Michelin has gone the extra mile to make sure the X-Ice Snow+ is as quiet as possible.

“We employed Piano Acoustic Tuning Technology to reduce road noise for a quieter, more comfortable ride,” Griese says. “This is a software and simulation tool we use to minimize the noise coming from tires.”

Looking at the tread with the naked eye, most people would say that all the tread features are evenly-spaced and identical, all around the tire, Griese explains. “But if you look more closely, you’ll see that they’re slightly varied and slightly different,” he adds. “That’s by design, so that you don’t get certain resonances and noise coming from the tire.”

Finally, the new tire was engineered to last longer. “The X-Ice Snow tire comes with a warranty, which is rare in the winter tire category,” Griese says. “We have improved the warranty for the new X-Ice Snow+. So while the original tire

“We launched the X-Ice Snow six years ago, but our DNA at Michelin is to continuously innovate.”

OMER WAYSMAN VICE PRESIDENT OF B2C MARKETING
MICHELIN NORTH AMERICA



The new Michelin X-Ice Snow+ comes with both a 3PMS and Ice Grip symbol on the sidewall.

came with a 60,000 km warranty, the new tire will have a longer warranty. We're currently running tests to see how long that new warranty will be, but I'm confident that it will be better than 60,000 km."

Test track experience

To prove how capable the new X-Ice Snow+ tire is, Michelin

invited the media to test it head-to-head against some of the top winter tires on the market today: Continental VikingContact 8, Nokian Hakkapeliitta R5 EV, and Bridgestone Blizzak WS90.

Whether driving on sheer ice or deep snow, the new X-Ice Snow+ tire consistently delivered better grip and control than these other tires, although in some cases, the difference between the X-Ice Snow+ and the competition was minimal. That's to be expected, since these are all top-rated tires.

One of the more impressive tests took place on an icy hill with the tread on both the Michelin X-Ice Snow+ and the Bridgestone Blizzak WS90 shaved down to 4/32nds. Here, the X-Ice Snow+ performed considerably better than the Blizzak WS90, delivering more grip, and less wheel spin.

That said, Bridgestone is replacing the Blizzak WS90 with the Blizzak IcePeak, and it will be interesting to see how these two fare against each other. In the meantime, the X-Ice Snow+ is more than a product refresh—it's a strategic reinforcement of a proven winter platform. 🇨🇦





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Redefining Performance

The New UHP Landscape

Modern UHP tires challenge outdated assumptions, delivering comfort, durability, and low noise alongside enhanced grip and handling.

TEXT JACK KAZMIERSKI

Once reserved for sports cars and performance junkies, UHP (ultra-high performance) tires have been going more mainstream in recent years. While this may be a given for those in the industry, some consumers still have a hard time accepting the fact that their family sedan or SUV was engineered to run on UHP tires.

"Historically, UHP tires were primarily associated with ultra-luxury or high-end sports vehicles. While those segments remain important, the market has evolved considerably in recent years," says Aadil Dutli, Product Segment Manager - PLT & STR, Dynamic Tire. "UHP tires are no longer limited to niche performance vehicles. They're becoming increasingly common across multiple segments of the market."

James McIntyre, SVP Sales Canada / Product Development North America at Sailun Tire Americas notes that a lot of the

growth is coming from performance SUVs, CUVs, and sporty sedans, with electric vehicles adding another layer of demand.

"Because of that, the category itself is evolving," he adds. "What used to be mostly pure summer UHP tires has now expanded into several segments: UHP all-season, traditional UHP summer, and Ultra-Ultra High Performance (UUHP) tires that are closer to track-ready products."

In practical terms, McIntyre explains, Canadian drivers still want performance, but they want to be able to enjoy it every day of the week—not just on weekends. "They want something that works for daily commuting, highway driving, wet-weather confidence, and even shoulder-season use," he adds. "That's why we're seeing the strongest momentum in what I'd call the 'fast daily driver' category, rather than purely enthusiast applications."

Michelin Brand Manager Chris Jillings agrees, adding that speed ratings are a key factor to consider when recommending UHP tires to consumers. "The Canadian market has seen a major vehicle mix shift toward CUVs and SUVs, and many of these vehicles now require V- or W-speed-rated UHP tires," he says. "Historically, UHP meant summer-only performance tires. In Canada, that has changed significantly. Today, UHP all-season tires account for the majority of UHP sales volume, and that share continues to grow."

The knowledge gap

Despite the growth of the UHP tire market, many drivers still don't understand why they would need tires that were once



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Sailun Atrezzo SVA 2 UHP

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considered a must only on high-performance vehicles. “Many consumers believe that UHP tires are designed solely for high-speed capability, but that’s only part of the story,” Jillings says. “UHP tires are engineered to deliver much more than top-end performance. They enhance cornering stability, improve wet-braking performance, sharpen steering response, and provide better handling under higher loads. These characteristics contribute to safer, more confident everyday driving, not just performance at high speeds.”

Consumers also need to understand that UHP tire design has come a long way in recent years. “There are a couple of common misconceptions,” Sailun’s McIntyre says. “One is that UHP automatically means a harsh ride and very short tread life. That may have been true many years ago, but modern UHP tires are designed with much better balance between performance, wear, and comfort.”

This knowledge gap needs to be filled, and according to Dynamic Tire’s Dutli, an ongoing effort to educate consumers can go a long way to correcting misconceptions. “Retailers and industry professionals can help consumers understand that UHP tires are about overall vehicle control and safety, not just speed or performance driving,” he adds.

Advanced tire science

Today’s UHP tires benefit from decades of advancements in engineering and technical know-how. “One significant area of

innovation in UHP tire development today is compound engineering,” Dutli explains. “While UHP tires were traditionally designed for maximum grip and handling on sports cars, their growing use on mainstream vehicles has forced manufacturers to rethink the balance of performance characteristics.”

Moreover, modern tire compounds are engineered to deliver strong dry handling and wet traction while improving comfort, tread life, and road noise. “Another key development is stronger tire construction,” he adds. “As vehicles become heavier and more powerful—especially with larger SUVs & electric vehicles—tires require reinforced internal structures and higher load ratings. These structural reinforcements help maintain stability, durability, and consistent performance under increased weight and torque demands.”

Finally, believe it or not, today’s UHP tires have been designed to be more appealing to the eye. “Aesthetics are becoming a major differentiator in the high-performance and ultra-high-performance tire segment,” says Michelin’s Jillings. “Manufacturers are developing new technologies that give industrial designers far more freedom to create high-contrast, dimensional features across both sidewalls and tread patterns. These visual enhancements not only signal performance, but also strengthen brand identity.”

Safer, stronger and more beautiful than ever, today’s UHP tires are a must on a growing variety of vehicles, which bodes well for this tire segment in 2026 and beyond. 



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Newbies Need Training!

Transferrable skills may lack safety savvy.

TEXT MATT WHITE

Due to the tight labour market, many tire shops are getting creative and hiring tire technicians from other sectors, like hospitality or high tech.

It's a great idea, and although many of these new hires come with a host of transferrable skills, there's one item they're missing—how to practice good safety. And that can only come from good training. For example, someone's who's been in the foodservice industry for 10 to 15 years, doesn't know how to safely change a commercial tire. In this environment, there are so many more hazards—metal objects, inflation hazards, driving hazards. So you have to start with the basics.

You need to bring them in, do the basic training and the apprenticeship program, step by step, putting them with a solid leader trainer who's been in the industry and proven that

they're doing it correctly. You don't want to start all over again with people who have learned the wrong way.

Online training

Many of you have realized this need, and we're seeing a high increase in demand for training. Our online training is off the hook. That's where somebody new is going to start,

in front of the computer. Then they have to do the task in front of a manager. That's one of the most sought-after programs in the past few years. During COVID, people were not able to train hands-on, so they had to train remotely. While

Training is power. It makes a difference in an organization of how people react to each other.

gaining new people and new personnel in the shops is a big plus for the tire industry, it's going to pose a challenge to managers and owners, to make sure these new people are



continuing to see growth, there has been an uptick in injuries. The best way to stop injuries is training. Training and enforcement of training.

Always review your safety standards, take pride in them. At the end of the day everyone goes home safe.

Training is power

Training is power. It makes a difference in an organization of how people react to each other. I've seen shops with healthy and safe standard operation procedures, and everything's working. They don't have a lot of troubles. Everything is flowing. You can see it in the attitude of a properly trained technician. You can see that he's got a different input.

Another bonus for bringing in people who have not worked in the industry before is that they can be shown the exact good standards instead of changing habits that were used in the past.

People are going to bring their exceptional skills from their previous profession, and they can make a big difference in the tire industry, provided we train them properly. 

provided with the best correct training and maintenance procedures on all the equipment. This ensures they know step by step standard operating procedures for installing and providing service to customers. Let's face it, a tire is a dangerous item. And with trucking and the mining sectors



Matt White is the Director of Tire Services for the Tire Industry Association (TIA). He has over 34 years of experience training technicians from all over the globe on how to stay safe on the job.



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The First 10 Minutes

Why great service advisors win before the hood opens.

TEXT KEN BORG

Step into any successful repair shop and you'll notice something right away: It's not just about fixing cars. It's about calming nerves, building trust, and delivering a consistent experience from the moment a customer walks through the door.

For many clients, visiting a garage feels a lot like going to the dentist: necessary, but uncomfortable. They arrive expecting bad news, a lighter wallet, and a conversation filled with confusing technical jargon. That's why the role of the service advisor is so critical.

The key is understanding where the customer is coming from, and more often than not, that place is uncertainty. Many customers open with the same line: "Excuse my ignorance—I don't know anything about cars."

Instead of reinforcing that discomfort, great advisors flip the script. A little humour goes a long way. When a customer describes a mysterious "click, click, boom, boom" noise, the right response isn't correction—it's connection. Laugh with them, not at them. "That's a great description," you might say. "Let's go take a look at what's making that click, click, boom, boom."

Consistency is key

Customer relations is all about relatability, but here's the catch: It only works if it's consistent. Customer experience isn't a one-time performance. It's a daily commitment. Whether in person or over the phone, clients expect the same tone, the same energy, and the same level of care every time they interact with your shop. A cheerful greeting one day followed by a flat, distracted tone the next doesn't go unnoticed.

In fact, regular customers will call it out: "You sounded happy the other day. Everything okay?" That's how closely they're paying attention.

Your very first few seconds with any client are the most important. The opening moments set the tone for the entire visit. A simple and upbeat, "Good morning, how's it going?" can break tension instantly. Even casual small talk about the weather, the cold, or the early start to the day helps humanize the interaction.



Not everyone is naturally suited for a front-counter role.

Avoid industry jargon

Equally important is avoiding industry jargon. Inside the shop, terms like calipers, rotors, and pulsation are second nature. For customers, they're confusing at best and intimidating at worst.

Instead, capable advisors would want to translate problems into plain language and, when possible, visual explanations. Showing a customer a simple image of a brake system and explaining what's happening as they press the pedal makes the issue tangible. It shifts the conversation from abstract to understandable, and that builds confidence.

Of course, not everyone is naturally suited for a front-counter role. Technical skill doesn't always translate to people skills. That's why hiring and training the right team matters.

All the world is a stage...

It might sound odd, but you have to think of yourself as an actor, or performer, who can appeal to your audience: each and every customer. Every day is like stepping on stage, and you've got to be "on." Low energy days where you're grumpy with customers simply aren't an option.

The best shops don't stop at conversation. They reinforce great service with thoughtful actions, like having a clean, ready-to-go courtesy car waiting without hassle. It's a small gesture that leaves a lasting impression.

