

BRITISH MOTOR TRADE ASSOCIATION

BMTA Newsletter Volume 1, Issue 1

Welcome to the first BMTA Newsletter. We'll be publishing this quarterly in order to keep BMTA members up to date on various aspects of the trade: New products, trends, management tips, profiles, and more.

We're looking for good articles and ideas—if you can contribute an article, a paragraph, even a sentence, we'd appreciate it. You don't have to worry about spelling or grammar.



Following our meeting in March where we signed up just over 40 members, we've had one mailing go out, and we're up to 54 members as of 5/14/03. While at the Carlisle, PA car show and swap meet May 15-18, we expect to sign up a few more members. After that, we plan to focus on building the internals of the BMTA rather than "membership drives." However, if you know of quality businesses that should join, send them our way!

Our priorities right now are to finalize the legal establishment of the BMTA, organize and develop a marketing plan for British cars, develop manufacturing feedback loops, expand the utility of the website, and foster business to business networking. We've identified some leadership for each of these areas, but welcome more volunteers!

Thanks to all of you for your participation and great ideas for the BMTA! You'll see we've got some interesting articles here from three of our members.

--Carl Heideman

Relationships with Local Clubs Bill Wardlow The Motorway, LTD

At the outset, I should state that this article is written from a shop owner's perspective rather than that of a supplier or magazine editor. First, thoughts of an immediate big boost in business as a result of sponsoring a couple of events or technical seminars should be summarily dropped. Ain't gonna happen. Many club members work on their own and each other's cars. They are, after all, enthusiasts. So why bother?

Bother because your overall reputation in the region will be enhanced. Club people talk to non-club people who own these cars.

Bother because while most of those club folks handle their own maintenance, they may not be so confident with an engine or transmission overhaul. I just went out in my shop and checked up. Fifteen vehicles are here for service ranging from tuneups to restorations. Only one machine belongs to a local club member. Ah, but walk into my unit shop. Three club members' engines and one gearbox, plus a TD axle for regearing are underway. There are, of course, several other engines and units as well, but the percentage is good and the unit work is nice, clean, compact, and profitable. I believe I can attribute this to seminars wherein, while teaching the basics of function and practice, people became convinced that we knew what we were doing.

Bother because supporting club activities is a favor that is most often returned in kind. At The Motorway, Ltd., we hold regular garage meetings (tech seminars), about eight per year. We make our showroom available for club events or parties, which average about two per year. And we sponsor a club charity event (a funkhana) once a year. On Saturday mornings, we have coffee and doughnuts (plus tea and scones for the purists) for the general public. Quite a few club members show up and I'm always pleased and a bit humbled by how willing they are to push cars, lift heavy objects, give rides, or virtually anything they are politely asked. Do be wise in what you ask, though, and watch your liability. I truly believe I could hold a "paint the shop" party and get a good turnout. Being nice is, like your mom always told you, a good investment.

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(Relationships with Local Clubs, continued)

You shouldn't be afraid of club involvement. I've known shop owners who would have nothing to do with a local club because they felt they would be "used." I can only ask how? I think it's a cynical attitude and that cynicism projected will be cynicism returned. Where's the profit in that?

Be up front. Tell the club membership what you can and cannot do for them. If you can't afford to discount parts, explain simply that your profit margin doesn't generally allow it by the time you figure in handling costs, etc. Tell them, however, that perhaps if business is good enough (hint, hint), you'll be able to offer club member specials on an occasional basis or that you'll spring for an award in the form of merchandise for a club event. Honestly, this is a good investment.

Finally, get involved with a club because you are an enthusiast. And be enthusiastic. I will assume that you didn't get involved with British cars simply because it looked like the most money you could possibly make. If that was your reason, you don't need my advice. You need, er, shall we say professional help. Believe me, your passion for English cars will rub off on other folks. The more passion, the more cars. The more cars . . .

It is enjoyable and gratifying to be respected for your knowledge and your willingness to share it. Be well prepared when hosting an event. And be honest about what you do and don't know. I'm more impressed by a doctor when he goes for a book to answer my questions than if he obviously tries to b.s. me. Relax. Remember, you da man. Use humor. As to what events and activities to host, I can say here that that's another article. If there is sufficient interest, I'd be glad to expound on some of the things we do in the way of entertainment, education, and community service. Meanwhile, get involved with a club. Invite them to your place. Feed them, even if you have to charge for it. And tell them how much you like their cars, unless you don't. If that's the case, disregard this article.

