

THE CAR AS CANVAS

The Orange County company that's making your custom paint job irrelevant

by Preston Lerner

In the world of automotive fashion, the new black is ... black. Matte black, that is. By dressing a car in what seems to be black primer, a matte-black finish exudes a bad-boy vibe that's become the rage for Bentleys, Ferraris, Lamborghinis, Mercedes-Benzes, and other high-end exotics. But since fashion is by definition fickle, the current trend isn't just to cover these gems in black paint. It's to sheathe them in matte-black vinyl that can be pulled off to expose the original paint—or replaced with new vinyl featuring the Next Big Thing. ¶ At the moment, I'm watching two vehicles—a work van used by a custom motorcycle shop, and a Ford GT supercar owned by a well-heeled enthusiast—get the matte-black treatment at Iconography Studios, a sign and graphics company in Los Alamitos. Over the years, I've put a bunch of relatively small vinyl graphics on various race cars, and while those jobs have required patience and

attention to detail, I wouldn't call them particularly difficult. But applying a vinyl wrap is another story.

To begin with, the vinyl used in wraps is significantly thicker and stickier—and therefore much more cumbersome—than conventional decals. To minimize the number of seams, it's applied in large pieces. The hood of the van, for example, is being covered with a single swath of vinyl being stretched by two guys with squeegees. A blowtorch is used to heat the material to remove wrinkles and encourage the vinyl to adhere to curves in the sheet metal. The whole process looks to be about as much fun as herding cats.

Because wraps demand so much labor, they cost between \$3,000 and \$5,000. That's a whole lot of Benjamins to cover a car in what appears to be an industrial-grade version of the Con-Tact paper used to line kitchen shelves. But there's a method to this apparent madness.

"In this day and age," says shop co-founder Sarah Naccarato, "everybody wants their things to be unique, whether it's their cell



PHOTOGRAPH (LEFT) BY JOSEPH ESCAMILLA / PHOTOGRAPH (RIGHT) COURTESY OF ICONOGRAPHY STUDIOS

The Most Beautiful Women In OC Want To Meet You!!!



Welcome to Model Quality Introductions, the nation's most successful matchmaking agency for affluent men seeking serious relationships. We recruit and screen the most attractive and intelligent single women to meet the toughest standards of all... yours! You wouldn't compromise in business. We won't let you compromise in love.

MQI eliminates the tedious process of you approaching strangers to find that one in a million. Our methods will dramatically increase the odds for jump starting a successful relationship. With over a decade of experience, you will find our program is absolutely amazing!

View hundreds of our members online and schedule a confidential meeting to discuss the exact specifics you desire in the perfect partner. You outsource everything else, so why leave the most important decision of your life... to chance?

Model Quality Introductions, Inc.

(949) 943-3343

ModelQualityIntroductions.com

* IRVINE * BEVERLY HILLS * LA JOLLA * PALM SPRINGS * SAN FRAN *
* PHOENIX * DALLAS * CHICAGO * BOCA * ORLANDO * TAMPA * NEW YORK *

phone cover or their car.” Adds husband and co-founder James: “They built about 4,000 of these Ford GTs. Every single one of them came off the assembly line with shiny paint.” Only two of them now have matte black vinyl, and one of them is a Naccarato customer. “I think that’s pretty cool,” James says.

James, a graduate of the Laguna College of Art and Design, still shows his paintings on occasion. Sarah used to be a corporate executive who, among other projects, oversaw the creation of a huge research facility in India. But with three young children, they wanted jobs that provided more stability while requiring less travel. They decided to look for a business that played to their strengths—artistic creativity and corporate know-how—and had a customer base that was primarily local. So three years ago, after considering businesses as varied as restaurants to massage franchises, they opened a sign shop. Since then, they’ve carved out a growing niche by offering soup-to-nuts design services, attentive customer support and, yes, stellar matte-black wraps.