In the end, customers may come in for a repair, but what they remember is how you made them feel in those first 10 minutes. 



Ken Borg has been in the auto industry since 1979, and is the General Manager of Oakville Tire & Auto, which has been in business since 1946.

Wider Market Insights

TRAC

What passenger tire professionals can learn from the 2026 OTR Conference.

TEXT CAROL HOCHU

While passenger and light truck (PLT) tires dominate the Canadian automotive landscape, the Off-The-Road (OTR) tire segment serving mines, construction sites, quarries, and heavy industrial operations offers a compelling preview of forces that will soon influence the broader automotive service world. The 2026 TIA OTR Tire Conference (February 18-21 in Orlando, Fla.,) spotlighted powerful trends in safety, technology, economics, and workforce development that extend well beyond earthmover tires.

Safety and precision

Safety messaging dominated the early conference sessions. From KLINGE's daily safety briefings to hands-on demonstrations of hydraulic tool maintenance, the tone was unmistakable: Downtime is expensive, and errors cost real money in demanding environments.

Technicians learned how poor maintenance of tools translates directly into lost productivity and preventable failures. For passenger tire retailers, the message is similar but scaled down: Shops that maintain tools meticulously and train consistently build efficiency, reduce comebacks, and strengthen customer trust. The OTR world simply highlights the stakes in sharper relief.

Economic trends

Michael Bennett of the Automotive Training Institute delivered a data-rich, economic outlook with implications for both OTR and passenger markets. He highlighted the construction and mining sector, which remains resilient with 73% of OTR demand coming from the aftermarket as fleets extend equipment life in response to high capital costs.

For automotive retailers, this mirrors what many see already: Consumers and businesses are keeping vehicles longer, and prioritizing maintenance over replacement. The infrastructure surge in Canada, including its place as the world's number two

in planned mining projects in 2026, signals similar maintenance-driven demand for passenger and light truck tires in adjacent regions.

Technology adoption

Sessions on smart tire monitoring, telematics, and autonomous equipment revealed an industry rapidly embracing digital tools. OTR fleets increasingly rely on real time tire health data to reduce downtime and prevent failures.

These same technologies are already moving into the passenger world, with TPMS representing only the beginning. Expect more emphasis on connected tires, predictive maintenance, and integrated fleet platforms for car dealerships and service centres.

The AI session, led by Brian V. Matson, reinforced this trajectory: From meeting transcription tools to AI-supported research and content creation, he underscored that AI isn't replacing technicians, it's elevating them.

Workforce skills

Yokohama's session, "The Whole Package," argued that customers—whether mine managers or everyday drivers—aren't simply buying tires; they're buying confidence, clarity, and trusted advice.

Technical knowledge isn't enough. Communication, strategic thinking, and leadership presence now define top performing tire professionals. OTR amplifies this reality, but the lesson is universal: The future tire expert must be a technician, educator, and advisor all at once.

Human resilience

Caleb Campbell's keynote on "The Inner Advantage" connected personal resilience with professional performance. His framework of "recognize, reframe, respond" offered a reminder that tire professionals also face intense pressure, from supply chain chaos to labour shortages.

Why this matters

The OTR sector operates at a massive scale, but its lessons cascade directly into Canada's passenger tire ecosystem, reminding us that precision and safety are non-negotiable. 



Carol Hochu is President of the Tire & Rubber Association of Canada (TRAC). You can reach her at chochu@tracanada.ca.

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Vast-Auto Distribution/O'Reilly Auto Parts One Team United Toward Excellence

The acquisition of Groupe Del Vasto by O'Reilly Auto Parts in 2024 positions the duo very favourably within the Canadian market. The recent "Built for This" Convention, held in Québec City in March, was the perfect illustration of a team united by a spirit of collaboration and a shared commitment to excellence in customer service.

TEXT MICHEL BEAUNOYER

O'Reilly's signature green took centre stage during this event, held from March 12 to 15, 2026, marking the integration of the brand's colours within the Montréal-based organization. Last year focused on learning how to work together and on building the foundations of this partnership. This year, a record number of participants (900 registered), including parts stores, shop managers, and their families, witnessed the very positive and tangible results of this new dynamic.

"Over the past few months, we have learned to better understand one another and embrace the values of respect and quality workmanship upheld by the O'Reilly family," explained Steve Bujold, Regional Sales Director, during an interview with *Autosphere*. "It is important to understand that O'Reilly Auto Parts is a powerhouse in the automotive aftermarket industry. With more than 6,500 stores across North America, it is a giant whose expertise and best practices benefit our market, while opening the door to an unmatched offering of services, parts, and tools for our customers." ➤

Team Members of the
Vast-Auto Distribution / O'Reilly Auto Parts



Indeed, the development of the product offering played a major role during the convention, with the progressive introduction of new parts categories into stores. Many of these additions, including proprietary brands, bring significant added value and enhance the diversity of offerings in the Canadian market, while meeting customers' specific needs and regulatory standards. New brands include the company's popular Super Start battery line, BrakeBest braking components, MicroGard filters, Import Direct brake pads, rotors and A/C compressors, the Murray Climate Control line, and Power Torque tools and supplies.

A strong team

In speaking with Canadian members of the company, it becomes clear that O'Reilly gained the expertise of a highly skilled team through the integration of Groupe Del Vasto. Not only will their clients and partners be reassured to see that the people with whom they have built business relationships, and even friendships, over the years remain in place, but the number of employees in Canada has grown by hundreds of new talents in recent months.

"O'Reilly Auto Parts shares our values regarding team member well-being," added Bujold. "We are also pleased to see that internal team development is clearly encouraged, as the company has a promote-from-within philosophy. This is inspiring and rewarding for everyone, especially for our next-generation team members who can look forward to promising career opportunities with us." This supportive approach is also felt among store managers, whether in-

dependent or corporate, as well as among the repair shops within the network.

Broad coverage

O'Reilly Auto Parts has an interesting strategy regarding its stores. For this company, stores provide services and inventory to mechanical repair shops while also opening their doors to consumers and DIY enthusiasts. Flyers are distributed across various sectors to attract this high-potential customer base, traditionally overlooked by automotive parts stores.

Store inventories will be expanded to support this business strategy which, as Steve Bujold emphasized, will not take anything away from repair shops. "The shops within our network, whether M 360 Mechanic / M Mécanique 360, Certified Auto Repair / Certifié Auto Service, Octo Auto Service Plus, or Auto Mécano, will benefit from a wider selection of quality parts, including O'Reilly proprietary brands. In addition, we will enhance service by ensuring faster and more frequent deliveries." Various promotional programs are also being introduced to attract more customers and build loyalty.

Access to training programs also remains essential for the network. The Vast-Auto Distribution Academy welcomed a new trainer this year, and the innovative Verified Electric program remains highly relevant.

While 2025 was marked by transition for Vast-Auto Distribution, 2026 may well be recognized as the pivotal moment when parts stores and repair shops across the network begin to reap the benefits of an acquisition carried out with full respect for each party's expertise. 

Recognitions

During the Saturday evening Awards Gala, participants came together to celebrate and recognize excellence and outstanding performance across all segments of the network. Vast-Auto Distribution/O'Reilly Auto Parts proudly recognized the following 2026 award winners:

Parts City Auto Parts / Parts City Pièces d'Auto of the Year



**Quebec : Distribution 20-100 –
Martin Boulet**



**Atlantic/Ontario : Atlantic Auto Parts
Resource Inc. – Craig Champion**



**Company-owned: Parts City Auto Parts /
CAPS Old Innes – Justin Fischer**

Certified Auto Repair / Certifié Auto Service of the Year:



**Pneus Premier Choix
Benoit Sarrazin**



**Ratté et Frenette Inc.
Martin Frenette**



**Toretto Pneus et Mécanique
Alexandre Boivin**

M 360 Mechanic / M Mécanique 360 of the Year



**M Mécanique 360 Roberval
Daniel Girard and Ghislain Meunier**



**FCS Auto
June Zhou and Rick Caiello**



In addition, several prizes were awarded during the Gala, including three trips for two to Málaga, Spain. The winners were:

Manufacturer Representative of the Year



**Québec
Zota Catalin – Agna Brakes**



**Atlantic/Ontario
Marc Woodburn – Mevotech**

Daniel Ostiguy
Danos Mécanique / Certifié Auto Service

Danny Côté
Garage Guy Asselin / Certifié Auto Service

Alain Morel
M Mécanique 360 Jean-Talon Ouest

Technology, Connectivity and Retention

New options are emerging in service repair via software and hardware.

TEXT HUW EVANS

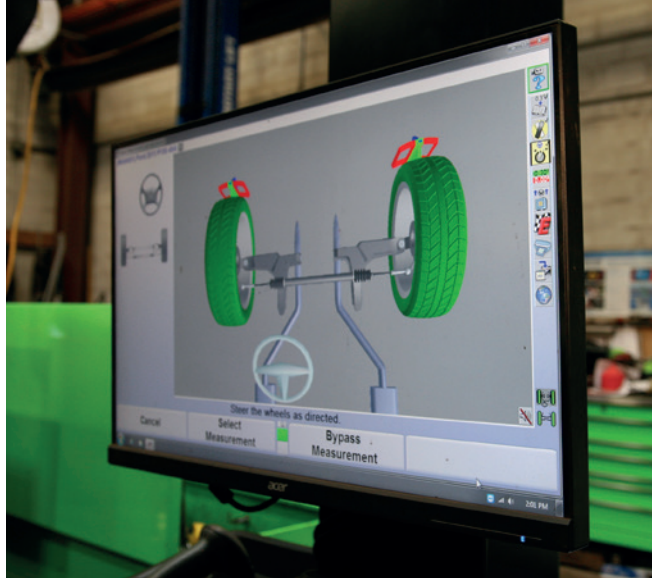
One of the hottest topics within the automotive service repair sector centres around connectivity. Whether it's between the vehicle and the customer, the vehicle and the service facility, and even between the vehicle and the equipment and in turn, the service advisor, technician and customer, today, effective connectivity matters. Within the aftermarket auto care realm, more connected vehicles and newer technologies, such as ADAS, mean that service centres are changing the way they operate. "As vehicles become more connected, service centres can benefit from connected tools," explains Mike Brecht, Manager, Quick Check Drive Inspection Systems, at Hunter Engineering Company.

Given that many businesses are still grappling with how to perform ADAS calibrations related to mechanical repairs, having information like Hunter's ADAS Coverage Guide can go a long way to understanding specific vehicles and calibration requirements.

Helpful aide

Brecht explains that tools like the Hunter ADAS Coverage Guide can prove particularly helpful when a customer's vehicle comes into the shop requiring something more than just a tire change or wheel alignment.

At Upper James NAPA AUTO PRO in Hamilton, Ontario, owner/operator Andrew Ackers says that for his team, the era of connected vehicles represents new opportunities, though it does require that staff are properly trained to provide the same level of service as they would under a classic maintenance/repair scenario. An important factor revolves around knowing that customer, and that they're properly scheduled for each service and repair visit. "Before each customer leaves our facility, we want to make sure they have their next appointment booked," explains Ackers. He notes that today, independent service providers have new opportunities via data and software where they can estimate service intervals, as well



Digital inspections are a key part of cultivating long term customer retention.

as driving distance and vehicle mileage a specific client is likely to generate. They can then base a preventative maintenance/repair schedule based around that data.

