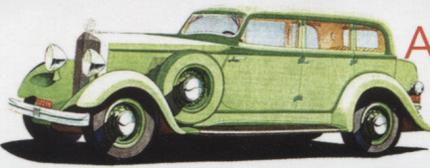


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CLASSIC CAR

THE DEFINITIVE ALL-AMERICAN COLLECTOR-CAR MAGAZINE

SEPTEMBER 2018 #168



STEALTH 4-4-2
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FORD FUELER
1930 MODEL AA TANKER



NASH

STYLE

NOTABLE PREWAR MODELS

PART II—
RESTORING
A **1938**
BUICK
AT HOME



PLUS
1936 AUBURN
1928 LINCOLN
1960 STUDEBAKER



SPECIAL
SECTION:
PEBBLE
BEACH
WEEK

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HAPPENINGS

Andy Bernbaum Auto Parts

A new-old-stock parts cacophony and careful planning culminated with a respected business serving the Mopar community for four decades



BY MATTHEW LITWIN • PHOTOGRAPHY BY RICHARD LENTINELLO

West Newton, Massachusetts, just two miles west of Boston, has been home to Andy Bernbaum Auto Parts since its founding in 1977, yet the company's history started nearly a decade earlier.

At the time, Andy Bernbaum—a native of West Newton and passionate Mopar enthusiast since his youth—was often seen driving a 1948 Plymouth throughout the region. “He loved that car, and to keep it running on the road regularly, like most of us old car nuts, he was always seeking parts,” remembers Chris Paquin, who purchased the business in 2011.

“Over time, Andy had amassed a small collection of Mopar parts and, having realized he had an overstock, he

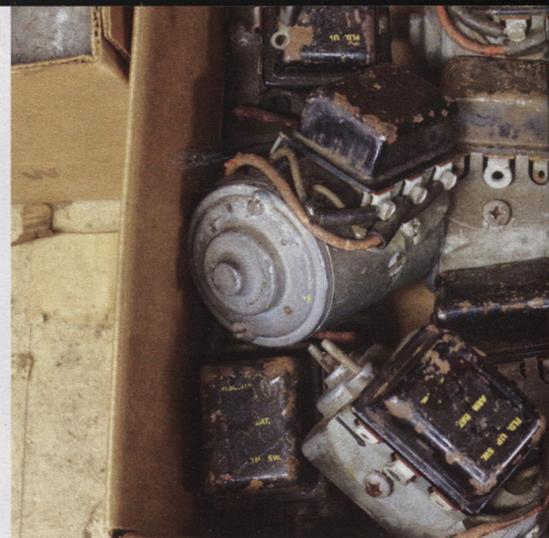
attended a swap meet and sold some of his excess inventory to other Mopar enthusiasts.” That was the beginning.

On the surface, one could say it was an auspicious start; however, the early success didn't immediately translate into a thriving business. Andy, who had an established career in a completely unrelated field of work, continued to hunt down parts for his Plymouth, but would also acquire NOS parts made for the other Chrysler Corporation brands. More swap meet sales followed, each met with growing success.

“Over time, Andy realized that his profits from selling parts at swap meets could match or surpass that of his day job,” says Chris. “Rather than plunge right in, he took a bit of a conservative approach and consulted with Steve

Ames—of Ames Performance—who provided both encouragement and advice. So, with a business plan formulated, Andy then drove all over the country in either his van or 1948 De Soto Custom Suburban, and would stop at Chrysler Corporation dealerships and inquire as to whether or not he could clean out their obsolete parts bins. Andy even tracked down defunct dealerships that had been closed and padlocked. Some of his favorite stories from that time involve being able to negotiate with the property owners to gain access to the buildings and clean out the treasure trove of NOS parts.”

By 1977, Andy had amassed enough of a collection to support a full-time operation, enabling him to completely shift careers. He printed a catalog and



subsequently opened Andy Bernbaum Auto Parts. Though his labor of love was now up and running, the hunt for parts never ended. Andy additionally began to manufacture reproduction parts, items that were in high demand, such as weatherstripping, other small rubber parts, and even wheel cylinders. According to Chris, this work was not accomplished in-house, but rather outsourced to reliable partners who could provide a quality product; a tradition that continues today.

"We're always adding new products

to our catalog. Some of our very latest reproduction items are 1949-'53 valve-stem protectors, which keep the wheel covers from walking around on the wheels; it's an OEM piece that's not been available for many years. Due to a consistent demand, we also just added hubcap clips for 1946-'48 Plymouths, which obviously help keep the wheel trim from popping off while driving."

Chris's background followed a similar path to that of Andy's. He came of age in a successive chain of Plymouths purchased by his father, an engineer by

trade who had a deep affinity for the division's fine engineering and affordable price structure. While attending high school in the Seventies, Chris acquired his first automobile, a 1948 Chrysler Windsor—a car he admits nobody drove to school at the time. Mopars have been in his stable since, naturally leading him into the time-honored tradition of seeking NOS and quality used or reproduction parts. One particular stop at a swap meet changed his life.

