

# Inside the Aluminum Revolution: Factors to Consider When Upgrading

Not since the introduction of the unibody vehicle has there been as revolutionary a topic to hit the collision repair industry as aluminum repair. With more and more cars and trucks equipped with this innovative material—as well as tools, products and equipment specifically designed for them—entering the market every day, the debate on how and with what to best perform proper aluminum repairs rages on. The Society of Collision Repair Specialists (SCRS) recently sat down with representatives from the equipment and tooling sides of the industry, as well as several collision repair facilities who have taken the plunge of upgrading, to get their perspectives on repair safety, the importance of accurate information and their personal experiences on the front lines of the aluminum revolution.

As someone who has seen his share of tools, fasteners and repair solutions, **Bastian Hartmann**, project manager of Advanced Joining Technologies for Indiana-based Bollhoff, Inc., a self-piercing rivet (SPR) fastener and tooling company, is well aware of the importance of a good tool—and the devastating consequences of an inferior one. “A company who wants to provide a proper SPR repair kit should not only sell a tool, but also have the experience and competence to guide their customers on how to set an SPR properly based on the application or material combination,” he said. “SPR equipment in mass production runs with high setting forces of up to 80kN (approximately 1.5 seconds per joint), and full process monitoring on parts fixed and clamped in engineered devices. To match the same joint quality with a handheld tool in a workshop requires not only different parameters, but also training on the technology itself. Training should be provided to all operators in the correct use of the tooling and appropriate personal safety equipment should be worn at all times.”

“Rivets can take up to 11,000 pounds of force on an 8-millimeter tip,” noted **Dave Gruskos**, President of Reliable Automotive Equipment (RAE). “Tip quality and arm stability is vital to performing a safe and proper repair. Also, the types of rivets vary from one OEM to another, so one needs the ability to adapt the rivet to

fit each job. A battery-powered rivet gun for a tiny rivet, for example, may not be the best direction.”

So how can repairers be sure they’re using the right tools for the job, and more importantly, stay safe while working with them? “Collision repair professionals should be purchasing tools that have been approved and tested by car manufacturers,” enforced Gruskos. “There should be training provided on the tools’ proper use by suppliers that have a tech line. But it doesn’t stop there; repairers should continue to be trained—and retrained—yearly, and should also have tools certified on an annual basis as well.”

“For the installation of the SPR, body shop operators should follow the tool’s operation manual and OEM guidelines, including all safety procedures,” added Hartmann. “For the application, in the best case, there is an OEM repair guideline existing which describes the exact setting parameters and the rivet/die combination to use at a certain location. This takes away the ‘guessing’ on the operator side and keeps both body shop and customer safe. If such a document is not available, the OEM should provide a general SPR guideline and the provider for the equipment should be able to help the operator achieve the joint quality described in the document.”

There is a plethora of information to consider when researching the decision to upgrade or modify tooling and equipment in the shop. However, in many cases, some of the most valuable data can often come straight from the real life experiences of those who have experienced it firsthand. SCRS Past Chairman **Gary Wano** of *G.W. and Son Auto Body, Inc.* in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma is a facility owner who has adopted advanced equipment and tooling to prepare for the future. As he advised, the decision cannot be made overnight. “The adoption of advanced programs, tooling, equipment and procedures has to be birthed from leadership, but a continual culture of learning must also be embraced, from the very top to the very bottom of the shop,” he says. “This is not just a plaque on a wall; it’s about making sure the correct processes are in place, about continually investing in the improvement of your business and about making sure that the people you have along for the journey are as dedicated

to the business’ success as you are.”

Once a shop has committed to upgrading, SCRS board member **Kye Yeung** of *European Motor Car Works*, Santa Ana, California, noted that the research process into tool and equipment purchases should encompass the past, present and future. “As a shop owner, [deciding on equipment for advanced materials], I would look back at which lines I repaired, who my customers were, and whether those OEMs were thinking about changing their production or technology in the near future, i.e. carbon fiber. You don’t want to circumvent a process where a manufacturer comes up with something unique, leaving you with outdated equipment. If you’re going through that push to upgrade, start slowly; get all the basics out of the way before deciding exactly what large purchases to buy.”

As Yeung continues, those large purchases should be considered with universality and convenience in mind whenever possible. “Like any type of purchase, the so-called ‘right’ brand would in my eyes have to include a service network that’s easily attainable. Our shop was originally involved with

the *Aston Martin* factory-approved program, and every piece of equipment had to be imported. Even their adhesives were Euro-specific; you simply could not get them in the States. The accessibility of service is huge. And my suggestion would be, before you jump, see what required equipment can be used on multiple lines.”