That said, Ackers notes that for independent aftermarket automotive service providers, it does require a bit of extra legwork to really make this come into its own, since many shops don't have automated services where the vehicle can automatically notify the repair shop with the required information. "It takes an extra level of diligence and care for service advisors, as well as through your CRM and standard operating procedures (SOPs), to properly track down and provide the correct information."

AI and aftermarket service

While Artificial Intelligence (AI) is currently a big focus in the business and technology world, for independent service providers, how it's implemented will determine how beneficial it becomes. At Hunter Engineering, Brecht explains that for automotive service centres, AI can help their staff by taking over repetitive or tedious tasks, freeing them up for other more critical functions. A good example is utilizing AI to perform customer follow ups or handle enquiries via text, email or phone.

Ackers says that for independent service providers who emphasize the personal touch when working with their customers, AI can be a bit of a difficult dance. "They often come to us because they want to speak to us personally, they want to talk with the owner, the manager, the service advisor and the technician." If you have AI set up to handle automated calling and it allows them to book a service appointment, it can be very effective, says Ackers. The trick, however, is making sure that AI performs consistently well and is seamless. "People are still touchy regarding AI, and the moment it falls off track (due to poor quality data access, for example) all trust is then lost with the system." There's no question that modern connectivity technology can

be a great asset in helping service centres build trust and long-term retention with their customers, but again, how successful it proves depends on which solutions the shop utilizes, and how it employs them to deliver on transparency and building trust.

Celebrating good news

At Hunter Engineering, Brecht stresses the importance of shops and service advisors celebrating good news with customers, and then working at building trust for work that is scheduled, or will need to be addressed, in the future. Brecht says an effective way of doing this is for service advisors to always present customers with Alignment and Tread inspection results, even if everything on the vehicle passed inspection. He notes that connected tools, like Hunter's Flightboard, and inspection results printouts can really help advisors by ensuring that the information is at their fingertips and ready for each customer interaction.

At Upper James NAPA AUTO PRO, Ackers says that while having a robust CRM tool is an essential part of running a modern, successful auto service/repair business, and following up consistently, such as every 60 and/or 90 days counts, another key ingredient is ensuring the actual process (when they bring their vehicle in), is smooth and consistent, every time. "Having the same intake process, the same digital inspection, all of this matters," explains Ackers. He notes that the period between the inspection, when the work has been authorized and is being done, prior to the customer collecting the vehicle, is where

friction can occur, if there isn't consistent communication. "This can be a grey area," says Ackers. "We've found that having regular messaging with the client, including sharing videos on repairs, has worked really well for us and helped boost long-term retention." 

Harnessing the data

Today, service repair centres, like many businesses, have access to more data than ever before. The question is, how do they turn that into meaningful information that can be related to individual customers? Andrew Ackers notes that at his facility, digital vehicle inspections have been a game changer. "Our digital inspections are being updated in timeline fashion now, and because we have the historic data on each customer, we can forecast service and maintenance for their specific vehicle going forward, such as how long it will before their brake pads or rotors need to be replaced, or when their fluids need to be changed—all because our inspection process is so thorough." Mike Brecht adds that because endless data passes through our fingertips today, service centres can leverage powerful solutions like HunterNet to provide fast, accurate details on customer's vehicles, and deliver high quality automotive service on a consistent basis.

**ANY AND EVERY PART,
THAT'S NAPA KNOW-HOW.**



Advanced and Aligned

ADAS calibrations are an integral part of modern wheel and tire adjustments.

TEXT HUW EVANS

There was a time when performing wheel alignments on light vehicles was relatively straightforward, and the prime focus was getting the toe and camber properly aligned, and the steering wheel centred. Today, a wheel alignment on a late-model vehicle is much more complex, often requiring sensor and ADAS calibrations. How it's performed significantly impacts vehicle safety, performance and reliability. "Service centres that treat modern day wheel alignments the same way they did in the 1980s and 1990s often see comebacks, unhappy customers, and potential liability, particularly if ADAS features don't perform correctly," explains Ryan Gerber, Product Specialist at Hunter Engineering Company. "If you're running a service centre today, investing in proper ADAS-capable alignment bays, and following vehicle OEM procedures, can pay off big time and significantly reduce potential comebacks," says Gerber.

Integrated service

In order to properly perform wheel alignments today, and do it accurately and on a consistent basis, Gerber says that service centres must view the alignment process not as a standalone service, but as an integrated process that includes ADAS workflow. He notes that modern ADAS systems rely on precise vehicle geometry in order to function properly, and even the most minor camber/toe adjustments require ADAS calibration in order for the vehicle to operate safely and correctly.

Gerber suggests that to ensure wheel alignments and ADAS calibrations are done properly and accurately, technicians should begin the process with a full 4-wheel Thrust-Line Alignment. "Determine ADAS Recalibration requirements by each individual vehicle, and never assume that requirements have

"If you're running a service centre today, investing in proper ADAS-capable alignment bays and following vehicle OEM procedures can pay off big time and significantly reduce potential comebacks."

RYAN GERBER PRODUCT SPECIALIST,
HUNTER ENGINEERING COMPANY



Equipment systems, like Hunter's Ultimate ADAS, are redefining modern wheel alignments.

not changed," Gerber explains. He stresses that it is essential today that shops make investments in the right equipment in order to do this, including a full range of alignment and ADAS equipment. There's also the question of where to perform calibration work within the shop environment.

Using existing space

Dynamic ADAS calibrations don't require any additional shop space, and Gerber notes that even when it comes to static calibrations, most forward-facing ADAS calibration sensors can be recalibrated within existing shop space.

If the service centre plans to offer complete, around the vehicle static ADAS calibrations, that requires additional space within the shop, though Gerber notes that equipment such as Hunter's Ultimate ADAS can be moved around to maximize efficiency and profitability within the existing shop footprint. At

Upper James NAPA AUTO PRO in Hamilton, Ontario, owner/operator Andrew Ackers says that especially when it comes to static ADAS calibrations, service centre staff need to be having conversations with their customers. He notes that often, the biggest friction between service advisors and shop customers is due to lack of training and understanding, and if the advisor isn't able to explain how or why the vehicle needs ADAS calibrations, it can come across as a blatant up-sell tactic since the customer may not understand what ADAS is and why their vehicle needs these sensors calibrated, especially, if in their mind they see the alignment as a "simple" procedure, even if in reality, that isn't the case. This illustrates why clear and effective communication is so important.

Training considerations

Ackers says that in reality, it can be tough to implement training for service advisors, since they represent the front line of the business, and as a result, there are shop owners that aren't willing to make the investment, or can't see that sending advisors to training will reap big benefits, even though they might send technicians for training on a specific vehicle or system for up to a week in some cases. Besides having the right training for both advisors and technicians, along with the right equipment from day one, Ackers says it's important to be having conversations with customers about performing vehicle maintenance alongside ADAS calibrations. "Do we need to perform ADAS calibrations every time? Not necessarily," states Ackers. "But if your customer has a four-year old SUV, and it's never had an ADAS calibration, that's a conversation you probably want to have with them, particularly if the vehicle is requiring maintenance."

Real gains

Back at Hunter Engineering, Ryan Gerber notes that those service centres that embrace and fully leverage systems like Hunter's Ultimate ADAS have seen, "real gains in consistency, accuracy and especially profitability." He says that by combining alignment and calibration in a single location, with automated and faster target placement, shops see significant time savings. Additionally, with laser-guided precision and error-proof monitoring, ADAS calibration results are accurate and consistent. This enables a high-margin profit centre for

service shops, which can bundle them with alignments—significantly increasing the average repair order value for both the shop and the customer. 

Error Proofing Your ADAS

As ADAS calibrations become a more regular component of mechanical and service repair work, shops need to ensure they take the necessary steps to error proof the process as much as possible, since poorly performed or inaccurate calibrations can compromise vehicle safety and performance. Ryan Gerber notes that most errors related to ADAS calibrations often stem from manual target placement using tape measures, plumb bobs or strings. "It's both error prone and time consuming," he says. Gerber notes that systems like Hunter's Ultimate ADAS use laser-guided, vision-assisted or camera-monitored placement. The lasers within these systems can paint exact positions and flag errors to force corrections. They can also automatically compensate for uneven floor surfaces and roll, pitch and yaw. In addition, step-by-step on screen guidance delivers intuitive instruction and prevents skipping any steps in the process. "This reduces setup time dramatically, while making the process nearly foolproof," says Gerber.



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Firefighting Is Not a Business Strategy

Chaos within your service centre is often self inflicted.

TEXT MIKE URBAN

Let me paint a familiar picture. It's 8:05 AM and the phone is already ringing. A technician is waiting for keys that weren't pulled yesterday. Your service advisor is chasing down parts from three suppliers. Someone called in sick. And the customer standing at the counter is already 15 minutes early and impatient.

Welcome to another day of firefighting.

Now let me ask you something: How much of your day do you actually own, and how much of it owns you? After 23 years of running Urban Automotive, one truth has become painfully clear: You can't grow a business if you're always reacting. And yet, many shop owners (myself included, for longer than I care to admit) build systems that make this chaos inevitable. The fix? It's not a magic app or a new piece of equipment. It's a mindset shift—and some discipline. Let's get into it.

Step One: Recognize That You Built the Fire

It's easy to blame your staff, your customers, or "how busy

things are." But chaos in your business is usually self-inflicted. If you're the go-to person for every decision, if everyone comes to you with problems instead of solutions, you're not leading—you're babysitting.

"It felt selfish at first. But the moment I stopped being on-call for every small fire, my team got stronger. They made more decisions on their own. And better ones, too."

MIKE URBAN OWNER/OPERATOR
URBAN AUTOMOTIVE

Worse, if your entire business revolves around your presence, then congratulations: You just bought yourself a job, not a business.

The first step is accountability. Ask yourself:

- Do I plan my day, or just survive it?
- Are problems recurring because I haven't fixed the system behind them?
- Am I solving the same problems more than once?

Step Two: Build a Calendar, Not a To-Do List

There's a reason most shop owners never "get around" to working on their business. It's because their day is dictated by everyone else. Here's what changed the game for me: time-blocking.

I started carving out blocks of time that were off limits to everyone. Thirty minutes in the morning for KPI review. One hour twice a week for SOP development. Daily check-ins with my team—on my schedule.

It felt selfish at first. But the moment I stopped being on-call for every small fire, my team got stronger. They made more decisions on their own. And better ones, too.

Step Three: Delegate—Then Actually Let Go

We all say we want to delegate. But then we hover, second-guess, and jump back in at the first sign of trouble.

If you've hired good people, let them do their job. Give them authority with accountability.

That means:

- Clear roles and written expectations
- SOPs they can follow without asking
- Weekly debriefs where they own their metrics

You can't scale chaos. But you can scale a system.

Step Four: Install Fire Alarms, Not Fire Extinguishers

Here's what I mean:

- If your techs are constantly waiting for approvals, fix the inspection process.
- If your parts delays are killing productivity, build a parts-ordering SOP with accountability.
- If customers are confused or frustrated, roleplay phone scripts and repair presentations.

Don't wait for problems to explode. Build alerts and habits that catch them upstream.

Final Thought: Busyness ≠ Effectiveness

A packed parking lot and a ringing phone don't mean you're successful. It just means you're busy.

The real measure of a well-run shop is this: What happens when you're not there?

If the answer is "everything falls apart," it's time to put the firehose down and pick up a blueprint. 🔴



Mike Urban owns and operates Urban Automotive, in Oakville, Ontario. You can reach him at admin@urbanautomotive.ca



Boosting Your Parts Opportunities

Trade shows continue to offer unique buying and business insights for jobbers.

