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Profile in Excellence



Bavarian Cream

The Werk Shop is the place for the ultimate in BMW restorations

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY RICHARD LENTINELLO

It was only a matter of time before a shop specializing in top-quality BMW restorations would surface. While there are many first-rate BMW specialists around the country, nearly all focus on repair and performance modifications, and the occasional restoration, too. But a dedicated facility devoted to assembling concours-quality restorations on BMWs of all vintages just didn't exist. Until now.

Located in an industrial park just a short drive north of Chicago, The Werk Shop is the brainchild of BMW owner, collector and all-around fanatic for the cars from Munich, Don Dethlefsen. He and his partner, Michael Marijanovic, have made The Werk Shop the place for authentic, factory-correct restorations. More specifically, the best restored 2002s in the country are built here.

The 1968-'76 2002 is not only the most popular old BMW to own, restore, modify and race, it's also perhaps the world's number one cult car, so it should come as no surprise that 02s make up the majority of the work. With six BMW-trained technicians on board, the shop performs between four and six ground-up, nut-and-bolt restorations per year, split almost evenly between 02s and the ever-beautiful 3.0CS model. Of course, not all the restoration projects are ground-ups; several partial restorations are taken on, too.

As it is with all professionally run restoration shops that are known for the very best in quality, there are no set prices. Each and every car is different; some cars require more rust or accident repair than others, and some have more parts missing. All of these issues affect the final cost.

Thankfully, BMW still manufactures about 90 percent of the parts needed to build a new 2002 from scratch, but thanks to the low U.S. dollar versus the euro, it's not unusual today to spend in excess of \$25,000 in parts alone. So depending on whether you want your 02 restored to a high quality street restoration standard or an absolute perfect concours contender, prices will vary greatly. Time? Figure between nine months and one full year for a ground-up restoration to be completed.

About prices, Don said, "I find that once a customer is in the shop and sees what we are working on (the degree of perfection we take to make the cars even better than factory new) and understands that \$30,000 (plus or minus) of new parts goes into the project, the price is not a problem. Of course, many cannot afford what we



Owners Michael Marjanovic (left) and Don Dethlefsen pose alongside a modified 2002 that they built and a 503 convertible that is currently being restored.



Big BMW sedans and convertibles from the '40s and '50s, such as this 1956 503, are always welcome at The Werk Shop, for either mechanical repair or full restorations.



An exotic M1 is being de-smogged back to European specifications for more power...



...while this M1 is being painstakingly restored to an exceptional high standard.

are doing, thus a partial restoration may suit them."

One of the reasons that cars restored by The Werk Shop are of such a high quality is because they don't cut corners. "We only use original equipment BMW parts, many of which we purchase directly from Germany," Don said. "Regarding upholstery and carpet material, many customers want even better quality than what the factory used. For example, no one wants BMW's loop carpet in a 2002; we will use the better quality German square weave or Wilton wool plush. This allows us to use flat goods and our own master patterns so that we end up with perfect fits."

The same mind-set of adhering to BMW-spec parts doesn't end with the mechanical, body and trim parts. It also extends to the final finish. To achieve the absolute best finish possible, Glasurit paint is used, the same product that BMW uses to paint all their cars. The paint is a two-stage urethane, which consists of a base coat/clear coat system. And while The Werk Shop does not do the actual painting, they work closely with three different high-quality paint shops nearby, all of which specialize in restoration work. Two of the shops

Don has been working with since the 1970s, when he was restoring Ferraris, so they know the type of high-end work he expects of them.

When it comes to mechanical work, every engine is built at the shop. As Don told us, "We employ one of, if not the best, BMW engine builders in the country. All engines are built in-house and are highly detailed. Internally, they have many secrets that make them even better than a factory engine."

The 2002's successor, the once popular 320i, is one BMW model that still hasn't taken off with enthusiasts as a car to restore. About this model, Don said, "We have had a few inquiries and have worked on almost every BMW model except the E21s. I suspect the reason is that almost all 320i's were rust buckets and few good ones have been saved. But it's the old CSLs, M1s, E-30 M3s, 507s, Isettas and 2000CS coupes that people are investing money in to restore. We recently took an M1 back to original BMW Euro specs, removing all the external and internal DOT/EPA items that were done when the car first came into the U.S."

As for vintage BMWs, The Werk Shop is



Pre-war BMW 315 Barchetta Special is undergoing a concours-quality ground-up restoration, as is the 3.0CS coupe in the background which has been stripped to bare metal inside and out.

currently rebuilding a one-off 315 Barchetta Special. This little pre-war BMW roadster, which competed in the 1947 Mille Miglia, is clothed in a very aerodynamic body that envelops the entire chassis. When completed in another year or so, it will once again take to the streets of Italy and go head-to-head with Ferraris and Porsches in the Mille Miglia Retrospective.

At the time of our visit to The Werk Shop, the 315 Barchetta Special's body was in bare metal, and the body had already been taken off its chassis, which was being repainted and rebuilt to factory specifications. When it comes to pre-war BMWs, and even those rarely seen post-war sedans, according to Don, "We service and restore pre-war cars, yet I see little difference between pre- and post-war car owners. They are all BMW enthusiasts, and in some cases, have both pre- and post-war cars in their collections."

When I asked Don where he sees the collector-car hobby regarding BMWs heading in the next decade, his reply was a most emphatic, "Nowhere but up! The BMW collector-car hobby is the hottest I have ever seen it. Prices are going through the roof; 507's that could have been bought at

\$250,000 three years ago are now selling in the \$800,000 to \$900,000 range. CSL 'Batmobiles' that were in the \$50,000 range only four years ago are now at \$100,000. RM Auctions recently sold a 2002 at Amelia Island for \$22,000, way over the catalog estimates. At this rate, we will be seeing nice examples of 02s selling at \$30,000 soon. I believe the BMW collector-car market is where Ferraris were in the early '70s. Everyone now wants one, and the prices are starting to go through the roof."

Proof that The Werk Shop's quality truly is as outstanding as what has been said above, each year, at the BMW Car Club of America's Oktoberfest, a special Best in Show trophy is given to the BMW that their corporate judges would most like to have. Of the seven different cars that have won this coveted award thus far, three were Werk Shop restorations, and those were the only years that they entered a car.

"I don't have a single favorite restoration that we've done," Don said. "For me, it is the journey to the finished product that gives me the satisfaction; the customer's shock and pleasure at the stunning end result is what I am looking for." 🍷



Another nut-and-bolt restoration of a 2002, this one finished in bright Golf Yellow.

Source:

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