

Magazine taps shop for tomorrow's car

By Eileen Oldfield
Staff Writer

Though Philip and Dana Brazer don't work on the cars at their business, Netcong Auto Restorations, the Hillsborough couple says the restorations, customizations, and simple collision work done in the shop makes more than a just another auto shop.

"We feel as though we're running a hospital for cars," Mr. Brazer said. "We have doctors who do the work."

The work done on vehicles at the shop — which could be anything from a 1953 Austin Healey, a Lamborghini Gallardo, Bentleys and Maseratis to Range Rovers, Corvettes and Mustangs — garnered the business Popular Mechanic's Top Shop 2010 Car Makeover project.

"We were really surprised that we won," Mr. Brazer said. "We're a startup company, out of hundreds of companies."

"Passion, focus, coordination," he added. "That's the key to our success."

According to the Brazers, the

magazine sends a request for proposals to hundreds of auto restoration and customizations country-wide, asking the businesses to customize a 2010 Chevy Camaro SS. The Brazers submitted their design and a cost estimate for the customization work, Mr. Brazer said.

The Top Shop articles will run in the May and June issues of Popular Mechanics, so the Brazers could not reveal the details of the customization work. The car will appear at several auto shows, including the 2010 SEMA auto show in Las Vegas, Nev., the Route 66 Car Show in San Bernadino, Calif., and at the Pocono 500, in Long Pond, Pa.

"We've made it a much more high-performance car," Mr. Brazer said.

The Brazers, of East Mountain Road, opened their auto restoration business in spring 2008, despite the beginning of the recession. In fall 2009, the Brazers purchased Netcong Auto Body's assets, and added collision work to the existing auto restoration services.

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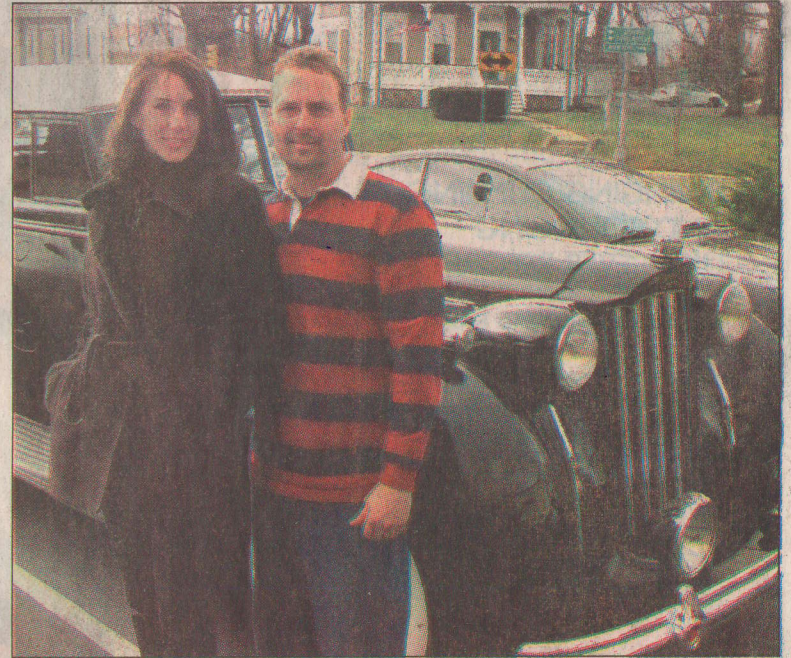


Photo courtesy of Philip Brazer

Although most of their business comes from restoring such classic autos as the 1939 Packard behind them, Dana and Philip Brazer's Netcong Auto Restorations has been tapped by Popular Mechanics to build a customized, high-tech Chevy Camaro.

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"At the time, I was working for IBM, but I didn't want to work in corporate America," Mr. Brazer said. "I wanted to own my own business."

While the Brazers have a background in the arts — Ms. Brazer owned an interior decorating business, and Mr. Brazer worked in Web design — and owned several classic cars before opening their business, they do not work on the cars.

Instead, a team of four veteran professionals in auto repair and customization handle the work.

"We make sure the person who is the most knowledgeable is doing the work," Mr. Brazer said. "... There's no one who is just OK at it — everyone is excellent."

Prior to starting in colli-

sion work, the Brazers worked with luxury, antique, vintage and various sports and muscle cars, they said.

"We're doing high end luxury, what you call exotic or super cars," Mr. Brazer said. "Right now, we have a 1939 Packard that's valued at \$400,000."

A third business arm — customization work on modern cars — grew out of the Brazers' decision to enter the magazine competition. Each arm of the Brazers' business involves different work and a different business approach, which the couple handles by treating each part individually. Each type of auto work requires different skills, the Brazers said.

"There's idiosyncrasies with all those businesses," Mr. Brazer said. "We run them like three separate businesses."

Though they've seen several successes, the Brazers said adjusting the auto restoration business did have a steep learning curve. While the Brazers knew cultivating a new business during a recession would be an added challenge, Mr. Brazer's Web design background helped them generate restoration requests online.

Breaking out of the traditional auto shop business model presented another challenge, since they wanted a team environment, they said.

"It always comes down to behaviors," Mr. Brazer said. "We had to get them used to working in a team environment. Usually, you'll have a boss who dictates the work."

"A lot of people who come here, we can get their work done in a shorter time because our guys know what they are doing," he added. "I'm not saying we're perfect but it's our people who make the difference."

The people working at the shop and the quality of the work paid off, according to the Brazers. "The guys (working at the shop) are not family, but they've become it," Mr. Brazer said. "We could have our own reality show." To contact the business, visit their Web site, www.netcongautorestorations.com, email info@netcongautorestorations.com or call 973-527-3464.