TEXT GODFREY BUDD

Trade shows of all kinds have mostly recovered from the hammering they took during the COVID-19 era, and auto parts trade shows are no exception. Whether going as attendees or hosting a trade show themselves, many auto parts distributors and jobbers continue to find trade shows a vibrant and enjoyable way to successfully augment their business. There's a diversity of auto parts trade shows to serve the varying interests, requirements and business priorities found in the auto parts supply sector. Major events like the AAPEX and the SEMA Show in Las Vegas each November, attract tens of thousands of visitors. A sizeable contingent of Canadian jobbers, distributors and other parts specialists also attend these massive events.

Wide range

Even here at home in Canada, there are a wide range of trade shows happening across the country each year. Most major parts suppliers, like NAPA, LKQ, Bumper to Bumper,

and Bestbuy Distributors Ltd. have trade shows. Lordco, a large regional parts supplier in Western Canada with over 80 outlets across British Columbia and Alberta, has also been holding an annual trade show in Vancouver each April.

If you're a jobber based in the B.C. interior, then Vancouver (never mind Las Vegas) might be a little out of range for a broad swath of your clientele. This year, for about six hours on March 17, Vernon B.C.-based Gilbert Parts

Depot, with seven outlets across the north Okanagan, Shuswap and West Kootenay districts held its second annual trade show. The two events featured about 35 booths representing a range of manufacturers with a focus on main brands on offer through the company's outlets. In the second show, about 25 of the brands from the first year had booths, and about 10 brands, absent last year, had booths this year. "The idea is to rotate the brands a bit each year. The feedback from last year was good, and a lot of people who came said they learned things that were helpful," explains Brennan Plante, a partner at Gilbert

"You don't get face-to-face with webinars."

ZARA WISHLOFF
PRESIDENT & CEO
AUTOMOTIVE PARTS DISTRIBUTORS

Parts Depot. The trade show invites customers—repair shop technicians, construction companies, forestry people, farmers, business and government fleet operators. Last year about 350 attended.

Knowledgeable representatives

Besides opportunities for networking, attendees have better access to knowledgeable company reps who can take the time to educate on optimizing the use of a company part or system. Reps covering half, or even the whole province, can sometimes be hard to pin down for detailed info or a quick training session. With Gilbert Parts Depot offering a wide range of parts and products, the company's complement of about 50 employees also attend the trade show, and can make use of the time to learn more about some of the products they sell.

Attending almost any Canadian auto parts trade show has an advantage in that auto parts experts and manufacturer reps typically are familiar with the Canadian market. Also, for auto parts jobbers and distributors, hosting a trade show and making some sales is typically part of the action. Furthermore, because it's relevant to their local market and their customers, attendees have a stronger incentive to purchase. At some trade shows, including the Gilbert Parts Depot one, a bunch of booths have trade-show-only prices.

For U.S.-based shows like AAPEX and the SEMA Show, which take place over several days at the Venetian Expo and the Las Vegas Convention Center, the focus for Canadians is often slightly different. These massive shows can seem overwhelming, especially for those attending them for the first time, but they offer a huge opportunity to talk to a whole range of people, including key decision makers. Plus, often, they are the place where many new parts and solutions are first displayed and revealed to the industry. For many, they represent a great opportunity, with a great deal of Canadians choosing to attend year after year. Exhibitors at AAPEX include over 2,500 manufacturers and suppliers covering 1,400-plus product categories. AAPEX aims to encompass the entire automotive aftermarket supply chain and provide quality access to the industry's key people, parts and professional training in one place. SEMA is even bigger, with more emphasis on customization, performance and trends.

Unique access

These big events offer opportunities to jobbers and parts distributors that they wouldn't get through the local channels, explains Zara Wishloff, President and CEO of Automotive Parts Distributors (APD). "The key decision-makers are at the show. People running

their businesses internationally are available, not just the local reps. You get to talk to the people you can arrange (exclusive) Canadian distribution with, across the country," Wishloff adds.

Jobbers and distributors attending the show can often identify a source for a hard-to-find product after drawing a blank searching the regular market. This happened after ADP had been trying, without success, to find an electric component for a steering system. "AAPEX was where we learned about a company that made the critical part," Wishloff says. "Networking here is really productive for business opportunities."

He notes that jobbers and distributors at AAPEX can benefit from training sessions in marketing, new technologies, staff retention, search engine optimization (SEO) and ADAS.

Good, strong relationships, Wishloff says, are a factor in the success of a parts business, and getting to know the people you are dealing with on a personal, face-to-face basis supports that. He notes a visit to a manufacturing plant that made fuel injectors, and led to a profitable deal and relationship, would not have happened without going to AAPEX. 



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A National Framework

A clear standard for Right to Repair helps the entire aftermarket.

TEXT DOUGLAS SQUIRES

Canada needs a national Automotive Right to Repair framework so vehicle owners and independent repairers can access the information and tools required to service modern vehicles. Without it, restrictions on repair information, software functions, and required tools increase repair costs, limit consumer choice, and weaken competition in a sector employing approximately 491,800 Canadians.

At risk

The Canadian automotive aftermarket sector is responsible for maintaining Canada's fleet of roughly 29 million vehicles through repair shops, parts distributors, and retailers. When restrictions are placed on the ability to repair vehicles by manufacturers, the viability of the entire aftermarket is put at risk.

Federal legislation should set clear, consistent requirements for access to repair information, software functions (including updates and calibrations), tools/interfaces, and necessary security credentials.

Dealerships can restrict access to critical repair information needed to properly service vehicles. As vehicles become more technologically advanced, manufacturers can limit independent repairs by controlling software functions, data, and required tools, which can steer consumers toward higher-cost dealership service. This threatens the viability of the aftermarket—from repair facilities to parts suppliers and manufacturers.

Logistical challenges

Canada is a vast country, with up to 20% of the population residing in rural communities. Reliance on dealership-only repair pathways can create challenges when consumers cannot afford higher dealership costs or do not have access to the appropriate dealership within a reasonable distance. Combined with the absence of mandatory vehicle inspections in some provinces, these barriers can affect aftermarket viability while potentially unsafe vehicles remain in operation. Modern cars are essentially "computers on wheels." Manufacturers' control

over repair software, software functions, and required tools or interfaces—including security credentials—can create repair barriers that limit consumer rights over the vehicles they own.

Fragmented system

The federal government has passed laws that have resulted in improvements; however, they did not go far enough to require car brands to share essential repair information. Differences between provincial rules also create a fragmented system, where a mechanic in one province may have more legal access to repair information than a mechanic across the road in another province.

As more EVs enter the used market, these restrictions become even more significant. Independent shops may be unable to perform basic battery calibrations or software updates without manufacturer-provided authorization, reducing local competition and increasing costs for Canadians already facing cost-of-living pressures.

Protection and support

A national Right to Repair framework would protect competition, support the aftermarket workforce, and keep vehicles safely maintained.

To level the playing field, Canada should adopt Federal Automotive Right to Repair legislation that clearly requires manufacturers to support safe, independent repair.

- Provide access to standardized repair information, including fault codes and service procedures.
- Provide access to necessary software functions, including calibrations and software updates, on fair and reasonable terms.
- Provide access to the required tools, interfaces, and security credentials so repairs can be completed outside dealerships.
- Provide the ability to purchase service manuals and replacement parts without undue restrictions.

Strength and viability

This approach strengthens consumer rights, increases competition, and protects the long-term viability of the Canadian aftermarket. Federal policymakers should therefore advance a clear, national Right to Repair framework now. 



Douglas Squires is a CPA, CMA, past chairman of both a Canadian and U.S. buying group. He is also President of Colonial Auto Parts, the largest independent WD in Atlantic Canada. You can reach him at djsquires@colonialgroup.ca



AIA Canada's 2026 Canadian Auto Care Conference (CAIC), which ran from March 10-12, was a sellout. Attendees had much to think about following the sessions that were so well presented by 'people in the know.'

Tuesday's session, on March 10, was geared toward Young Professionals—a Speed Mentoring Roundtable, and had many in attendance. Wednesday, March 11, saw Tony Kuczynski, Chair AIA Canada and Emily Chung, current AIA Canada President and CEO, lead off the presentations. Awards were presented, with the Distinguished Service Award going to Tony Canade from the Boyd Group. Young Leader of the Year went to Adam Malik of Turnkey Media Solutions.

Shifting gears

Emily Chung presented 'Shifting Gears: The here, now and next of Canada's auto care sector with AIA Canada.' Following that was a panel discussion: 'No Talent Left Behind: Building a future-ready workforce—our industry growth depends on talent!' Stephanie Cooney-Mann moderated the session with panelists Chris Theodorates and Saifullah Sanaye.

Concurrent business operations and performance sessions followed—Murray Voth, President of RPM Training presented Technician or Operations Challenge: What's holding back repair shops? Repair shops have workforce challenges—plus evolving processes and customer expectations... and these are more varied than ever. Today, household budgets are strained—rising living costs are to blame, and because of this, repair decisions and loyalty are influenced. Voth presented practical strategies to align operations, training and culture, and how to retain skilled techs and meet customer expectations while maintaining your profitability.

Then came business operations and performance: Bridging the Talent Gap: How young professionals will future proof the auto care industry by Pruthvi Brahmabhatt from UAP Inc.

He showed that young professionals are stepping up as key drivers of change in areas like EV readiness, sustainability and digital innovation. AI, automation and employability skills are reshaping roles. This session delivered strategies to thrive in our rapidly evolving industry.

Market research and data—Ryan Robinson, Deloitte LLP spoke on Canadian auto sector trends: Navigating uncertainty breaking down the trends, risks and opportunities that'll define Canada's automotive landscape. He also added Trends—the Canadian Auto sector is shifting faster through technology, policy and economic forces.

A panel of CEOs and senior leaders got into the real issues shaping the auto care sector—Lorraine Sommerfield hosted with panelists Nick Brunet, President, CEO, Bestbuy Distributors; Alain Primeau, President, UAP Inc.; and Nick Field, VP Sales, Uni-Select Inc.

Beyond just co-op

Engaging with younger students was headed up by Lucas Chang. He shared recent case studies concerning students from manufacturing, construction and automotive industries in Ontario. He related that these partnerships taught the students new skills, enabled networking with industry professionals, thereby providing many opportunities for these students to apply classroom learning in situations of today's world.

Emily Holtby, VP AIA Government Relations moderated 'From the ballot to business: One year later and what it means for Canada's auto care industry—a fresh look at the federal election.' David Coletto, founder and CEO, Abacus Date spoke on this subject. He related that consumer and voter sentiment has 'shifted.' He told what trends have emerged... and what this all means for the auto care industry today. The landscape today is rapidly changing, requiring business to have the latest insights so they can stay ahead of the curve. 

NAPA AUTOPRO - Upper James

A True Family Business

Thriving through experience and innovation.

TEXT JAY GUTTERIDGE

Automotive technology is rapidly evolving and service providers must adapt to frequent changes. At the same time, many older vehicles are still on the road, so experience is highly valued in an auto service shop.

The team at NAPA AUTOPRO – Upper James in Hamilton strikes that balance. The business opened in 2016 and was purchased in 2019 by the husband-and-wife team of Andrew Ackers and Alysa Beech who, if this year's forecast holds, will have a book of business five times larger than in their first year.

The 4,500 square-foot shop has six bays and typically services 200 to 300 vehicles per month.

"We do everything from just general vehicle repairs to deep-level diagnostics," Andrew says, adding they have special expertise in EVs. The business has grown from four employees to 10, with five licensed technicians.

