

newsworthy trends

Modified Cars: Performance Still Matters

by Paul Ireson

(NAPSA)—The skyrocketing popularity of upgrading and customizing automobiles, or “tuning,” is clear. What was once considered the domain of a select number of gearheads has grown to become a passion for thousands of automotive enthusiasts nationwide. Tuning is no longer a weekend hobby, it’s a lifestyle.

While people are fascinated by the customization craze, many believe they don’t have the technical skills or experience to improve their own ride. After more than 30 years in the scene, I’ve learned that you don’t need to be a professional technician to become a tuner. As long as you have an imagination, a car and a passion for learning, anyone can gain the knowledge to make it happen.

Here’s some advice for anybody looking to develop his or her tuning talent.

Tuner Tip #1: Originality Is Key

Make your car stand out from the crowd with new and innovative ideas that won’t be forgotten. Look back through old magazines or TV shows for inspiration. Expand and improve on these ideas and, most importantly, make them your own. For example, I create my original customized beauties by starting with a car model that’s less common in the tuning realm, the Mini. From start to finish, my rides are different from everybody else’s and stand out above the rest.

Tuner Tip #2: Gain Experience

Attend car shows, spend time with a mentor, help your buddy work on his set of wheels or, if you’re really serious, start working as an automotive technician’s



apprentice. Expose yourself to anything and everything that will help you understand the basics and stretch your abilities. In the end, each experience will teach you a new angle of tuning.

Tuner Tip #3: The Easy Route Is Not The Best Route

Don’t take the easy way out and buy bolt-on upgrades. If it fits on your car within 10 minutes, you’re not customizing—you’re just slapping on a product and moving on. Always put enough effort into each project so that it leaves a lasting impression with judges and, most importantly, your peers. In the end, it’s not about an accessory’s price tag as much as the tuner’s ability to apply each accessory. Be sure to get the right products for the job, install them properly and fabricate or customize when needed. Anyone can take the easy road—be unique.

Tuner Tip #4: Quality Delivers

From the beginning of a project to the end, quality should be the main characteristic of your conversion. Craftsmanship, ingenuity and attention to detail are some of the factors that appeal to judges during competition, not just a colorful paint job.

The same ethics apply to the products you choose to put on and in your car. Specifically, tuners must pay attention to the performance of their vehicles and the long-term effects of the products

they use. One place to start is by making smart decisions at the pump. By using a high-quality fuel with detergency, you will keep carbon deposits from building up on critical engine parts, such as intake valves and fuel injectors. For example, Shell V-Power has five times the amount of cleaning agents required by federal government standards. As you drive, it actually cleans power-robbing carbon deposits that can affect your engine’s performance. Over the long run, everyday purchases from fuel to lubricants can have a dramatic effect on the performance of your vehicle.

Tuner Tip #5: Your Style Will Set You Apart From The Rest

Don’t be afraid to be a trendsetter. Your customization style is as personal as your signature and will set you apart from the competition. Let your style and creativity guide the blueprints of your next car’s design. That’s what’s great about tuning—there are endless possibilities with the car you choose to modify and the upgrades you choose to make. As your tuner skills develop, you’ll find your own groove and decide what “modifications” are most important to you and your car. While exterior enhancements are fun and important, I suggest first diving under your car’s hood and getting to know the parts that make it hum.

Paul Ireson has an extensive background in all aspects of automotive performance, including roles as a mechanic, import tuner, garage owner and race car driver. While known for building small, powerful sport compacts, it’s his extravagant modifications to import Mini Coopers for which he is most well known.