

# Goodguys Spring Nationals: Trust is key for car builder

[Martin Dolan, The Republic](#) | [azcentral.com](#) 3:09 p.m. MST March 11, 2015



(Photo: Martin Dolan/The Republic)

Tony Arme keeps in touch with some of his clients only by text and e-mail; others don't own cellphones and wouldn't know what to do with a computer.

"I have to call their home phones or mail them letters," said Arme, 30, a rising star in the high-dollar and highly competitive world of custom automobiles.

He represents a changing of the guard as the generation of customers and customizers who consider a '32 Ford high boy the epitome of cool gives way to a generation that treasures Boss Mustangs, Hemi 'Cudas, 454 Malibus and other muscle cars from the 1960s.

Arme, service manager for Brown's Custom Autos in north Scottsdale, can build to tastes old or new — always with extraordinary quality and an eye out for something never seen or done before.

In his early 20s, Arme built a Chevrolet C10 pickup that was chosen for the Great 8 at the Detroit Autorama, the Super Bowl for custom-car builders. He's now working on a pre-war Ford that he hopes will win the prestigious Ridler award at Autorama in 2017.

He builds a modern car beneath a vintage body, providing all the safety, performance and creature comforts of today's automobiles with the timeless style of yesteryear.



Arme's team hand built this replica of a 1952 Kurtis 500S, a street version of the racer that dominated the Indianapolis 500 more than 60 years ago. It won top honors in the overall sports category at this year's Grand National Roadster Show and will be at Goodyguys 6th Spring Nationals. (Photo: ClassicCarNews.com)

"Anyone who's driven a '63 Corvette will tell you they handle like crap," said Arme, who works closely with owners to be sure their vision becomes steel, glass and rubber (no Bondo, thank you very much).

Building trust is the key, he said, because customers "rely on us to point them in the right direction."

"Every car kind of tells a different story," Arme said. "What the customer wants determines what parts and pieces we use. ... We try to make it look right and fit together well, not like 10 different people wrote the same book."

Vision can clash with reality.

"I won't put junk on their cars, but we can usually find a way to get the job done," he said. "If I built every car the way I wanted, they'd all look the same. I'm learning every day just as much as everyone else."

In addition to his prowess as a customizer — the Phoenix native appeared in a 2012 episode of the Speed Channel reality show "Car Warriors," and his boss, Walt Brown, calls him "the next Chip Foose" — Arme is a top-flight mechanic and fabricator. His team of seven, who range in age from their 20s to 50s, do all the work except paint, which is done by Joe Perkins of American Tradition in Mesa, and interiors, which are handled by Hot Rod Interiors by Glenn in Glendale.



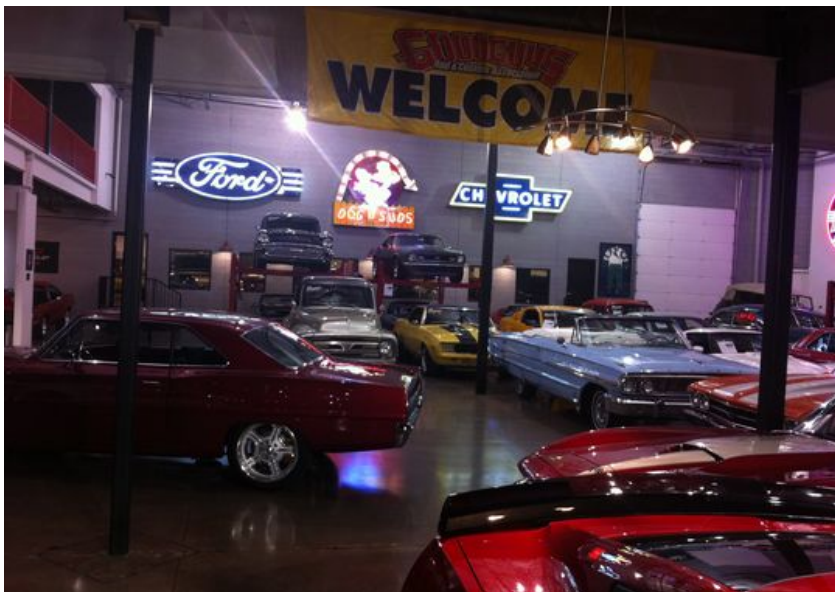
This is an artist's rendition of the '63 split-window Corvette that Tony Arme and his crew are working on. It includes such touches as mesh screens on the hood and front-quarter panels that evoke the newest Vettes. The original plan was to put an LS3 V-8 under the hood; that changed when Chevy introduced the 6.2-liter LT1. (Photo: Paul Kuras)