"We were probably one of the first to actually pull batteries out of vehicles and replace cells and actually really start to dig into high-voltage repairs."

ANDREW ACKERS OWNER/OPERATOR
NAPA AUTOPRO UPPER JAMES

Keys to success

Andrew offers three driving factors behind the shop's success, with the first being treating staff well. "Just as we want to give the highest level of service to our external customer that comes through the door, we want to take care of the people that we have," he says, noting a focus on creating work-life balance.

Key to success number two

"I strongly believe in a digital process," Andrew says, noting the shop was an early adopter of a paperless system.

The third factor to success, Andrew cites, is a shift the team made about a year ago in their customer experience model.

They wanted to be more transparent with customers about the work technicians were doing on their vehicles. To fix this, shop manager Sierra Belore began creating short, personalized videos for customers alongside the technicians, showing the vehicle owners exactly what was happening in the shop.

Owners meet cute

While Andrew and Alysa are still quite young, they both have lifelong automotive experience.

"My grandfather got me into cars at a very young age, working on them with him," Andrew says. Alysa's father, Alan Beech, owned his own auto shop, Beech Motorworks, just down the road from what is now NAPA AUTOPRO – Upper James.

Andrew attended college at the Automotive Business School of Canada and got a co-op placement with CAR Holdings, through which he met Alysa. He attended a service advisor training program led by Alan in which Alysa also took part. On the second day, Alysa and Andrew were sent out as mystery shoppers to see how other businesses operated, and they decided to pretend to be a couple as part of that.

Two or three months later, as part of his co-op at CAR Holdings, Andrew was sent to work at Beech Motorworks, where Alysa was also working. Andrew's job during his co-op was to onboard shops that CAR had recently acquired, a process that took about a month at each shop.

"It gave me a good crash course on shop operation, implementing process, and getting the correct service level into their



Andrew Ackers (left) and Alyssa Beech acquired the business in 2019.

retail locations,” he says. Andrew and Alysa took the leap and purchased their own shop when CAR decided to sell, and it became NAPA AUTOPRO – Upper James.

Family connections

Yet another remarkable connection between Andrew, Alysa and their business is their shop foreman Jeff Hunt who used to work for Alysa’s father. Jeff joined NAPA AutoPro – Upper James from the start, and has continued to adapt to new technologies. He has NexDrive Level 5 EV Certification, and advanced training in servicing many European vehicles.

EVs are a key focus of the business, Andrew says.

“I always joke that we’ve gone off the deep end, because we were probably one of the first to actually pull batteries out of vehicles, and replace cells, and actually really start to dig into high-voltage repairs and utilize our training,” he says.

If an EV battery needs to be replaced, NAPA AUTOPRO – Upper James uses refurbished batteries from Quebec-based DCF, which are guaranteed to be at least 90% state of health.

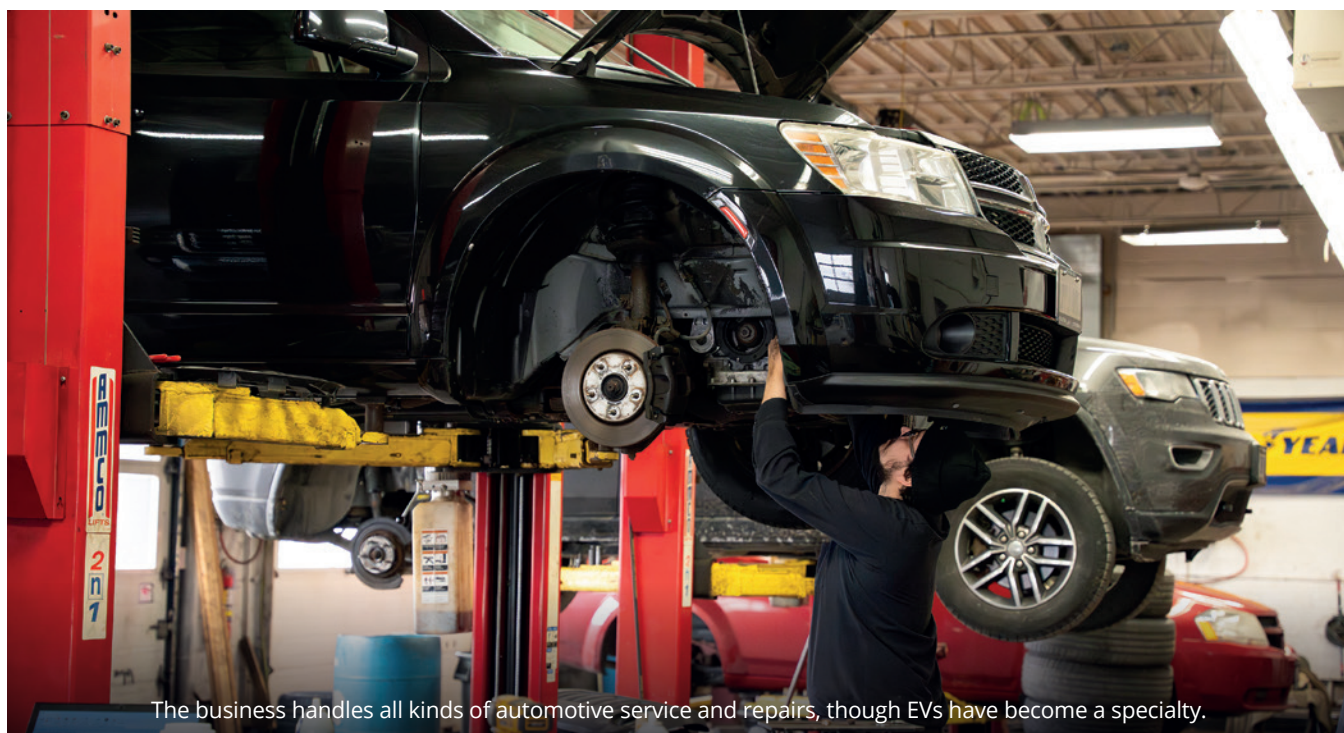
Some other shops use refurbished batteries that are only guaranteed to be 70% state of health, Andrew says.

Eyes on expansion

Looking to the future, Andrew says the team plans to continue specializing in EV repairs and aims to serve business clients with EVs in their fleets.

He says the plan is to expand, probably to a second location at a different site.

As for a succession plan, Andrew and Alysa have a son, Mason, who may one day take over the business. “He’s two years old right now, though, so he’s got a little ways to go.”



Low Charge Transit

Voltage issues led to investigation of the generator circuits.

TEXT MARK LEMAY

We recently had the opportunity to do a diagnosis on a 2017 Ford Transit equipped with the 3.5L GDI V6 engine. In this case it was regarding a charging system concern. The vehicle was charging at 13.2 V with the Battery and Check Engine Lights on in the dash. Upon arriving at the vehicle, a code scan was performed and several charging system codes were found.

Important codes

The important codes to note here are P0620, P0625 and P065B. These codes all relate to some sort of charging system problem and in this case had to be further investigated. The P0620 code is a general charging system fault indicating that the system cannot deliver the desired charge rate. The P0625 code indicates that the generator field circuit is low and the P065B code indicates a problem with the Generator Control Circuit. By looking into the code descriptions there were two faults indicated. The generator monitor (GENMON) circuit was open or shorted, and the Generator Command (GENCOM) circuit was not functioning as expected.

Circuit tests

At this point the trouble tree in the service manual calls for a number of circuit tests performed with a DVOM. This seemed like a lot of unnecessary work without knowing where the actual problem lay. These circuits are monitored by the PCM, and they can be viewed in scan data. Once the data can be examined it should provide a better idea of where the actual problem is, otherwise following the code chart will require testing all circuits. A quick check of the scan data confirmed that problem lay with the GENMON circuit and that the generator was

operating in default mode. The data showed the commanded voltage at 14.6 and the system battery voltage at 13.5. This generator has a backup circuit that defaults to 13.5 volts if the PCM loses command of the generator which was clearly the mode the generator was operating in. The data also shows a problem with the GENMON circuit.

A quick recap of how this system works. The PCM sets the charging voltage by sending a digital message to the generator on the GENCOM circuit. The generator carries out the command and sends the PCM information on how hard the generator is working via the GENMON circuit.

Contact issues

At this point, it was time to check the GENMON circuit. A lab scope was hooked up to both the GENMON and GENCOM circuits at connector C1280 (the closest I could get to the generator). There should be battery voltage on this circuit. The PCM supplies a 12 volt signal which the generator ground at a changing duty cycle to inform the PCM of generator load. Having found low voltage, the circuit was checked at the PCM. The circuit voltage was good at the PCM but bad at C1280. Clearly there was a problem between the two test points of the GENMON circuit. Further investigation revealed that contacts in the C1280 connector itself were the problem. The circuit was repaired and retested and the vehicle now operated normally. 🔧



Mark Lemay is President of Auto Aide Technical Services. You can reach him at markl@autoaide.ca

A Partnership for Growth and Success

Auto Electric Service Ltd. and the Aftermarket Auto Parts Alliance, Inc. are driving value and excellence.

TEXT HUW EVANS

Auto Electric Service Ltd. was founded in 1943. Today, more than 80 years later, it continues to be laser-focused on relationships, service and product availability.

Jennifer Fox, President of Auto Electric Service Ltd., notes that this approach has not only enabled the company to become the largest in their marketplace, [that serves the automotive, PBE, commercial coatings and agricultural, fleet and industrial sectors] but also allows it to continually adapt to changing market conditions and customer requirements. "Our evolution has really been about adapting to customer needs—moving from a traditional wholesale model to a more sophisticated distribution network that supports a variety of linked customers."



"Our evolution has really been about adapting to customer needs."

JENNIFER FOX

PRESIDENT, AUTO ELECTRIC SERVICE LTD.

Growth phase

Fox notes that today, Auto Electric Service Ltd. is in a "growth phase where we're investing heavily in infrastructure, technology, and people to scale our business for the future—all while maintaining our local ownership."

Fox, who got involved in the automotive aftermarket after working in both the public and private sectors, says a key factor for her was the scale of opportunity, both in terms of growth and impact. Today, as the first female President of Auto Electric Service, she's seen that happen in real time.

Over the past decade, change in the automotive aftermarket has advanced significantly. The level of complexity inherent in modern vehicles, including electronics and all manner of ADAS systems, has required new approaches from aftermarket manufacturers, distributors and service centres.

Fox says that some of the key factors essential today are understanding the growing importance of data and technology in both managing inventory and delivering a superior customer experience, as well as continually growing expectations around delivery methods, including speed and parts availability. "Now, we see same-day and 30-delivery windows not as luxuries, but table stake requirements," Jennifer explains.

Far more critical

At the same time, consolidation within the aftermarket auto care sector has made scale and efficiency far more critical than ever before. Despite all these changes however, Fox says that core fundamentals of the sector have not changed. "This is still a relationship-driven business, where trust and service matter."

For Auto Electric Service, a key part of the company's success and the ability to strengthen its product offering, lies in its partnership with the Aftermarket Auto Parts Alliance, Inc., the headquarters of the Auto Value network. "This has been a major strategic advantage for us," explains Fox. "It has given us access to a premier program group with strong supplier relationships, dedicated technology, and fantastic partners that feel more like friends."

She notes that alongside industry leading tools such as MyPlace4Parts, a B2B e-commerce platform, and the Alliance Inventory Optimization Tool (IOT), this relationship has provided robust marketing, training and operational support to help Auto Electric Service Ltd. not only grow as a business, but help its customers so they can be the best at what they do and compete head to head against larger automotive service chains.

