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Record  
Newspapers

Kendall County Record  
Ledger-Sentinel  
Plano Record

# Countywide

Your Home and Family News

From all of  
Kendall  
County

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# Feel the need for speed?

## Modern Muscle may be your answer

By Lisa Welz

Walk into the shop at Modern Muscle in Oswego and one thing is instantly clear; this is no greasy, grimy auto repair shop. Rather, it's a squeaky clean, organized shop filled with cars and equipment that would make anyone with even a passing interest in cars sigh, and maybe dream a bit.

There's no question the speed shop has been a dream for Justin Meyers, who is co-owner of the business with Ryan Diem, an offensive tackle for the Indianapolis Colts, now getting ready for his eleventh season.

"Back in '07," Meyers explained, "Ryan and I reconnected at an engagement party for my cousin. He'd been in the NFL for a while, and he'd always been a car guy. He was having some work done on a car."

"After talking for a little while, he realized that was kind of my dream, to always have a shop like this. He was starting to think about his retirement and what was he going to do after football and he wanted to start a business like this, too. So it was like a colliding of the worlds, it just sparked, and here we are."

That spark led, in a very short time, to the annual SEMA show held in Las Vegas, Nev. In 2008, Meyers and Diem took their project car, a 1964 Chevelle, and won a place in the top 13 cars at the show.

SEMA (Special Equipment Market Association), Meyers says, "Is the biggest, best car show in the world" where they competed against the biggest builders and designers in the industry.

That accomplishment got them a lot of attention, including a feature in Hot Rod Magazine's June 2008 issue which said, "The shop's first project on the books is a '64 Chevelle SS designed to be an all-purpose Pro Touring car. Here's a quick run-down: a 1,000hp twin-turbo 6.7L Gen III; coilover suspension with tubular upper and lower control arms up front and a custom fabricated four-link and Strange Engineering 9-inch in the back; big six-piston Wilwood cross-drilled discs; huge 20x12-inch Billet Specialties Stilletos wearing Mickey Thompson S/R radials; a 10-point chrome-moly rollcage; power everything; and a high-end sound system inside. Not bad for a first try, but the best part is that it's not for a customer. Ryan says it's the shop project car and will be abused accordingly. We can't wait to see the proof."

Meyers is a bit more modest and described the restoration process of the Chevelle, saying, "We bought a car, completely stripped it down and did frame-work restoration and basically built a really pretty racecar. That continues to be our flagship and we take it to shows and what-not."

### Building a business, too

The same year they won at SEMA, they moved into their current location just off Route 34 on Oswego's east side and opened for business. They have been there ever since.

They are not a general repair shop, so people shouldn't be confused. "We are a speed shop primarily," Meyers explained. "We basically take your car and do performance modifications to it, so whether that is suspension, handling, chassis, engine builds, tuning, anything that makes a car go faster, handle better, sound better, things like that, that's our primary business. We also do restorations."

"The biggest difference between what we do and what you would see on televi-



Modern Muscle co-owner Justin Meyers is shown with some of the cars the firm is working on. The other co-owner is Ryan Diem, former NIU football star and currently an Indianapolis Colts lineman. (Photo by Lisa Welz)



sion, like West Coast Customs or Pimp My Ride, things like that, is that we really focus mainly on the performance aspect. We do paint, we do custom, make this pretty, and interiors, but our real focus is making cars perform."

For instance, he said, "We'll take your average \$30,000 Camaro and hop it up to the point where it's competing and beating exotics like Lamborghini's and Ferrari's, things like that. We build a lot of drag race cars; that's really popular around here." They can do custom work, such as fabricating parts, as well.

"The majority of our business is to make cars go fast. It's the biggest market, for one thing. Second of all, I'm a mechanical engineer by trade," Meyers said. "I've got a college education and worked as an engineer for 10 years. That was really my focus, power plant development and things like that."

He worked in the petrochemical industry designing oil refineries. "You might think that oil refineries don't have a whole lot to do with cars, other than putting gas in them," he said with a grin. "The reason I became a mechanical engineer is I wanted to design engines in the first place. But I didn't want to move to Detroit and work for the Big Three, so I did what I needed to do, but in all reality, a refinery is just a gigantic machine. A lot of the practices and theories I used in engineering, apply almost perfectly to automotive. It's just a smaller machine, but essentially just about the same. That's how they went hand in hand, but my hobby was building cars. That's where the practical, useful knowledge came from."

It is that combination, he says, that sets their speed shop apart from the rest. Meyers says, "A typical speed show

owner or founder is going to be a mechanic. He's done general repair most of his life and played around with some cars...this stuff is so advanced and so custom, that it really takes an engineering mindset to do things well and produce consistent results all the time, without giving up all the things we take for granted in modern cars—reliability, drivability, things like that."

