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Priceless autos find expert hands in Ayer

Written by Jeff Lavery

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KTR European Motorsports keeps history alive

On a sprawling parcel of grass and pavement near Route 2 in Ayer, the growl of a high-revving 1950s Lotus charging down a test-track mates with the subdued roar of a late '90s Audi S4 on a four-wheel drive chassis dynamometer. Before even stepping through the doors of KTR European Motorsports, one thing is clear: this is not your everyday repair shop.

A dynamometer, which helps measure how much horsepower and torque a vehicle is making at the wheels, is just one of the services offered by KTR. From an oil change to a frame-off restoration, the firm performs any number of tasks that often represent a relentless commitment on the owner's part to keep their machines in perfect tune.

KTR began as a pastime in a small garage for its first owner, legendary local rocker John Geils (of J. Geils Band fame). Though the company has since changed hands, its reputation as an expert in vintage European car service has helped KTR evolve into the 32,000 square-foot of showroom and workshop space it occupies today. After incorporating the now-defunct Worcester-based operation of Adrenaline Motorsports, a tuner shop specializing in Audis and Volkswagens, KTR grew to include a sister company, KTR Performance. While the original still serves clients with vehicles that rolled off the assembly line over forty years ago, the younger branch helps boost the horsepower of late-model German and Japanese imports that have barely passed their break-in period.

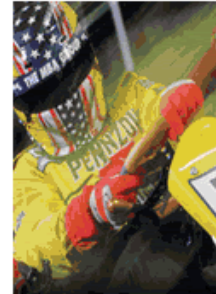
Under current owner Bob Gett, the employees keep the business humming, says general manager Andrew Funk. While Gett capitalized the operation, Funk and his team of 15 technicians ensure that its reputation remains golden. Initial plans called for the current headquarters to be built closer to Worcester, inside the I-495 belt. Ayer's lower property costs kept KTR outside the loop, but thanks to loyal customers, the location isn't a drawback. "I could be anywhere," says Funk. "The customers always meet me at the track."

Funk says that while customers still enjoy racing their cars, changing demographics have pushed KTR to offer additional services. Gone are the days of owners who took care of all pre-race preparations. Now, KTR provides full track support services by servicing the vehicle prior to a race, transporting to the track via fully enclosed trailer, and serving as a pit crew upon arrival for both driver and car.

Of a customer base of only 30, Funk says that many of them own more than one car - and each one passes through KTR's shop. "Six good customers can keep you busy," says Funk, who adds that on race weekends at tracks like Connecticut's Lime Rock Park, 10 to 15 cars may pass through in a week, all needing to be prepped for the upcoming events.

Funk admits that while the profession is not terribly lucrative, KTR currently has to control its growth before entering new markets, such as selling exotic machinery similar to the models they service. Though some shops make good money from car sales, KTR's current staff is too small to add a new segment to the business, says Funk. In an industry where word-of-mouth can cause a company to sink or swim, keeping current customers satisfied is KTR's first priority.

"Money and growth are important," says Funk. "But it's also essential that your reputation stays on top."



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