AI-optimization

Fox says that Auto Electric Service is seeing real opportunity in AI-optimization for forecasting and optimizing inventory. She notes that partnering with the Alliance has also streamlined ordering and accuracy, enhanced communication and coordination between warehouses, drivers and customers. The result has been an effective way to scale operations while at the same time, decreasing costs and enhancing the customer experience. 

COLLISION



**FIX AUTO
EDMONTON WEST**





Fix Auto Edmonton West

Family Values, Next Level Success

In partnering with Fix Network, the Rosanova family collision repair business has grown into a formidable MSO.

TEXT HUW EVANS

In 1974, Otto Rosanova opened his first body shop in Edmonton, Alberta. Five decades and three generations later, that business has become a thriving MSO, with locations across the Edmonton Area. Otto's son Albert and grandson Mike, oversee a business that operates five collision centres and three complimentary auto service facilities, collectively employing 110 people in the Edmonton community including technicians, painters, estimators, production managers, customer service representatives, parts coordinators and administrative staff (Mike's brother, Max, is the journeyman Collision Repair Technician who works at the North Edmonton location).

Mike Rosanova says that he grew up around the collision centres his grandfather and father operated and later got involved on the operations side. "My father [Albert] helped grow the business and steered into the modern era," says Mike. "As I got more involved with the operations of the business, I took on a larger leadership role and today, oversee both operations and growth of our locations. It's been very rewarding to be able to build upon the foundation begun with the previous generations of our family." ➤

The Rosanova family has built an impressive MSO operation in partnership with Fix Network (L-R) Max, Otto, Mike and Albert

Joining a network

As Albert took over and modernized and grew the business, he realized that the future lay in becoming part of a collision repair network, especially as consolidation began to happen across Canada and insurers increasingly looked to larger operators for establishing high volume claims and DRP repair work. For the Rosanova family, the future lay in joining a franchise repair network, and through industry relationships came across the team at Fix Network.

"As our business continued to grow, we were looking for a partner that had a solid reputation and strong insurer relationships, as well as a clear framework when it came to how franchisees operated within the network." Rosanova says that Fix Network stood out because of its professionalism, the support structure it provides for its franchisees and a clear commitment to maintaining a higher level of repair standards.

For a multi-shop operation, consistency is everything, and the strong, established systems and procedures that Fix Network had in place, along with robust training and operational guidance made it a highly suitable fit for the Rosanovas. "We really have to credit the Fix Network team for helping us stay ahead of the curve. On the training side, Jeff Francis has been a huge help to us, and the ability to collaborate with other franchisees within Fix Network has been very beneficial."

Tremendous value

Mike explains that this collaboration and being able to share ideas and learn from other locations facing similar challenges, has delivered tremendous value for the Rosanova MSO operation.

Not only does this type of collaboration strengthen individual operators, it also bolsters the entire network and by extension the collision repair industry.

As a MSO, focusing on standardized processes and procedures across all locations is paramount, and Mike says that each collision centre can handle a full scope of collision repair services. This includes structural repairs, aluminum repairs, OEM certified repair as well as advanced technology repairs and refinishing. "Each location is essentially standardized," explains Rosanova. "It is laid out in a similar fashion with the same equipment and the staff are trained to perform the same high quality repairs and maintain strong, personal relationships with our customers."



Fix Auto Edmonton West is one of eight facilities within the MSO's portfolio

PHOTOS BARBARA HEINZMAN



A high level of training and equipment investment has been key to success





The facility chosen for our photo shoot for this edition of *Autosphere*, Fix Auto Edmonton West, covers approximately 20,000 square feet. Like the other locations it features a drive in and dedicated appraisal bays, with specific production areas that include advanced frame and measuring equipment. “We have modern paint booth/spray systems at each location and specialized tools for OEM repairs,” Rosanova explains.

Increasingly advanced

He notes that as the business has grown, it has focused on investing in its people, equipment and technology to ensure each location is fully equipped to repair today’s increasingly advanced vehicles. Mike believes this is essential if collision repairers are

to stay ahead of the curve in a fast-changing industry. “Vehicles are becoming ever more advanced, so we need to continuously make those investments,” he says. On the flip side, Rosanova also acknowledges that while technology and repair techniques continue to advance, and it’s necessary to keep up, a big part to long-term business success boils down to the fundamentals.

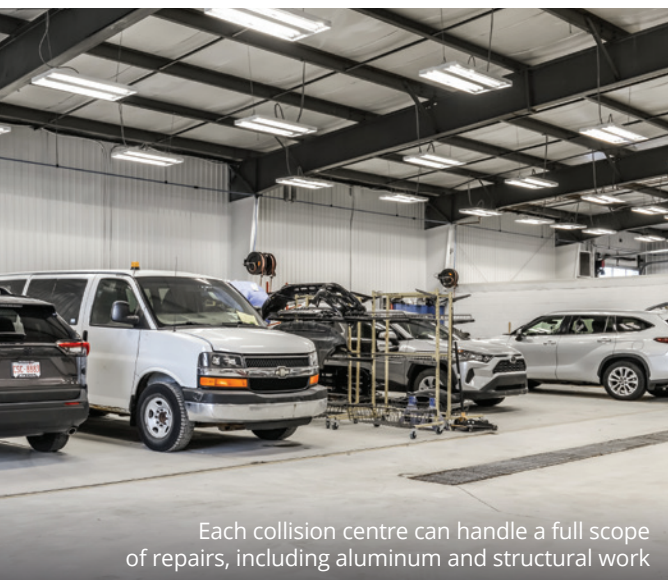
“Having the right people in place, along with strong process and a consistent commitment to quality is important, without that, we cannot be successful,” he says.

As the business looks to the future, Mike says the goal is to continue strengthening each of the existing locations within the group, while at the same time exploring what he terms “thoughtful” growth opportunities.

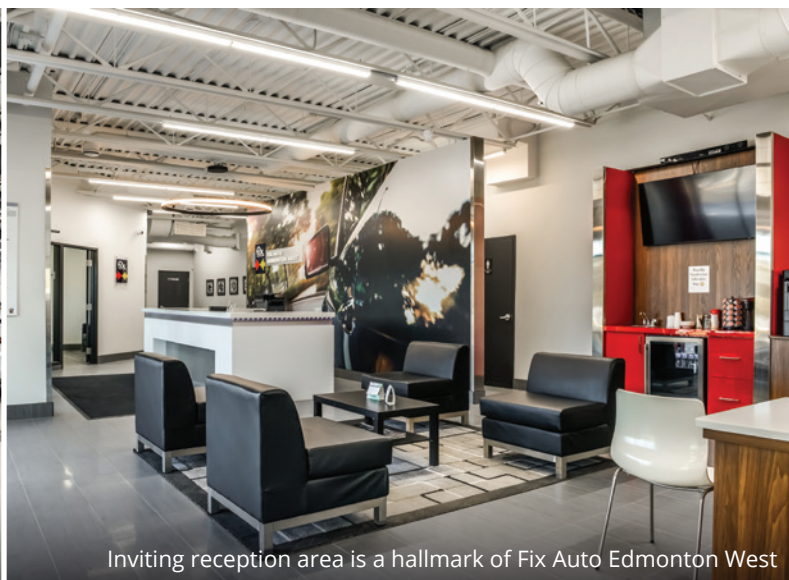
Critical to growth and success

“Working alongside Fix Network has been a critical part of our journey in terms of success and growth,” he says, and we look forward to continuing to build upon what we have and having a strong partner like Fix Network to help us continue that journey.”

While prospects for the future look exciting, and it’s been an incredible journey for the Rosanova family since Otto opened that very first collision centre back in 1974, Mike says that despite all the success, what matters most is that the business is still strongly rooted in solid family values, even though it has grown into a multi location operation. “The original foundation, built by my grandfather and carried forward by my father, still guides how we approach the business today. We’re really proud of what we’ve built and are excited about where we’re going, especially with Fix Network right alongside us.”



Each collision centre can handle a full scope of repairs, including aluminum and structural work



Inviting reception area is a hallmark of Fix Auto Edmonton West



Planning for the Future

Good mentorship programs are one of the keys to long-term success.

TEXT GODFREY BUDD

In an age of laser focus on shareholder value, mentoring company juniors may seem at times to have taken a back seat, if not entirely falling off the radar. At the same time, a good mentoring program could help secure the very survival of a business.

Ever since the first wave of baby boomers who ran and owned businesses began nearing retirement age about a quarter century ago, the prospect of succession and planning for the future came into increasingly sharp focus for many. Everyone who has given the matter some thought agrees that a strong, comprehensive succession plan brings stability to any business, and in the case of collision repair, it's essential for profitable continuity.

Critical role

Mentoring new recruits to the business can have a critical role in the process. "When we invest in young technicians, we're not just filling a position, we're building the future

workplace our shops will rely on," says Jeff Francis, Western Canada Technical Trainer at Fix Network. "Junior technicians who are supported, mentored and given a clear path for growth often demonstrate exceptional loyalty. When they see that the company is invested in their success, they buy into the culture and stay long-term."

Francis adds: "Providing structured training and up-skilling opportunities pays real dividends. Besides strengthening overall capabilities of new technicians and their speed and skill levels in a range of shop tasks, structured, quality mentoring boosts their engagement and forms the foundation of an effective retention strategy."

Given the potential benefits of mentoring, the value of an approach likely to deliver results is not lost on the industry. Like Francis, Aaron Hebb, Services Consultant, Eastern Canada at AkzoNobel Coatings Ltd. advocates a structured approach. "The best mentoring is usually structured, consistent and personal," he says. "Pairing a new employee with

a single mentor tends to avoid mixed messages, while clear 30, 60, and 90-day plans provide direction, accountability and measurable progress. Strong on-boarding is also important to ensure the shop's culture, standards and expectations are set from day one. From there, real-time feedback and coaching help shape habits quickly, correct issues early, and build confidence over time."

Positive experience

A willing senior technician who receives the tools and support needed can help make the mentoring process a positive experience for both mentor and apprentice. "It's also important that we don't place the entire burden on the senior technician" Francis adds. "When a new apprentice comes in with no tools at all that can strain the relationship. A practical solution I've seen work well is providing the new technician with an entry-level tool box and basic hand tools with the understanding that they become theirs after a probationary period. It sets them up for success, reduces friction and shows both parties that the company is committed to supporting the mentoring process."

He advocates that, as a general rule, it is best that shops don't assign more than one apprentice or junior technician for mentoring per senior technician.

So how well prepared can a small collision repair shop be to run a successful mentoring process? "A small shop can absolutely mentor up-and-comers. In some ways, a small shop

can even offer an advantage to the person being mentored," Hebb says.

In this scenario, a young apprentice is perhaps more likely to have exposure to various team members across multiple activities and disciplines. Communications tend to be more direct and feedback quicker and more consistent. But in a small shop, especially, scheduling mentor and apprentice work sessions together, on an optimal basis, can require some astute and careful navigation. "The challenge is that in many shops, the mentor is one of the main producers. For mentoring to work well, the shop has to be intentional about balancing production needs with the time and attention required to develop the next person properly," Hebb says.

Dividing the work

One way to do this in a smaller shop where the senior tech/mentor is also a team leader, he says, is to divide the work on a job for the apprentice and mentor between easier and more difficult tasks, respectively. Francis is in broad agreement, saying that there really aren't any limitations on shop size when it comes to mentoring a junior technician. "What matters more is the compatibility or chemistry between the mentor and mentee and the level of patience and support the shop can provide."

