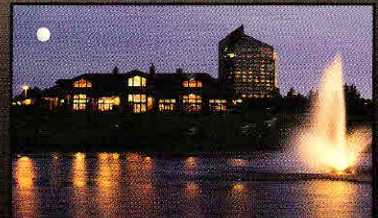


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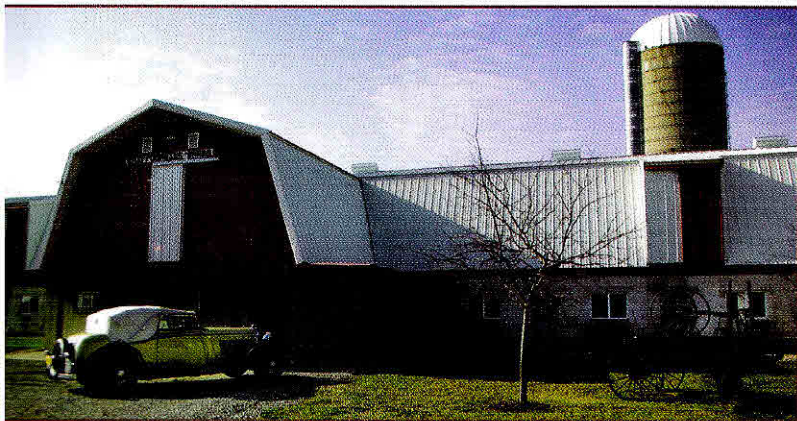


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COUNTRY CRAFTSMANSHIP

R&A Engineering Uses a Rural Setting to Their Advantage to Perform Award-winning Restorations



Southeast Michigan's Irish Hills are full of winding country roads and hilly terrain that make a perfect playground for automotive enthusiasts, but while the area is ideal for roaring through the curves in a vintage car, it's not where most of those enthusiasts would picture an award-winning, world-class restoration facility.

Convention says that restoration shops should be tucked away in back alleys in industrial neighborhoods, housed in concrete blocks that share little in common with the meticulously restored automobiles that emerge from the paint booths and detail areas.

If you wander through the quilt-patchwork farmland and country homes that make up much of the rural area around Manchester, Michigan, about half an hour from Ann Arbor, you'll eventually stumble on a what looks like a dairy farm, picture-perfect red barn and all. On any given weekend, however, there are dozens of vintage cars parked out front. This isn't any farm you've ever seen before; instead of milking cows and raising hogs, this farm is churning out Best of Show and Best in Class collector cars that are garnering attention all over the world.

R&A Engineering isn't a farm, though the facility once was. Restorer Bob Anzalone and his wife, Mary, bought the former dairy farm in the mid-1990s when they decided to take Bob's knack for restoring cars to a whole new level.

Since opening its doors, R&A has put an impressive touch on numerous award-winning cars, like Ethel Lanaux's 1931 Waterhouse-bodied Chrysler Imperial CG Victoria, which was recently awarded Best in Class at the 2007 Meadow Brook Concours d'Elegance and has previously placed in class at Pebble Beach.

The aubergine (a deep eggplant purple) Chrysler has been the center of attention at more than a few collector car events since its 5,000 hour restoration was completed by R&A. Subjected to a 100-point level restoration, the Chrysler became a family member for the Anzalones.

"We chose the pinstripe color with Ethel from a flower in my garden," says Anzalone's wife, Mary. A bright green, hand painted pinstripe adds a certain flair to the regal Chrysler.

The shop became so close to the car that, when it was on the tour prior to the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance and the transmission gave up the ghost, Anzalone replaced it with a rebuilt transmission right on the polo field merely 12 hours prior to the early morning Dawn Patrol. With the help of other restorers, Anzalone was able to track down a rebuilt transmission in Chicago and have it shipped out to California in record time.

Thanks to an extensive background in engineering, Anzalone could run the restoration shop on his own – and he has done so in the past. When he decided that he wanted to do what he truly enjoyed, he opened R&A Engineering, an outfit that has grown from his garage to a full-scale, fully-staffed restoration shop.

The Anzalones moved out into the country from Monroe, Michigan, located in the nearby Detroit-Toledo corridor, in order to focus on their booming restoration business. They chose a former dairy farm because of its quaint 150-year old farmhouse and 14,000-square-foot red-painted barn that could easily be converted into a restoration facility.

Step inside the barn and you'll see that dairy cows have given way to vintage classics. On the day of *American Driver Magazine's* visit, the aforementioned Chrysler shared space in the shop with enough a partially assembled classic cars to stage their own Concours d'Elegance.

Tucked away in one corner was the body of a 1952 Jaguar XK120 Fixed Head Coupe body fresh from the state-of-the-art paint booth and color sanding. The Jaguar was ready to be polished out and properly set. This voluptuous car had stayed in the Ann Arbor area for its entire life, so it required some rust repair, including fabrication of an all-new trunk lid.