Running a Successful Business (isn't a Mechanical Problem)

Gary Anderson
Classic Motorsports Magazine

In ten years publishing British Car magazine, and five years before that doing the Austin-Healey Magazine, I've had a chance to drop in on a number of British car restoration and maintenance shops, and chat with customers of many others. As a former business consultant, I was interested in how they ran their businesses.

Many of the shops I've encountered have been in business longer than I've been interested in British cars, and have established enviable reputations that have carried over even when the business changed owners or was passed from one generation to the next.

Unfortunately, too many others have gone out of existence, some so abruptly that customers with cars in the shops were never able to get their cars back.

There are lots of ways of failing, but the sad fact is that many businesses fail, not because they can't get enough paying customers in through the big door in the back, but because of what is going in and out of the small door in the front.

Operating a successful business is never a solo performance. I knew one owner who had never lifted a wrench on anyone else's car before taking over his shop, and to my knowledge never has since. Nevertheless he built up one of the best restoration shops in the country. His recipe was simple. "I hired a good mechanic. Then I spent my time making sure he had a car in front of him and the parts and tools he needed behind him, whenever he was on the clock."

If you are a good mechanic, you can still run a successful business, but at the very least, get someone to man the counter, prepare the estimates, write up the job sheets, order the parts, track labor hours and costs, prepare the status reports, bill the customers, and keep track of expenses. Maybe they might even be willing to make coffee, though you'll still have to keep the washroom clean yourself. A good office manager can be hired for a lot less than a good mechanic, so if you're a good mechanic, every minute you're not working on a car, you're costing yourself money.

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(Running a Successful Business, continued)

Good bookkeeping is essential. The best way is to find a good clerk and get them a good accounting program, like Quickbooks, and a good shop management program for the shop computer. If your clerk is well-organized and good with customers, but a loss with numbers, then find a good accountant who can come in once a week to empty that shoebox of your receipts and bills, and put order back into your life.

Even if you are head-down under a bonnet all day long, you can still keep from being ripped off. Unless it's your spouse who's doing the bookkeeping, write the checks yourself and make the bank deposits yourself, checking the totals against the reports your office manager or accountant is preparing for you. The worst situation is one where the same person who keeps the books also does the billing and banking. It's just too easy to create dummy expenses and divert customer payments. More often than I would have expected, I've heard tales of businesses that were totally busy, but didn't seem to be making any money, until the owner discovered the bookkeeper was making more than the owner was.

Just some ideas to think about.

Thinking about Computing? Cliff Pulis, Jr. Profitware Inc

Does the idea of computerizing your business send chills down your spine, but you grit your teeth knowing it must happen? When and how you do it can make a huge difference. Usually our fears are greater than reality and the benefits are greater than we imagine.

What are your fears? Maybe local classes, a basic book like "Computers for Dummies" or talking to knowledgeable, (usually older) qualified people can remove fear. Then you can begin to see ways to improve your business and provide better service - key reasons you should consider before making any change.

Customers want to do business with shops that provide the most for their dollar. Modern technology is part of that equation. Why use an old tool when a new one could do the job quicker and more accurately? You can rebuild a forty year old engine to last much longer than the original, thanks to improved machining, metallurgical and lubrication technologies. New paints are more durable and look better than their counterparts of only a few years ago. Customers expect the best from you and

the right computer and software can help you give it to them.

The appearance of your invoices and statement says so much about you. If you go a step further and create a web site, you will promote credibility and stability. On a basic level, computer printouts provide and look more accurate than hand written invoices and statements. We found one shop that had errors on 30% of all manual invoices. When a customer catches such a mistake it can cast a shadow on the rest of your work. He will wonder, and you should too, what else has slipped through the cracks?

What about the way you manage your business? How many times have you misplaced a part only to find it after you already ordered a new one? How often have you misplaced a scrap of paper with important information? Do you have any idea how profitable your shop really is? Do unit repairs or complete restorations bring more return? With modern tools you can get accurate answers in seconds. Such speed and accuracy enable you to make better decisions without the traditional guesswork. Lack of knowledge only increases fear. Solutions become larger and more difficult with time. Computers are not the demon, fear is.