“The manufacturers dictate the tools, the equipment and the training that are mandatory [for the repair of advanced materials],” added SCRS Chairman **Ron Reichen**, *Precision Body & Paint*, with multiple locations in Oregon. “If you’re going to take that plunge and invest in becoming a certified shop, you need to make that decision to either dip your toe in the water, or to jump in and become certified for several lines. If you invest in building a clean room for Audi’s certification program, for example, you’ll be able to use that space for several lines. Some pieces of equipment also have crossover, and with an average cost of \$10,000 apiece or more on rivet guns and between \$20,000 to \$30,000 on welders, the economies of

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# Annual Vendor Awards Announced by Sherwin-Williams Automotive Finishes

**Sherwin-Williams Automotive Finishes** announced its annual Associated Products Vendor Awards. The announcement was made at a special reception for more than 300 suppliers, employees, and V.I.P. guests at its national sales meeting held at the Gaylord

Williams Operational Excellence. “The goal at our almost 200 branches is to meet the needs of our collision repair customer base around the country and bring them greater value. Our vendor partners are an intricate part in helping us demonstrate the service

and find, or have immediately delivered, the exact products and services they need to be profitable and productive.

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and find, or have immediately delivered, the exact products and services they need to be profitable and productive.

“More than 300,000 customers walk into our branches every year. Our vendor partners are important to the ongoing service and attention to detail



Sherwin-Williams Automotive Finishes 2014 Operational Excellence: P.P.C. Inc. 1st Row (l to r) **Jim Zele, T.J. Miles, Danae Miles, Martin Powers, Dana Vonover, Brian Love.** 2nd Row (l to r) **Tom Hablitzel, Adam Chafe, Jake Mussay, Andrea Sovak, Tim Schmidt, Scott Minor, Greg Ocampo, Jeff Hartl**



Sherwin-Williams Automotive Finishes 2014 Brand of the Year: DeVilbiss. 1st Row (l to r) **Jim Zele, Steve Duff, Roger Henry, Jeff Bell, Linda Langford, Hans Horstik.** 2nd Row (l to r) **Tom Hablitzel, Adam Chafe, Jake Mussay, Andrea Sovak, Tim Schmidt, Scott Minor, Greg Ocampo, Jeff Hartl**



Sherwin-Williams Automotive Finishes 2014 Sales Excellence - Canada: Dan - Am Company / SATA. 1st Row (l to r) **Tom Hablitzel, Jim Zele, Jason Gravenhof, Andrea Sovak, Greg Ocampo.** 2nd Row (l to r) **Adam Chafe, Jake Mussay, Tim Schmidt, Scott Minor, Jeff Hartl**



Sherwin-Williams Automotive Finishes 2014 Sales Excellence - U.S.A. - Garnat. 1st Row (l to r) **Dave Adams, Bill Morando, Gary Lehky, Debbie Teter, Kendall McGowen, Jim Zele.** 2nd Row (l to r) **Tom Hablitzel, Adam Chafe, Jake Mussay, Tim Schmidt, Andrea Sovak, Scott Minor, Jeff Hartl, Greg Ocampo**

Texan Resort & Convention Center in Grapevine (Dallas), Texas.

Associated Products suppliers honored at this year's Vendor Awards included:

- DeVilbiss - Sherwin-Williams Brand of the Year
- Garnat - Sherwin-Williams Sales Excellence: U.S.
- SATA - Sherwin-Williams Sales Excellence: Canada
- P.P.C. (Powers Paper Co.) - Sherwin-

excellence that our customers expect,” said **Jeff Hartl**, Director of Associated Products Marketing for Sherwin-Williams Automotive Finishes.

Hartl noted how the Sherwin-Williams controlled distribution strategy provides a real difference as it directly supplies its collision repair customers: “Our company-trained employees manage the entire supply chain from product development to delivery. A Sherwin-Williams professional di-

services—innovative products, training, delivery, consulting and centralized billing—and this drives consistency and cost-effective results. We want to be the one-stop-shop for the automotive repair and refinish industry and our stores make it easy for customers to come in

we provide all our collision repair customers whether they come straight to the counter in one of our branches or through delivery to their shops.”

For more information, visit [www.sherwin-automotive.com](http://www.sherwin-automotive.com) or call 1-800-SWULTRA (1-800-798-5872).

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scale really do come into play in some respects. Do your due diligence, do your homework and pay attention to the big picture.”

While market demand is also hugely influential to the decision-making process, Reichen stressed, “Research whether your market will support the lines you want to work on before purchasing equipment to fix them. Outside of your relationship with the OE, the most important tool in a repairer’s arsenal can be one’s own peers. Wano agreed, “My relationships with my industry colleagues have been extremely

helpful in my research. Whether it’s calling around to get their experiences on a certain piece of equipment or getting their take on a particular tool, keeping the lines of communication open helps us all make more informed, realistic decisions for our customers.” Yeung added, “Your relationship with the OE and sponsoring dealer is very important because if you don’t have that affiliation, you might not know where to start in terms of purchasing equipment or getting training. Industry groups and communication are incredibly important to help facilitate that.”

For more information about SCRS, or to join as a member, please visit [www.scrs.com](http://www.scrs.com), call toll free 1-877-841-0660 or email [info@scrs.com](mailto:info@scrs.com).

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