Left: This isn't your average dairy farm. R&A Engineering occupies a large former barn.

Above: Perhaps R&A's best known restoration is the 1931 Waterhouse-bodied Chrysler Imperial CG Victoria, a Concours darling since it was finished.

Right: R&A's projects have been invited to more than a few Concours events.



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Just in front of the Jaguar, and looking like an auto show mock-up, sits a freshly restored frame and drivetrain out of a 1930 Dodge Brothers Eight. The roadster body of this rare, large car rests on a custom-welded cart across the facility on its way to a sophisticated body shop room, where it would receive the final touches before entering the paint booth.

"There aren't many of these Dodge Eights around," Anzalone says. "We tracked down all the vintage literature we could find."

The big Dodge will be painted in a unique period combination of an ochre body with signal orange highlights and black fenders, a scheme that R&A and the car's owner gleaned from original sales brochures that are perhaps more rare than the car itself.

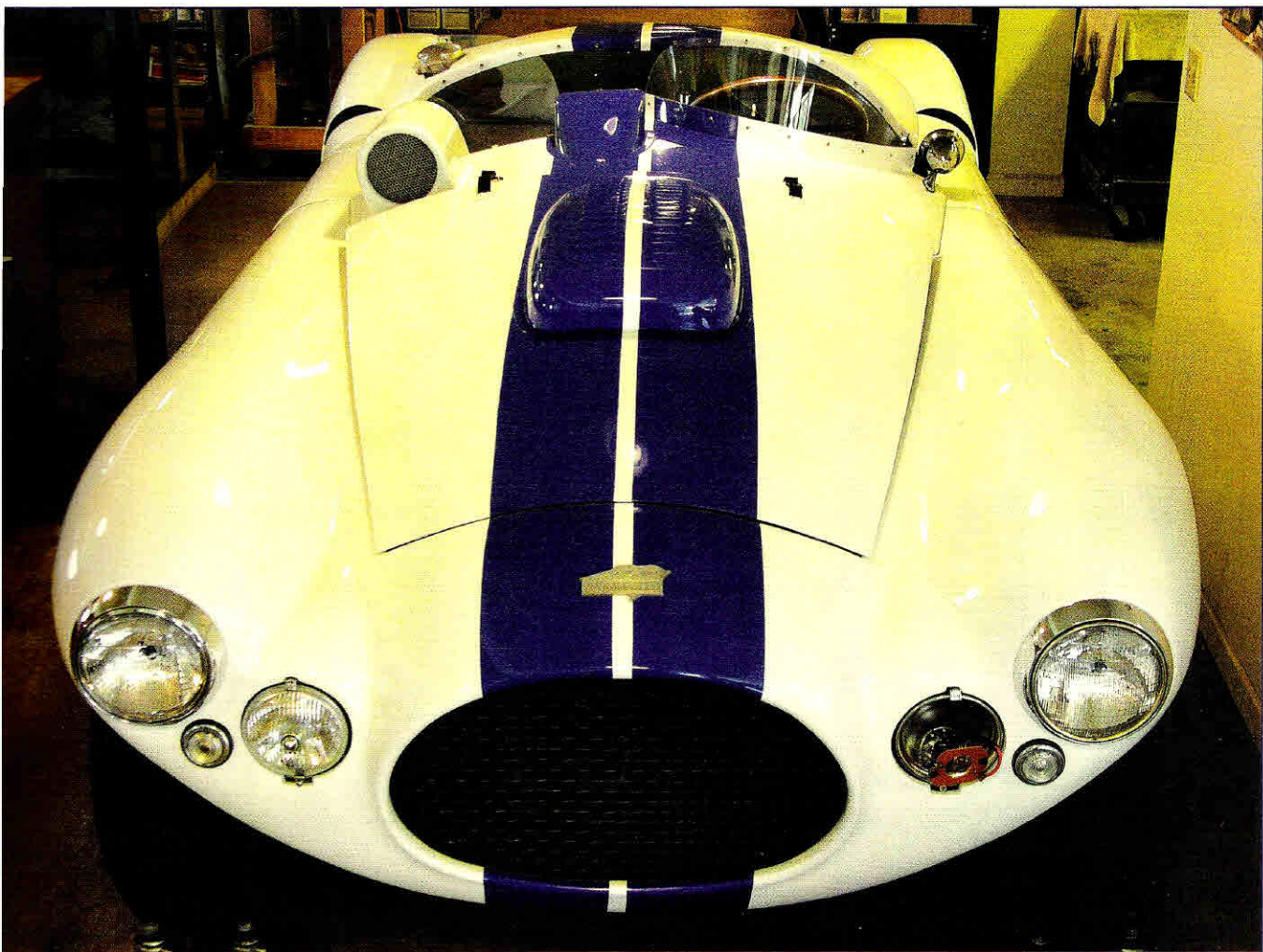
A much more svelte chassis from a 1957 Mercedes-Benz 300SL Roadster rests just across the way on another custom-welded cart. The 300SL's highly sophisticated tubular frame looks noticeably better than new, not surprising given R&A has completed top-notch restorations on two 300SL Gullwings in the past.