James believes the matte-black trend was inspired by military hardware (think SR-71 Blackbird and B-2 stealth bomber) and pop icons (Batmobile and “A-Team” van). I suspect it’s got more to do with the perverse conceit by which haute couture is inspired by street fashion.

I first remember seeing matte-black finishes—though not in vinyl—about 10 years ago in what are known as rat rods. At the time, hot rodding had morphed into a high-dollar hobby dominated by ultraglossy street rods exemplified by the work of the late Boyd Coddington in Stanton. So several rebellious car clubs in Southern California—notably the Shifters of Orange County—started building old-school hot rods and, to emphasize their rejection of the Coddington look, they left their cars in black primer rather than painting them candy-apple red or tangerine metal-flake.

Matte-black finishes started showing up on high-end new vehicles on the car-show circuit about five years ago. After a German company developed a heavy-duty “cast” vinyl specifically for wraps, the matte-black look migrated to the con-

sumer market. The Naccaratos did their first commission in July 2009, and they've knocked out 15 more to date. Their roster ranges from a Ferrari F430 and a Bentley Arnage to a Mini and a Ford Transit Connect minivan, with a Toyota FJ Cruiser in the pipeline. (They recently had to turn down a Lamborghini because they were too busy with other jobs.) At this point, matte black has gotten so much play that some people think it already has become a cliché. Jokes Jan-Michael Mislant, who works for the Naccaratos: "I want to do my car in matte white."

Actually, I think matte black still has plenty of traction. But even after the fad passes, I'm convinced that vinyl wraps are here to stay. The monochromatic approach is just the beginning. Like commercial customers, consumers can use digital design software to create graphics that are limited only by their imagination—zebra stripes, hallucinatory paisley, knockoffs of famous paintings, even fine art itself. It takes about a week to apply a wrap, and as long as it's removed in less than five years, it won't harm the original paint. Better still, it's the automotive equivalent of a caterpillar turning into a butterfly. "It's totally an instant gratification kind of thing," Sarah says.

As I watch the van being transformed from prosaic work truck into a bold vision statement, I realize that the vinyl wrap is a perfect metaphor for the Naccaratos' own lives—from artist and executive to entrepreneurs in one fell swoop. Of course, America always has been about reinvention, and nowhere is this truer than in California. Whether it was the Gold Rush of the 19th century, the Great Depression of the 20th, or the recession-to-be-determined of the 21st, this has always been a place where immigrants flocked to reimagine, reconstruct, and reboot their lives.

In this sense, at least, vinyl wraps are as American as baseball, apple pie, and the matte-black Yukon Denali parked behind the Iconography shop.

PRESTON LERNER, a long-time automotive journalist, has covered car culture for Orange Coast since 2008.

DIVORCE AND FAMILY LAW



EXPERIENCE MATTERS MOST...

IN ACHIEVING THE BEST OUTCOME FOR YOU AND YOUR CHILDREN

Dishon & Block, APC is an experienced and innovative law firm that focuses exclusively on family law. We understand the special needs of those faced with divorce and the importance in achieving the best outcome for our client. You deserve the highest level of counsel to ensure the protection of assets while preserving the interests of your children.

- DISSOLUTION OF MARRIAGE
- PATERNITY
- CUSTODY/VISITATION
- PROPERTY DIVISION
- CHILD SUPPORT
- LEGAL SEPARATION
- SPOUSAL SUPPORT
- ENFORCEMENT OF ORDERS
- DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
- MEDIATION







DISHON & BLOCK
California Divorce & Family Law Experts

CALL TODAY TO SCHEDULE A CONSULTATION
949.231.1305
10 TRUMAN, STE 100, IRVINE, CA. 92620
FAX 949.231.1318 | WWW.CADIVORCE.COM



Thanksgiving Day, November 25, 2010

Run America's Turkey Trot® in Beautiful Dana Point, California



www.turkeytrot.com 562-427-4606

TURKEY TROT NOVEMBER 25, 2010