



Waxing Eloquent

Barry Meguiar preaches the gospel of the car hobby around the world and in his own backyard.

By Lauren Simon

Barry Meguiar is the Billy Graham of the car hobby. He's passionate—some might say evangelical—about his cause. He travels the world appearing before thousands of the faithful who share his passion. He loves to press the flesh and talk to men and women from all walks of life, whom, he says, form a common bond at car shows. He hob-knobs with industry leaders and crosses all boundaries of what he calls “car crazies,” from hot-rodders to Enzo owners. He hosts a syndicated radio show called “Car Crazy” with a televised version on SPEED Channel, in which he, like Graham, sermonizes about the righteous cause to which he has dedicated his personal and professional life.

How can a man raise a humble product like car wax to such a heavenly plane? He's not. Meguiar doesn't preach the gospel of waxing and buffing. Oh no. He preaches the gospel of the car hobby.

A Lifetime Passion

When Meguiar preaches, he knows what he is talking about. His grandfather, Frank Meguiar, Jr., founded Meguiar's in 1901 to sell furniture polish, which the elder Meguiar mixed with a hand whisk, one bottle at a time. The business remained in the family after Frank Jr. died, and when Barry was a child, he spent summers working for his father in the mixing room and on the production line, making polish for multiple uses—including cars. He worked part time during high school and became the one-person accounting department during college for the family business that was to become known as Meguiar's Mirror Bright Polish Company.

In the early days of hot rod and custom shows, most of the custom painters across the country gave a bottle of Meguiar's Mirror Glaze No. 7 Sealer & Reseal Glaze with each custom paint job to help their customers



keep their cars looking their best. Meguiar recognized early on that these end-users, not tradesmen, held the most potential to grow his business, so he began attending car shows to talk directly to car lovers, collectors and hobbyists. He hawked his car wax at the shows, shining up collectors' cars and leaving them with a sample of his product, essentially creating loyal customers, one person at a time.

Forty years later, he's doing the same thing, only on a much grander scale, jetting around the world to car shows on nearly every continent and preaching the gospel of the car hobby to anyone and everyone who will listen. Last year alone, Meguiar was on the road almost every weekend, and he attended upwards of 45 car shows worldwide, meeting with company executives, auctioneers, dealers, restorers, custom shop owners and regular Joes—all of whom he says he adores equally.

"I'm unique in that I go to every type of show," Meguiar says. "I go to Volkswagen shows. I go to Ferrari shows on the other end. And I go to everything in between. So I'm in a very unique situation in having come into a place where I know just about everybody, the movers and shakers in each of those genres."

Almost Like Heaven

One reason that Meguiar loves the car show circuit is that both for him and for the people he meets, car shows offer a cool oasis in the harsh desert of everyday life. "It doesn't matter how much money you have, what color your skin is, language or what type of car you're into,



+ THE MEGUIAR WAY

Most businesses have a mission statement that guides their strategic decisions. Meguiar's has a passion statement that reflects its owner's personal beliefs, as well as his, well, passion for his work and for cars.

"Meguiar's is a hot bed of energy and emotion dedicated to the creation, identification and propagation of cutting edge ideas, products, services, programs, promotions and experiences that overwhelmingly excite and unite car enthusiasts worldwide," the passion statement reads. "Our commitment is to serve car lovers, industry professionals, strategic partners, our team members and God in such a way that lives are enriched and inspired."

President/CEO Barry Meguiar says that his management team developed the Meguiar's passion statement in 2001 in honor of the company's 100th anniversary as a way to reach the approximately 30 million people, or about 10 percent of the population, in the United States whom Meguiar classifies as "car guys"—men (and women) who, in Meguiar's words, "have an unusual emotional attachment to their cars."

All of Meguiar's outreach efforts invite people into the fold. "You're not just a Corvette guy, or a Mustang guy or an antique guy. It's a much bigger deal than that. ...You're part of 30 million people in the United States," Meguiar says. "This is the greatest fraternity on the planet. It's global. And look at all the wonderful things it does for you, and your family, and your marriage, and your kids and society.

"Exciting car guys globally is what we've been doing since we wrote that statement," Meguiar says. And people are listening. Since Meguiar's really began promoting the car hobby in 2001, its business has doubled.

there is this commonality among car guys," Meguiar says. "The cars may look different ... but they love those odd cars for same reasons I love the cars I love. The hobby is a level playing field."

Meguiar especially values the role that cars can have in helping the next generation find its way. "I love the car hobby because it's a righteous hobby in a world that is sullied with bad distractions for kids," he says. "It offers an opportunity ... for something fun. It builds talents and builds relationships, develops their math skills, and teaches them about responsibility, getting up early, a work ethic and respecting other people's stuff."

It wouldn't be a stretch to say that Meguiar thinks that car hobbyists can save the world. "We need to get more people to be car guys," he says. "If there are more car guys, there will be less war, less strife. There's no racial tension in the car hobby. None. There are no barriers. It's going to be what heaven's like when we get there."

In His Own Backyard

Meguiar's sponsors thousands of car shows every year, including the Concours d'Elegance. Because he's a local guy and because his family business is headquartered in Irvine,

Meguiar has been personally involved in the local show and serves on its Board. As dedicated as he has been, he's not shy about saying that in past years, the show has not lived up to its potential. "Orange County is a mecca for cars," he says, and for that reason, "It deserves to host one of the great car shows in the world."

Moving the Concours to The St. Regis Monarch Beach in Dana Point lays the foundation for a world-class event. "Nobody's going to make a show better than Pebble Beach. It's the best in the world," Meguiar says. But, he adds, "As far as a facility, the St. Regis is a better facility than the Lodge at Pebble Beach. It's just spectacular. Now we have a world-class venue. That changes everything."

Adding an auction—which the Board hopes to do next year—also will raise the caliber of the Concours d'Elegance, Meguiar says. "Once you do that, you start saying, 'This is at least a national event, if not an international event,'" he comments. "You're talking about an event that within four years will be one of the top events in the world. The people that it will bring to Orange County—enjoying all that we have here—is just going to be phenomenal. It really is. ... All the stars are lining up now." •