But not every project R&A has completed is quite as conventional as a "mere" restoration to Classic Car Club of America 100 Point standards or Antique Automobile Club of America First Place Award level. For some, a little out-of-the-box thinking is required, like the 1957 Ford Fairlane that the restorer is currently fitting with the powertrain, suspension and interior of a late model Ford Mustang Cobra.

"The owner wanted something different, but also reliable and comfortable," Anzalone says.

Resto-mods are pretty popular these days, but Anzalone says that you'll be hard pressed to find one more intricate than this one. Not only did Anzalone shoehorn a 4.6 liter V8 out of a 2001 Ford Mustang Cobra donor car into the Fairlane, but he managed to adapt the late model's fully independent suspension to the classic car's frame. Inside, the Fairlane will gain the Mustang's dashboard, air conditioning and even airbags by the time the project is finished. It's a major undertaking, but it only shows off the shop's flexibility.

Though Anzalone's specialty is in pre-war Concours d'Elegance quality vehicles, he started off as a hot rodder, so the 1932 Ford Deuce Coupe sitting adjacent to the Fairlane is quickly becoming a favorite project. It's a true survivor that once served as hot rodding icon Ray Brown's daily driver. Rather than restore the car and lose the jaw-dropping patina that it has gained over the last 50 years, R&A is rewiring the entire vehicle to make it more reliable





and safer and they're doing everything they can to preserve the scrapes and bruises that give it a tremendous amount of character. It represents a rare glimpse into the early days of flathead Ford hot rodding.

To complete the Ford triquetra, former Ford designer Buck Mook's personal rare French-bodied 1954 Ford Comete Monte Carlo Coupe with an original Ford Flathead engine sits in a corner awaiting final electrical wiring. The car's paint was barely dry when it won a Lion Award at Meadow Brook in 2007 and Anzalone has high hopes for it to do well at future shows now that the restoration is nearly complete.

"It was a real challenge. We got it with awful metal," Anzalone recalls.

The swoopy dark blue coupe with an almost Italian grille arrived at R&A with a myriad of body problems. Wheel openings that weren't properly aligned over the tires were just the start of an extensive bodywork restoration that R&A undertook to get the coupe back in order.

Fortunately, R&A employs a great team of metalworkers and painters and, with a well-used English wheel and the latest and greatest TIG welders in the shop's metal fabricating and welding area, R&A can fix bad panels and create new ones from scratch with little difficulty.

The Facel-bodied coupe now features perfect body panels and a deep paint job courtesy of R&A's top-notch painter and metal fabricators.

"Those two guys can do pretty much anything," Anzalone says. His shop has been awarded at collector car events for its high quality paint jobs and one merely needs to look at the Ford Comete or the 1931 Chrysler to see. But the shop's bodywork is also receiving a lot of attention.

"We're currently fixing the fenders for a 1938 Indian four-cylinder motorcycle," Anzalone explains. "We're putting proper holes in it and reshaping it. It was a real mess when we got it."

For projects that require fabrication of all new parts, R&A has a full service machine shop and an electrical bench, both of which are housed in what was once the milking room of this former dairy barn.

Each vehicle under R&A's watch receives at least one custom-made parts cart that can be shuffled around the facility depending on what project is being undertaken at any given time. When the parts carts aren't in use, a freight elevator made with an automotive lift takes the carts to an overhead loft storage area.

In addition to restorations, R&A's services also include maintenance and preservation of vintage and classic cars of all types. Car guru Bob Lutz so regularly calls on R&A for their mechanical skills that Anzalone has given him his own parking spot out back. Then again, there's probably not much competition over a heli-pad.

"Bob likes to come check on his cars with his helicopter," Anzalone laughs. "He used to do low-altitude flyovers in his fighter jet until the neighbors started to complain."

Lutz's German Air Force Alpha jet also spooked the Anzalones' two percheron draft horses, who live in a converted horse barn next to the restoration facility. The big horses have become popular with local car enthusiasts who enjoy regular tours of the shop for auto club events.

There's little that R&A can't do and there are few awards that they haven't received, though the top spot at Pebble Beach is on the wish list, something the shop might find in the not-too-far-off future.

"I used to be tickled about getting invitations to shows," Anzalone laughs. "Now people are begging us. I've either got a good reputation or I've been around too long."

But for now, Anzalone is content with restoring some of the finest vehicles on and off the classic car show circuit in R&A Engineering's idyllic country setting.



Left: R&A applies the expertise they gleaned from two prior Mercedes-Benz 300SL Gullwings to this 1957 300SL Roadster.

Above: This 1928 Isotta Fraschini Tipo 8AS Landaulette, bodied by Castagna, has won numerous awards for R&A Engineering, including Best in Class at Meadow Brook and a class finish at Pebble Beach.