Before you run out and buy a new computer or new software, consider these guidelines:

- 1) Not everything needs to be computerized. Automate business processes that are too complex or time consuming to do accurately manually. Tying together the process of writing estimates, ordering and receiving parts and maintaining inventory is a good place to start. Look for reports that will help you analyze the financial results.
- 2) Do not automate a process that works just as well when done manually. For example: you would not take time to enter your local phone directory into a program. Instead, enter the names and numbers of the businesses and customers you call most often. That level of automation makes sense.
- 3) Benefits from a computer come at a price. It takes time to learn to use it. Consider taking a class through adult education or a local trade school. Education compresses time. Time is a scarce commodity in your own business. Before you use a computer in your shop seek help from a qualified professional. Look for someone who understands your type of business and how to apply information technology principles that will work for you.

Current BMTA Members:

Autodynamics	Bellington	WV	Craig Bolton
Autosport Inc	Bloomington	IN	Tucker J Madawick
British Car Specialists	Stockton	CA	David Nock
British Cars of America	St Louis	MO	Charlie Key
British Parts NW, Inc	Dayton	OR	Greg Sherick
British Tool Company	Grand Rapids	MI	Robert Nortier
British Wire Wheel	Sutter Creek	CA	Dan Canada
Christopher's Foreign	Ocean City	NJ	Chris Roberts
Clark & Clark, Inc	Holland	MI	Robert Clark
Clarke Spares	Doylestown	PA	Todd Clarke
Classic Motorsports Magazine	Ormond Beach	FL	Gary Anderson
Connell's MG	Indianapolis	IN	Bob Connell
Dayton Wire Wheel	Dayton	OH	Mike Edgerton
Eclectic Motorworks LLC	Holland	MI	Carl Heideman
Engel Imports	Kalamazoo	MI	Gary Ilcyn
Glenn's MG Repair	St Petersburg	FL	Glenn Lenhard
Grand Prix Graphicx	Huntersville	NC	Dick Lunney
Gustafson Machine	Gloucester	MA	Keith Gustafson
Guy's Garage Inc	Northville	MI	Guy St John
Hendrix Wire Wheel	Greensboro	NC	Allen Hendrix
Hi Tech Collision Repair	St Louis	MO	John Mangles
Jim Allen & Associates	Towanda	PA	Jim Allen
Kip Motor Company Inc	Dallas	TX	Kip Lankeau
LaFox Auto	South Elgin	IL	Dennis Tobin
Little Britain Motor Co	Lindsay	ON	Bob DeShane
Little British Car Co	Farmington Hill	MI	Jeff Zorn
Moss Motors Ltd	Goleta	CA	Kelvin Dodd
New Life to Classics	Mankato	MN	Dave Wiss
North American MG Council	St Joseph	IL	Rick Ingram
Northshore Sports Cars	Lake Bluff	IL	Norb Bries
Old Cars Weekly / Krause	Iola	WI	John A Gunnell
Omni Specialties	Cleveland	OH	Steve Chivington
Profitware Inc	Loveland	CO	Cliff Pulis Jr
Quality Coaches Inc	Minneapolis	MN	Mark Brandow
Ragtops and Roadsters	Perkasie	PA	Michael Engard
Riverside Motors	Delaware	OH	Eric Jones
Ron Shimek Auto Service	Austin	TX	Ron Shimek
Roundabout Motors	St Mary's Point	MN	Lew Palmer
Scarborough Faire	Pawtucket	RI	Cecelia Bruce
Stockton Communications	Livonia	MI	Bob Stockton
Strohm Automotive Inc	Indianapolis	IN	Carl Strohm
Surrey Motorsports	Niles	MI	Bill Farr
Terry's Jaguar Parts	Benton	IL	Bill Terry
University Motors LTD	Ada	MI	John Twist
The Motorway, Ltd	Fort Collins	CO	Bill Wardow
The Roadster Factory	Armagh	PA	Charles Runyan
The Winner's Circle	Lakewood	OH	Dave Giorgi
Victoria British Ltd	Lenexa	KS	Susan Berkowitz
West Michigan Imports	Byron Center	MI	Duane Bailey
Wire Wheel	Vero Beach	FL	Hayes Harris
Worldwide Auto Parts	Madison	WI	Peter Caldwell
XKs Unlimited	San Luis Obispo	CA	Jason Len