The Fast and the Furious





Shawn Unger of Panther Road Classics

All Panther Road Classics and Park Place Ltd. photography by Rodrigo DeMedeiros



In our latest Marketplace column, we're shining a light on

three local entities making car dreams come true.

Shiny Coats, Purring Engines at Panther Road Classics

Shawn Unger's blue eyes twinkle, his voice quickened by infectious enthusiasm, when he tells you about the slate of vintage vehicles available at Panther Road Classics, the Edmonds business he opened in 2020 after a short period building cars out of his house.

Like Jack Rabbit Slim's, the 1950s-themed diner in which Mia Wallace and Vincent Vega shimmied in "Pulp Fiction," Unger's showroom is charmingly bedecked in midcentury memorabilia matching the cars' old-fashioned shine. A green-and-red Paragon Gasolene pump on one side of the room and a billboard-big Graceland shrine on the other heighten a nostalgic mood that makes you wish more than you ever have that you had, say, a lipstick-red 1953 Ford Crestline convertible or a honey-orange 1968 Camaro sitting in your driveway.

The people who come from all over to buy one of the cars gleaming among Unger's painstakingly organized curation — a flipping-minded guy from Australia, a Willie Nelson lookalike from Nowheresville, Minnesota — tend to already be in a nostalgic mood whose only endpoint is the keys to their dream car.


LUBRICATION
MERCURY
12







Unger, whose business both buys and consigns its offerings, estimates that he sells about six vehicles a month, with steep sales taxes (whose amount he pointedly tapes to the front of his office desk) sometimes stopping people in their tracks.

Unger next wants to make the business a little homier —

mounting a TV, setting up some diner booths in the showroom — so that even those not particularly in need of a car still want to hang out and find community there. For him, the work is too fun to really consider a job.

“(People) are in here because they want to see a toy; a lot of them are looking for that one thing that they’ve always wanted,” Unger said. "It’s really cool when I have it, because you can see it. People’s eyes will just light up immediately."



Photo by Maris Saulits

Avants Wants You to Drive Everything

When 425 Business last spoke with Avants founder Adam Cramer, it was early 2021, and the organization was in a period of transition: growing in popularity, but also shaking off a lockdown era that had forced it to rethink some of its approach.

About three years later, the brand — which looks, among other things, to connect gearheads through a variety of regular private events that range from track days to collection tours — has doubled its membership to more than 4,000, launched a podcast, added collaborators for

member perks, refined its magazine, and expanded partner cities to also include Southern California. (Currently, Avants operates in the greater Seattle area, Portland, and Denver; Cramer said there is interest to potentially expand into Arizona, and credited Seattle director Krissy Wells as integral to the brand's growth over the years.)



Photo by Jason Tang



Avants founder Adam Cramer

Photo by Rami Garcia

There’s only more room to grow. Cramer said that, right now, the primary goal is to improve online content, then keep widening its footprint across the country and add more partners to bring more value, and more variety, to members, whose interests are not necessarily one size fits all.

“I want to create a product that any person who is interested in cars would find value in, whether it’s, ‘Oh, yeah, I can save money when I buy my tires,’ or it’s, ‘I like to flip through the magazine on a rainy Saturday,’” Cramer said. “I want to create something that, no matter what you’re into, we provide some value for you.”



Jeff Rogers, Ryan Vanderwel, and Ryan Shope of Park Place LTD.

Park Place LTD Revs Up for the Future

Launched in 1987 by friends Butch Bockmier and David Bingham, Bellevue's Park Place LTD has evolved over the decades to become a premier luxury collector and exotic car dealership on the Eastside and West Coast more broadly. Its offerings are so wide-ranging — and I mean that partially literally, since the business has five total properties spread across a small radius in Bellevue — that to peruse its offerings is a little like the adult equivalent of being a sugar-hungry kid in a candy shop, the appetite-whetting options almost overwhelmingly endless.

Park Place has weathered hardships along the way — more recently a light rail-induced location change, COVID-related woes — and is now entering a kind of new era, with leadership formally shuffling in January to put chair and majority owner Jeff Rogers, general manager Ryan Vanderwel, partner Ryan Shope, and Bockmier in charge of overseeing day-to-day operations. (Bingham has stepped back from Park Place.)

Rogers, personable and tangibly excited for the future, told me in his office in late February that he has designs on exploring some additional brands that are not already represented by the business, creating more events and other unique experiences, and potentially pursuing car club or storage venue ventures — ideas, he noted, that were

proffered in-house rather than by external forces.





“I believe most of the ideas of how an organization can grow and improve reside within the team that’s already there,” Rogers said. “I don’t think it’s because you go to an external consultant, or you read the latest thing in X.”

The attitude makes sense for a company culture that prides itself in its employees sticking around for the long haul — typically 14 years. Also crucial to Park Place’s endurance, to Rogers’ eye: its local emphasis, the staff’s legitimate

passion for cars, the way care clearly embeds the business model.

“I like cars,” Rogers said. “But I don’t love cars — I love people. I want this to be a great place to work. I want to take care of families. I want to take care of our community … I want to be able to live those out in the way we do business.”