"We make the fastest cars in Chicagoland. You can drive a 1,000 hp car on the street no problem and go get groceries...we're not just throwing parts at a car. We know what they're going to do. We do simulations and really take things to another level."

It's that focus and expertise, Meyers said, that has been the key. "We started the business when economic Armageddon hit. We're building and growing a business in a recession, selling a bunch of stuff that nobody needs. It's all disposable income. We do zero dollars in repairs here, none. We focus 100 percent on modifying cars. We really feel, that to be the best speed shop we can be, and we want to be the best speed shop in the nation, we need to do nothing but that."

Of his partner, he commented, "Ryan's a very modest guy, very down to earth. This business is really built on the backbone of good business practices and treating people right, taking care of people, and not on a celebrity name. We really wanted to found this as a good solid business."

### How they do it

"If you're going to compete with an exotic and compete with a supercar, it's pretty much a retooling of the entire vehicle," Meyers said. "We start with the chassis, but we do complete suspension

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upgrades, so we're changing everything—hard parts, bushings, pieces of rubber—we make them stiffer, springs, shocks. We stiffen up the chassis. As far as making power, there's a number of ways to do it" including superchargers and nitrous oxide.

"Engine builds can include camshafts, cylinder heads, headers, exhaust, things like that. It's all encompassing, really. Any part that's in an engine we will probably modify in some fashion to create the horsepower we need to. We physically build those things and then we have a Dyno that we run the cars on and we measure the horsepower and tune them. We hook up instrumentation so we can see what the car is doing and make adjustments based on that."

To give people a better idea how they accomplish their goal of increasing speed on a vehicle while, in the case of the '64 Chevelle, giving it a complete restoration job, Meyers went into more detail.

The car had been a drag race car since the 70's and was in need of a complete restoration. So they completely disassembled the vehicle- took the body off the frame, stripped it down, repaired everything and painted it.

"The bread and butter of what we do is, we modified that car to integrate all of the modern performance into that classic vehicle, hence the name Modern Muscle. That's what's called a pro-touring conversion or a resto-mod, where you restore a car, but modernize it, bringing in air-conditioning, high-performance suspension systems, and late-model motors, all that stuff that we enjoy in a modern car that they didn't have back then. Modern Muscle also means we do late model

muscle car performance," taking the car from its original stock 230hp to, Meyers says, about 1,300hp.

Rather than judging a car on top speed, which takes aerodynamics into account, he said the better way to measure performance is to look at acceleration, specifically the quarter-mile race.

"Back in the day, that car probably ran a quarter mile in about 15 seconds. That car now will do it in about eight and a half seconds. It's fast." That translates to about 150 to 160 miles an hour when it hits the quarter-mile mark, compared with about 90 m.p.h. back in 1964.

As with all the cars they work on, the '64 Chevelle, despite its ability to beat just about anyone on the track, can still be driven around town as though it were a mild-mannered Toyota Camry.

Typically, he said, owners who come in to modify their cars are looking for the car to have a low, rumbling nostalgic sound. "Cars are coming off the lot these days with about 400hp, but you can't even hear them run and people want their performance car to sound like the old school big blocks that they remember from their childhood. It just sounds angry. A lot of it is just turning heads."

"You build this car and it makes an incredible amount of horsepower, phenomenal performance, but at the end of the day, a lot of times the satisfaction our client gets is sitting at a stoplight and people just look at it and say, what is that. Then they take off and it sounds incredible...just the enjoyment of simply driving the car. A lot of clients, including myself, don't even turn the radio on because the sound of the engine is all you want to hear."

The look and sound they achieve brings



The 1964 Chevelle at Modern Muscle

clients back to the good old days, the 60's and 70's and the birth of the muscle car, Meyers said. "For that generation of clients, that's a huge thing to them. It's just a personal experience. We have just as many clients that don't want their car to sound like anything, but to be extremely fast...we call them sleepers or stealth."

"That's one of the great things we do here. We don't just build what Modern Muscle wants to build, we put you in the car that you want and we really listen to what you are looking for and we know how to achieve every one of your goals. We're very boutique and one of the higher volume speed shops in the region. We want to give the customer exactly what they're asking for."

"This is a very serious performance place. You're going to come in and walk out faster, it just costs money," he said with a smile, adding, "It's not uncommon

for us to hand a car back to somebody and they're scared to death of it because it's so fast. They're very drivable, very controllable, they just accelerate so quick that your body can hardly imagine it. You go from zero to 100 in four seconds...you can be driving down the interstate at 60 and punch it and the tires break loose and smoke. That's a lot of power."

While their customer base is local and regional, they get regular traffic from adjoining states and have had cars shipped to them from across the country. Clients range in age as well, from the 18 year old that wants to race to the 70 year old who finally bought the Corvette he dreamed of.

For more information, visit their website at [www.modern-muscle.com](http://www.modern-muscle.com) or call them at (630) 898-5933.

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