Chris recalls: "Like Andy, I was working in a completely unrelated field at the time, and, honestly, I had been already thinking about the prospect of owning my own business when I bumped into him. We had talked prior, and on this occasion, I learned that he was looking to hang it up. As we continued to talk, somewhere along the way, he decided that I was the right Mopar guy who had the perfect enthusiasm and ambition to take over the business he created. I talked it over with my wife, and we both felt that it was too good an opportunity for me to pass up, so I purchased the company in 2011. Andy stayed with us for a while and helped me transition into the new role."

Today, Andy Bernbaum Auto Parts is housed in a single, 20,000-square-foot facility. Supported by a staff of just four well-versed and like-minded Mopar enthusiasts, Chris has been expanding their catalog with a growing array of reproduction parts that complements the NOS inventory.

"This place is overwhelmingly filled with NOS parts, primarily from the Thirties up to the Seventies. We have stuff in here that just blows me away, such as a box of blackout headlamp bulbs from World War II and painted chrome pieces for the 1942 cars. The funny thing about '42 is that they made a lot of parts, but they didn't make a lot of cars; our inventory for that abbreviated year is more extensive than one would assume.

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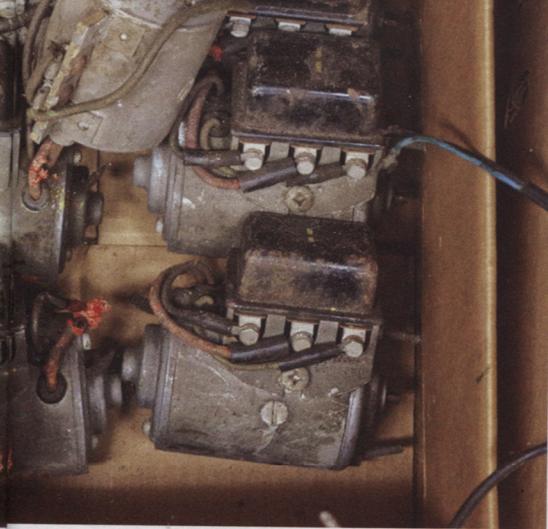


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Some of the rarer parts we have include items for the Airflows. So many parts on the Airflows were different than the rest of the product line. The same can be said of specific parts for the Chrysler 300 Letter Cars—that stuff is solid gold. We also see a growing request to support the guys who are restoring Dual Ghias, too.

“There are parts of the warehouse I’ve not even been into, and we’re not 100 percent sure of what we have in stock—yet. It’s a careful, continuous effort. We’re still acquiring NOS parts whenever possible, which is one of the reasons it’s taking some time to completely document the inventory. We want to do it right, but the ever-changing dynamics of the hobby mean we have to keep pace. For instance, we’re starting to get more calls from our customers who are looking for parts from the late ’70s, and now even the ’80s. It’s an area we know we are going to have to expand into down the road.”

Despite the sign of things to come within the hobby, Chris is quick to point out that some areas of the more vintage Mopar market are as robust as ever. “We see a continuing strength in the 1955-’60 Forward Look cars. Also, the pre-1955 models, going back to the immediate

prewar era, are always popular because they are affordable. They are a great entry point into the hobby. We’ve got everything it takes to keep them going. Chrysler Corporation made a ton of them, especially 1946-’48. They made the same car for three consecutive years; the demand for cars after the war was intense, which is why there are a lot of them floating around still. Like I said, it’s a car you can get into rather affordably—\$10,000 or less for a really nice one. Another that’s quickly gained appreciation is the Imperial. More people are restoring them, all the way up through 1966.”

Interestingly, the space required to house reproduction parts is comparatively small, and used parts are virtually non-existent within the facility, as Chris goes on to explain. “The reproduction parts that we sell equates to the majority of our revenue, which makes you think we need space for it, but we cycle those parts in and out. It’s replenishable, whereas the NOS stuff really isn’t. There’s just a finite amount of NOS parts on the planet. Regarding used parts, we have a network of trusted friends in the industry who have helped our customers seeking those items.”

If you’ve not guessed already, Chris is just as hands-on as the rest of his

staff. Although he has to devote time to maintaining the business, such as buying and marketing, the interaction with fellow Mopar enthusiasts is one of the aspects that he enjoys the most.

“I drive my old Mopars in to work—either my 1939 Plymouth convertible coupe, ’65 Imperial convertible, or ’48 Chrysler New Yorker—as frequently as possible, and will get on the phones as much as I can. We have the greatest customers in the world; I really get a kick out of hearing their stories and talking to them about what they are doing. They really are a great group of people and they are the key to a hobby that keeps marching on—always has and always will.

“The cars don’t go away, and we’ve seen an increase in a younger audience, especially through our social media outlets, that have an appreciation for the traditional end of the hobby while harboring a nostalgia for the cars they grew up in. It’s one of the reasons I’m so enthusiastic about the business, because it just keeps on rolling out. I’m not particularly nostalgic about K-cars, for instance, but there are people out there who are. I’m optimistic about the hobby’s future, and I’m thankful I can continue to be a part of it.”



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