Clearly, the right fit between mentor and apprentice in the shop is important. Not every great technician is going to be a great mentor. Technical ability and teaching, most would agree, are not the same thing. "The wrong mentor can do >



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Effective mentorship programs ensure long term success for collision centres.

damage. A new hire can learn bad habits, a poor attitude, short-cuts, or unsafe behaviour just as quickly as good outcomes. Mentoring should include culture, not just craft. It's all about leading by example. Show up on time, communicate effectively, stay organized, respect OEM procedures, prioritize safety and take pride in the repair. Those are some of the traits that need to be passed on through a good mentorship program.

Solid outcomes

Francis shares Hebb's view on the potential role of a good shop culture in fostering good mentoring program outcomes. "Teamwork, rather than individualism, amongst technicians lends itself to the healthy progression of a junior tech's knowledge. Junior techs need to feel like they are part of the team and not a burden. They will make mistakes, but that's how we all learn," he says.

Another challenge to spending the time and money on mentoring is an industry tendency to focus on the immediate,

short-term costs of mentoring, including the costs stemming from the probable production loss from instructing and training an apprentice. Those costs are real, but they are only part of the picture, Hebb says.



"If we fail to properly develop the next generation of skilled technicians and administrative team members, we weaken the future workforce our business will depend on."

AARON HEBB SERVICES CONSULTANT,
EASTERN CANADA,
AKZONOBEL COATINGS

"From both a shop and an industry perspective, we need to look further down the road and understand the much greater cost of not investing in mentorship. If we fail to properly develop the next generation of skilled technicians and administrative team members, we weaken the future workforce our business will depend on. That's where the true cost lies. When you look at it that way, the upfront costs are significantly less than the long-term costs."

Looking at the big picture then, which includes the short, medium, and long-term timelines, it's about seeing a mentoring program as a true investment for the future success and viability of the operation and the industry, instead of simply just the cost of doing business. 

CCIF Toronto 2026

Redefining Priorities

Changing operating environments, greater complexity and recruitment were all key highlights.

TEXT SHIRLEY BROWN

At AIA's Canadian Auto Care Industry Conference, the collision repair sector sessions again provided great information for those in this very important, far-reaching sector of the automotive aftermarket. Dan Friedman, Vice President of North American Business Development at Integral spoke about "Envisioning the Future of the Auto Claims Ecosystem." He stated that rapidly evolving technology and mobility trends were disrupting the traditional business models for collision repair shops, insurance providers and vendors.

Greater collaboration

Friedman explored how all stakeholders in the industry could work together to improve customer, as well as employee satisfaction, reduce costs and friction in the claims process, and thus ultimately contribute to safe, proper repairs for their clients.

The 'People-first approach' was a leadership conversation with Amin Youssef of Fix Network Canada and Wendy Dugas, of the Donnelly Auto Group. This fireside conversation explored how people-first leadership and proactive retention strategies drive long-term business performance. It touched on culture, candid lessons learned, and empowerment. It also offered practical insights into how a leader can promote an authentic sense of belonging in today's workplace.

Profitability

Profitability is a subject everyone is interested in and two concurrent sessions covered it. One session, "Succession Planning: Future-proofing your business" was given by Shawn Wilson of Simplicity Car Care. Future-proofing your business goes beyond fixing cars, and Wilson walked shop owners through succession planning, plus the key drivers of business valuation. Wilson discussed how to maximize long-term value to plan smooth ownership transitions.

Human Resources

"Classroom to Career: Building the autobody workforce of the future" explored how Canada's 310B/310Q apprenticeship pathway is shaping the future. The discussion, by Josh Westgate, Apprenticeship and Skilled Trades Accelerator at Fanshawe College broke down training models, industry partnerships, apprentice supports, and what is really working—plus what is not—in today's system. Westgate showed that from post-secondary pipelines to digital skills and upskilling opportunities, those in the business could better attract, engage and retain the next generations of skilled auto body technicians.

The other session was "Vehicle Technology" with Jeff Peevy, Vice President, Industry Relations, I-CAR: He addressed "Reimagining the future of learning in collision repair: Technology, efficiency and the mindset shift ahead." He acknowledged that the collision repair industry is changing fast that vehicle technology is advancing. Repairs are becoming more complex while safety and accuracy expectations are still rising. To be in the loop, the way techs, estimators and leaders learn must evolve.

Immersive simulations

Peevy explored the future of learning in collision repair, highlighting technologies that are now in place—AI driven training and immersive simulations that enable faster learning while improving repair quality and consistency.

Ryan Mandell of Mitchell International tackled "Global trends shaping collision repair." He took a deep dive into the key trends reshaping this sector, and drew on claims data and global market insights to explore how tariffs, supply chain pressures, advancing vehicle technology and evolving insurer expectations are redefining the needs of the future shop, plus what repairers must prioritize to remain competitive. 

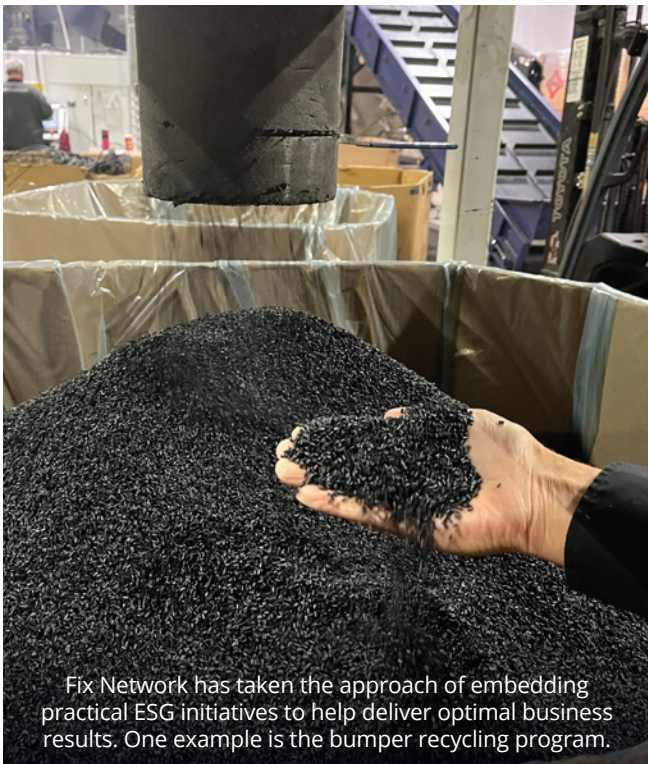
Fix Network

Where ESG Meets Operational Excellence

Fix Network has embedded ESG into sound operating practices across the entire spectrum.

TEXT HUW EVANS

There has been a lot of conversations and documentation around Environmental and Social Governance (ESG) over the last decade, but what does the concept really mean? And how can organizations apply it on a practical and long-term sustainable level, not only in terms of ecological and social responsibility but also through sound business practices. In the collision repair space these are questions we frequently come across, which is why having the opportunity to discuss the subject with Mary de Guzman, Environmental and Social Governance (ESG) Lead at Fix Network World, was something we were keenly interested in.



Fix Network has taken the approach of embedding practical ESG initiatives to help deliver optimal business results. One example is the bumper recycling program.



Practical and people centred

According to de Guzman, Fix Network has taken an approach to ESG that is “intentionally practical and people centred.” She explains that while ESG itself is a complex topic with many facets, where organizations can really use it to their advantage comes down to embedding and integrating it into their daily operations, not just by creating a standalone initiative or compliance exercises, which rarely achieves lasting, nor meaningful results.

“For us it’s about integrating ESG into our operations, not only at the corporate level, but across our franchise and supply chain networks,” says de Guzman. “It’s really about creating the right mindset that focuses on safer workplaces, stronger ethical practices and long term business sustainability.”

And without properly supporting people across the organization and the network, ESG’s effectiveness is limited. “A sustainable collision repair [and aftermarket] industry and business depends on skilled and engaged personnel, including technicians to be able to perform work within the organizational ESG framework and then providing clear governance and transparency, so that industry stakeholders, including insurers, vendors and franchisees know exactly where the organization stands and how it operates in terms of sustainable and ethical practices.”



“It’s really about creating the right mindset that focuses on safer workplaces, stronger ethical practices and long term business sustainability.”

MARY DE GUZMAN
ESG LEAD
FIX NETWORK WORLD

Bumper recycling program

Looking at the environment component or “E” in ESG, Fix Network has developed a key initiative through its bumper cover recycling program. “This helps divert a significant amount of volume from landfills,” explains de Guzman. “It does this by embedding responsible material handling into our daily operations.” She says the goal is simple: To make environmental responsibility a natural part of business operations while at the same time, not adding additional tasks within the overall collision repair process.

Related to the Social aspect of ESG, de Guzman notes that at Fix Network, a major focus has been on addressing the shortage in skilled labour faced by the collision repair and aftermarket service sector. “We’ve really invested in our training centres and partnered with organizations like Skills Canada to help attract and inspire new talent in our industry,” she says. A lot of this work revolves around supporting the aftermarket industry long term and ensuring its economic health and viability by ensuring collision centres, service providers and related businesses have access to the next generation of skilled professionals.

Additionally, the Governance side, which includes advocacy efforts Fix Network has been ardently supporting

Right to Repair legislation in Canada, including partnering with the Automotive Industries Association of Canada (AIA Canada). The objective is to ensure that independent service centres have the right tools and repair information access they need to properly diagnose and fix vehicles. This is essential to not only performing safe, proper repairs for consumers, but also helps ensure industry competitiveness and long-term sustainability within the entire automotive ecosystem.

Strengthening operational excellence

De Guzman notes that when structured and enacted properly, sound ESG practices strengthen operational excellence at both the individual shop and network level. “When teams are well organized and are operating safely as well as being environmentally responsible, their work becomes consistent, efficient and predictable.”

A good example is on the waste reduction side, where a focus on repairing rather than replacing, helps collision centres better control their operating costs, increases safety and compliance practices, while at the same time reducing downtime and potential disruptions in workflow.

De Guzman also explains that when organizations have a clear governance and ethics framework, it promotes greater trust, transparency and accountability and in an industry such as collision repair, this can be hugely advantageous. From Fix Network’s standpoint, ESG translates into a repair first mindset, standardized environmental practices (such as the bumper repair program), responsible waste handling, safe and supportive work environments and training, as well as ethical purchasing and supplier due diligence.

Embedded in every facet

She notes that today, ESG is becoming embedded in every facet of Fix Network and every major decision from strategy through operations, partnerships and advocacy. “It’s becoming part of our identity and who we are as an organization,” says de Guzman. Furthermore, as ESG expectations continue to grow across the industry, with insurers asking for greater accountability around environmental practices—plus governments continuing to push for more stringent regulations around human rights, supply chain and environmental performance—those organizations that have made a conscious effort to advance ESG initiatives are the ones most likely to benefit from both a fast changing collision repair industry and an evolving, wider business operating environment. 🌱

CSN Retouche Rapide 30 Years on the Road to Excellence

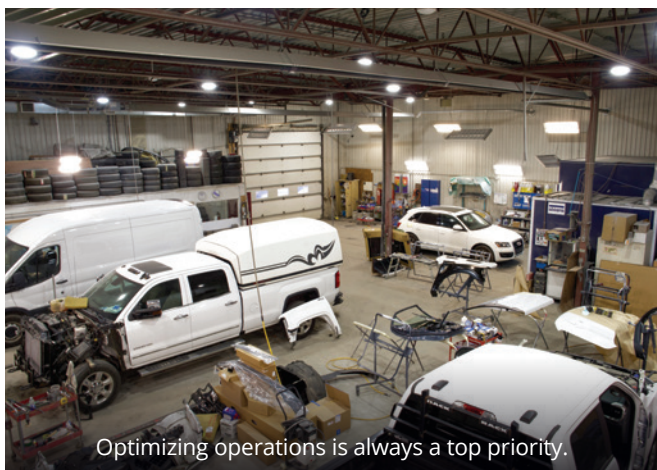
This Saint-Eustache shop has continually reinvented itself to develop a business strategy covering a wide range of services.

