

AutoWeek

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Milk run

From dairy barn to restoration shop

By ROGER HART



Red dairy barns dot the southern Michigan landscape the way Starbucks populate Seattle--they're everywhere you look. But one dairy barn near the little hamlet of Manchester, southwest of Ann Arbor, is a bit different from the others. The cows and the

milking equipment are long gone, replaced by a state-of-the-art paint booth and chests filled with tools that, under the direction of several craftsmen, help create concours-winning restorations.

Bob Anzalone moved his shop, R&A Engineering, to the once-bustling dairy barn 10 years ago. Early in his career, Anzalone had spent 15 years working as an engineer for a Detroit automotive supplier.

While he worked on electromechanical devices for Kelsey-Hayes during the day, at night he was working on cars, primarily hot rods.

In 1978, an Altered T Roadster hot rod he created was shown at Detroit's Autorama and won the coveted Ridler Award.

"I had always done cars for other people after hours working for Kelsey. I finally built one for myself. Winning the award was my 15 minutes of fame," Anzalone jokes.

But winning the Ridler reinforced in Anzalone that his real passion wasn't designing and testing widgets but building and restoring cars. So he left the security of a big company to strike out on his own.

He's worked on just about every type of car but now says he prefers prewar classics. A walk through his expansive workshop shows half a dozen cars in various stages of restoration, including a 1924 Model T and a 1957 Mercedes-Benz 300SL roadster.

"I've done gullwings before, but this is my first roadster," he says.

Cars also are brought to his shop for general maintenance. A Cunningham owned by GM vice chairman Bob Lutz, who lives nearby, was in the shop for service.

"For most of these cars, you really can't go to Midas for an exhaust system and brakes or to the local quick-change place for an oil change," Anzalone says.

Of all the cars he's worked on, he says is most proud of a body-off restoration of a 1931 Chrysler Imperial CG Water-house body. The car won awards at Meadow Brook, Hilton Head, Gilmore and the granddaddy of them all, Pebble Beach. Cars he has restored have appeared at the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance three times, each one winning a best-in-class award.

Anzalone and his four employees typically take 18 months to complete a body-off restoration. Owners are given monthly updates on the work.

While his specialty is prewar cars, hot rods hold a special place in his heart.

"I've always liked the hot-rod guys and the cars," he says. "If you want to win the Ridler Award or America's Best Roadster [AMBR], well, they are absolute works of art. But it seems you have to have Chip Foose or [the late] Boyd Coddington or some other name designer do your car if you want to win.

"So you spend \$800,000 to \$1 million to win the award and the \$10,000 that goes with it," he says, laughing.

Anzalone says he spent \$8,000 to build his Ridler winner in '78. And he drove it everywhere he could, something today's Ridler or AMBR winners usually wouldn't dream of doing.

"It's amazing what we're able to do today, as far as restoring these cars. In many instances, they're better than the originals. And all it takes is money."

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