



It's all about looks at Apex Customs.

TOP OF ITS GAME

Apex Customs keeps customers looking good.

By Cathie Beck

If a dynamite look is the primary need for your super-performance vehicle, Apex Customs has all the answers.

With aesthetics as its focus, one need only imagine what upgrades might make a vehicle sparkle and the good news is that the 4-year-old Phoenix shop is already way ahead of whatever you might be imagining.

“We do some performance upgrades,” says Tyler Copenhaver-Heath, general manager. “But the aesthetics are our main purpose—everything from graphic systems to window tinting, plus racing stripes, carbon fiber hoods, powder-coating, audio, suspensions and exhausts. And we also do wheels and tires, hydrographics and auto upholstery.”

The work is performed by seven employees in a four-building complex that includes a 900-square-foot space for an office, waiting area and showroom; a 2,800-square-foot building for employees and where *clean* work is done; an upstairs

section for design and cut-down; 400 square feet that houses an application booth; and a building with three bay areas for tires, paint, a workshop and a lift.

CLASSIC TRAINING

It all began when Copenhaver-Heath was barely out of his teens. At that time, he

saw project cars as a way to make money.

“In college, I began building classic cars at my house on the side. I would build them and sell them, but then I ran out of room and, at the same time, I needed to fund my college education.”

So, he looked into the business of building *drivable* classic cars.



Tyler Copenhaver-Heath, center, began building drivable classic cars in college—the start of a business that's evolved into Apex Customs in Phoenix.

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RESTYLING/AFTERMARKET ACCESSORIES



If you have an idea of how you'd like your vehicle to stand out, chances are Apex Customs is already way ahead of you.

Because of its quality work, Apex Customs enjoys repeat business and referrals.



"Something that looks cool and runs awesomely," he recalls. "I got a dealer's license and had 17 project cars at first."

From there he saw the light, literally, when he started adding lighting systems.

"All of a sudden the classic car business went by the wayside. We found we were working on new cars, even though that wasn't the original direction of the business," he says. "Now we're known for cutting-edge, new-age cars. What I started to fund college has turned into a business."

That business today embraces everything from parts installation to high-end specialty upgrades.

"We do anything from window tint to a \$30,000 build," says Copenhaver-Heath.



Copenhaver-Heath and the seven-member team strive to treat people right.

"I often work with large projects online to help DIY folks achieve their vision; they often come here and look at what we have onsite.

"Our people are specialists, so if someone wants audio, we have the audio specialist," he adds. "The best scenario for us is the person who walks in and says, 'Here's my budget, here's what I want.' Once we have an idea of what the project is, we source parts from all over the country."

The plan from there is to impress customers and entice them to want more.

"Ultimately," says Copenhaver-Heath, "we get the enjoyable moment of delivering the vehicle. It's sort of like a getting a tattoo—once you do one, you want more."

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

NFL wraps, a Jurassic Parkmobile and a Ferrari fall into the Apex Customs' *high-profile/special project* category, but a favorite project of Copenhaver-Heath's involved a Transformer brought to life.

"We've done a number of special projects, including a trailer for the Rolling Stones," he says, "but we also turned a moving truck into an Optimus Prime, which was cool because that was one of my favorite childhood toys. The truth is that anytime we push the envelope, we love it."

Special projects, however, are not the core of the Apex Customs customer base—everyone else is.

"I would have thought we'd get the younger crowd the most," says Copenhaver-Heath, "but that's not necessarily the case. We get young, old, female and



The 4-year-old Phoenix shop offers graphics packages and related upgrade items.

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The company's best case scenario is when a customer walks in and says, "Here's my budget, here's what I want."

everyone in between. We've found that customization for the middle-age clientele is key for us."

Finding employees that can help deliver the final product is an effort that calls for a keen eye and deliberation.

"We are very careful when we hire and, at times, that carefulness has stagnated our growth," he notes. "We are concerned about quality and cohesion, so we are slow to hire. I have people I've had since the beginning, but usually our staff comes to us. We've gotten to know them and we then take only those who are the best in their industries.

"But they must have like-mindedness, because we are a family," he adds. "The quality of the work must be high and takes a certain dynamic."

The good news is that quality work allows for a stable pricing structure.

"We are the driving force for the market," says Copenhaver-Heath. "But, I've noticed that some of our prices, which I choose, often come to us arbitrarily to some degree. We find the industry adapts to that. We don't go searching the market for the price; we set our prices based upon what we feel is right."

And that means fair for everyone—business and customers alike.

"We tend to be priced a bit on the high side," he says, "and we don't mind losing business to price. We just don't want to lose to poor quality."

Because the quality is consistently high, Apex Customs enjoys repeat business and referrals.

"We have a nice website (apexcustoms.com) and a nice online presence," he says, "and we try to keep up with social media.

"But, we also make sure to treat people right," he adds. "Every car that leaves here

tends to be a billboard for Apex Customs."

STOCK ANSWERS

When it comes to stocking product, Apex Customs attempts to stay flexible. Though impossible to keep every item on the shelf, the shop is able to quickly access and deliver most anything a customer wants.

"We have a multitude of parts on hand, but we have the diverse ability to order often and we buy directly from suppliers," says Copenhaver-Heath.

If there's a consistent challenge the shop faces, it's time and determining how long a job will take.

"There is no manual to follow," says Copenhaver-Heath, "so it can be tough to gauge time requirements. We want to deliver the vehicle perfect and on time.

"But, it's custom work," he adds, "so parts need to arrive on time and if a project takes more time, it affects other projects on the calendar. You have to earn customers' trust and that is something earned on the job."

Of course, Copenhaver-Heath wouldn't have it any other way.

"I'm not a monetary-fulfilled guy," he says. "It's the accomplishment that motivates me; my staff motivates me. My staff works really hard. They love their job and they like to see success. They want to do a good job and make the clients happy. That drives me to do a great job."

And all that positive production means Apex Customs expects continued growth, and that means also evolving locally.

"We put money that comes in back into equipment and innovation," says Copenhaver-Heath. "We plan continued growth and continued influence within our community. They appreciate us being in the area. I'd like Apex Customs to do a lot of good for the community." **TS**

Seeing the Light

In May, Apex Customs announced the launch of Axium Lighting, a new line of premium automotive LED products developed to help car owners improve the color, visibility and efficiency of their custom lighting projects.

"As a customization shop, we've worked with a broad range of automotive lighting products from just about every aftermarket supplier on the market," says Elliot Hutchens, co-founder of Apex Customs. "Working with aftermarket lighting every day, we were frustrated by the lack of reliable LED headlight options for our projects that delivered the results our customers demanded. We decided to build them ourselves so our clients could enjoy the benefits of LED lighting without draining their bank account or returning to our shop with burned-out headlights a month later."

Apex sought to resolve the issues its technicians encountered during installation and address the common complaints customers expressed after their projects were completed. The Infinity line of headlights by Axium offers improved light output with lower operating temperatures and energy consumption by utilizing the latest LUXEON ZES chip technology, according to the company.

"Our goal is to provide a product that people can trust, so they can get the benefits of LED lighting without worrying about damaging their cars or wasting their money," Hutchens says.



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