TEXT MICHEL BEAUNOYER

In 1996, Claude Laforme launched a mobile automotive refinishing network. Since then, his son Sylvain has taken over operations and established a permanent, fixed-location shop. With the support of his brother Dominic he continually adds new layers of expertise to the business.

"This anniversary is meaningful," says Sylvain Laforme, speaking from his private office adjoining the shop where he can step away from the constant buzz of daily operations. "Our business has undergone a profound transformation over these three decades. It's rare for a business in our industry to survive this long."

The Saint-Eustache shop hasn't just survived all these years. It has thrived. Several winning strategies made that possible, starting with a shift away from paint touch-up work toward becoming a full-fledged collision repair facility. That evolution continued when the shop joined the CSN Collision network, gaining valuable support without giving up its independence, when it comes to business decisions.



Optimizing operations is always a top priority.



For Sylvain Laforme, leading this business means staying true to the family values he was raised with: integrity and professionalism.

Surrounding yourself with the right people

There is no question that Laforme is a natural entrepreneur. Over the years, however, he has made a point of surrounding himself with specialists and colleagues to advise him on operations and investments.

"On that note, I have to say that joining CSN Collision has been tremendously beneficial," he says. "The organization gives us access to key expertise, as well as all its performance indicators, allowing us to benchmark ourselves and keep improving. On top of that, the collision repairers in the CSN Collision network form a truly dynamic community, always eager to share solutions to the challenges we face in our day-to-day operations. For a business that wants to grow, it's an ideal environment."

And as if that weren't enough, Laforme also brought on business strategy consultant Patrick Champagne. Together, the two make a remarkably effective team, and their chemistry shows. Laforme genuinely values the fresh, objective perspective his advisor brings. "We go over our goals together, and he has the discipline to analyze the numbers and guide me toward the best solutions, both for growing our operations and making them more efficient," says Laforme.

The family business has built an enviable reputation grounded in trust with its customers. That reputation for excellence is essential today, as work with insurance partners is central to sustaining operations. In fact, CSN Retouche Rapide has developed transparent relationships with insurers, carefully monitoring their performance reports to identify areas where the shop can improve.



The shop uses cutting-edge technology to serve a highly diverse clientele.

"The results speak for themselves," Laforme says with satisfaction. "We are among the top-performing shops in the network, and while the overall number of vehicles to repair is declining across Canada, we continue to see steady growth in our volumes."

The CSN Retouche Rapide team consists of six employees in the shop and three in the office, including Dominic, who handles estimating. Claude "Papi" Laforme, founder and co-owner alongside Sylvain, still comes into the family shop every day to handle messenger and courier duties.

The team may seem modest in size, but it is highly skilled and deeply committed. Training is a priority here, keeping pace with evolving demands, particularly around vehicle electrification and sound environmental practices. In that regard, the shop recently earned Clé Verte Platinum certification, which allowed it to join the ranks of CAA-Québec recommended garages.

Diversifying activities

Behind this shop's success is a deep commitment to keeping pace with evolving technology, reflected in the large number of manufacturer certifications it holds through the CCC program. But Laforme has clearly understood that in an industry tied to seasonal cycles, putting all your eggs

in one basket is a risk factor. Over the years, he has built agreements with fleet managers to ensure a steady, reliable flow of work. He has also cultivated strong relationships with dealerships and resellers in the region who regularly send their own vehicles and those of their customers to this shop with its well-earned reputation.

"With our analytical tools, we can see slower periods coming," adds Patrick Champagne. "So we can launch targeted local promotional campaigns for our services during those quieter stretches."



« With our analytical tools, we can see slower periods coming. So we can launch targeted local promotional campaigns for our services. »

PATRICK CHAMPAGNE STRATÈGE D'AFFAIRES

A vision for the future

When asked where he sees himself in ten years, Laforme replies without missing a beat: "I'd love to have my shop under the warm Italian sun." That quip is followed by a laugh and a more serious answer: "I'll always be here pushing my collision repair shop forward. I believe that by then, we'll have all the manufacturer certifications, along with the tools and skills to honour them. Expanding the shop to accommodate growth in the coming years is not out of the question. But what's certain is that everything must move in the direction of diversifying our offering, raising the quality of our services, and above all, building customer loyalty by maintaining an impeccable reputation." 

ARC-OARA

Affordable, Quality Parts Solutions

Recyclers are increasingly seen as offering significant advantages for mechanical service centres as well as collision shops.

TEXT WALLY DINGMAN

As we head further into spring, and attention turns to vehicle maintenance and repairs, auto recyclers are well positioned to offer reliable and affordable solutions when it comes to replacement parts. Good examples are engines and transmissions. There have been studies done in Australia and the UK that show that around 83% of consumers are willing to use parts sourced from recyclers due to the often prohibitive cost of sourcing new components.

Going the extra mile

When it comes to big ticket items like engines and transmissions, top tier recyclers are going the extra mile to ensure they are supplying high quality parts, and backing them with both good parts and labour warranties. In some cases, a good condition, low mileage engine or transmission sourced from a recycler can cost a third of the price of a new one, so the savings are significant, particularly during times of economic uncertainty.

The reality is that here in Canada and elsewhere, consumer budgets are being squeezed, so any benefits we can provide in terms of cost savings can go a long way.

As these words are written, we have been working on a RFP for a social media company to help us create messaging around the uptake on recycled parts, the benefits and cost savings they provide, as well as the environmental benefits.

GHG benefits

On the environmental and Greenhouse Gas (GHG) side, our studies at OARA have revealed the costs and effects of manufacturing new parts versus using recycled ones. And today, with the conflict in the Middle East and oil prices rising, the cost of transportation is increasing across the supply chain. This presents another opportunity for auto recyclers to leverage their advantage of being local and having a wide range of quality parts available for significantly less than sourcing new ones, as well as providing a much reduced carbon footprint.

Combine that with the fact that the vehicle fleet continues to age, and that consumers are keeping their cars longer, and a 60-70% saving on a repair bill for a consumer goes a long way.

Processes and practices

Another aspect to competing successfully on the replacement parts side comes down to processes and business practices. In previous columns, we've discussed revamping the Gold Seal standard on the collision side, but at ARC and OARA we are also working on implementing best practices on the mechanical parts side as well. Some of these include having solid information about the condition and mileage of items like engines and transmissions, good photos and descriptions, and the right tools and equipment (including scan tools), so that each facility that obtains these parts knows what they're selling.

Good examples are engines that cannot be turned backwards, and providing warning labels and lockout devices to prevent that from happening and causing unnecessary damage to these engines. Another example is placing warning labels on transmissions that indicate whether the unit has been drained of fluid or not, since a lot of transmissions no longer come with dipsticks to check the fluid level. These are just some of the efforts that our top tier recycler members within ARC and OARA are doing so they can ensure their customers get the best parts at the most competitive prices.

Greater communication

We're also seeing greater communication between our association and others on the mechanical/service side, as there are opportunities for both our sectors to work more closely together. Ultimately, our goal, both on the collision and the mechanical side, is to provide comfort and assurance that the parts that collision and service centres receive from a Gold Seal certified auto recycling facility will meet their requirements and consistently ensure a successful repair, as well as a happy and loyal customer. 



Wally Dingman is a long-time auto recycler and past chair of the Automotive Recyclers of Canada. He now serves as Executive Director for ARC and the Ontario Auto Recyclers Association (OARA). You can reach him at wally@autorecyclers.ca

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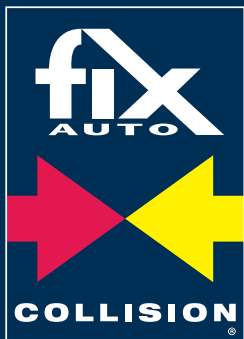
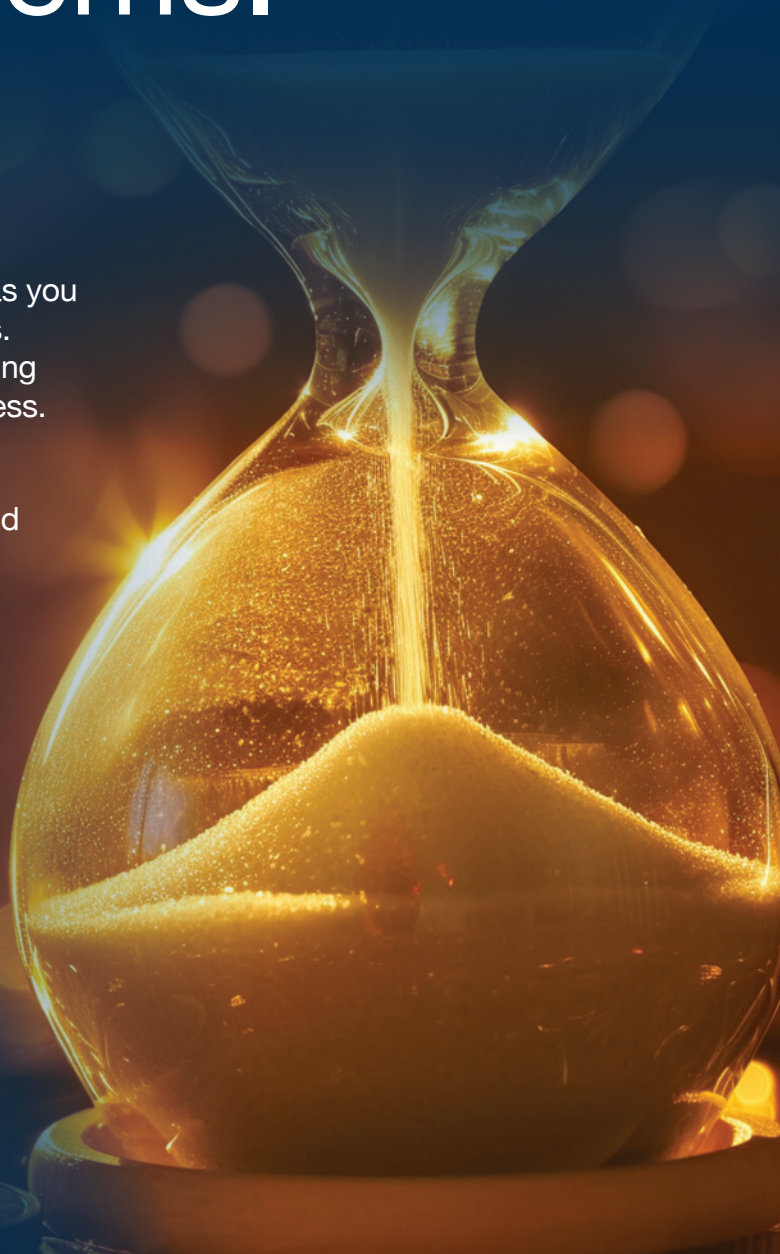
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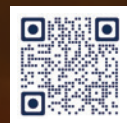
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