Six cars built by Arme and owned by Brown's will be at this weekend's Goodguys 6th Spring Nationals at WestWorld of Scottsdale. Ten other Arme-built cars on consignment at Brown's also will be there. All told, about 30 cars that Arme and his team have worked on will be among the more than 2,500 classics, hot rods and everyday drivers built before 1973 expected at the three-day show.

Arme is particularly proud of one of his cars that will be at Goodguys: a handbuilt 1952 Kurtis 500S reproduction roadster, owned by Warren Alvord of Scottsdale. It's based on the street version of the Kurtis Kraft Indy racers that ruled the Brickyard back in the day, but it has been refabricated top to bottom, inside and out. It won top honors in the overall sports category at the Grand National Roadster Show in Pomona, Calif., in January.

Arme and his team spend many hours going to car shows and "seeing what all the big shots are saying on social media." They also discuss what's new with other customizers, at least those who don't consider their work to be trade secrets.

"I always want to do something that's never been done before, something that nobody's seen before," Arme said.



A '34 Ford Fordor he's working on for Melvin Melton of Payson is a case in point. Most hot rods are coupes, so the Fordor had immediate appeal because it's different. The sheet metal from the rocker panels down is all new, as are the fenders, hood, trunk, running boards and top. Under the three-piece hood is a Boss 302 bored and stroked to 363 cubic inches and mated to a four-speed Ford automatic with overdrive. The sleeper design calls for a misty-green paint with butter-yellow wheels and chrome hubcaps.

Arme enjoys the designing phase and sometimes stays up late imagining the perfect look. But he also likes to bend metal and bust his knuckles turning wrenches.

His shop has about a dozen projects in various stages of completion, including the '34 Fordor, a 1963 Corvette split window, a '34 Ford coupe, a '57 Chevy convertible, a '65 Chevelle droptop, a two-seater Lotus powered by a Cosworth four-banger, a '68 Barracuda 340, a modified "Eleanor" Mustang and assorted pickup trucks. Depending on the car's original condition and the desired modifications, the work takes eight months to several years to finish.

Off to one side, under covers, is the Ford that Arme intends to enter in the Ridler competition in 2017. The Ridler, named for longtime Detroit-area promoter Don Ridler and awarded to custom cars that have never been shown or written about, is the Lombardi Trophy of the custom-car world. The prize money is a pittance, but the prestige of winning the Ridler, or just making the Great 8, is incalculable.

Under the rules for Ridler cars, Arme can't talk about specifics for publication or allow photos to be taken. But the Ford promises to be a knockout when it's done. He already has put three years of work into the car.

Arme says he began working on cars "before I can remember," learning at the feet of his mechanic dad. He was 14 when he finished his first car, a 1968 Mustang fastback (he drives a 2000 Viper now but is working on a custom '68 Mustang notchback). A graduate of Marcos de Niza High School in Tempe, he completed Mesa Community College's automotive-performance program.

"I was the only student at Mesa who drove a muscle car," he recalled. "Everybody else drove Civics, so I was pretty cool."

Arme, whose wife, Casey, is expecting their first child, has worked for Brown's Classic Autos since 2013, when he left Hot Rods by Dean. Brown's current 18,600-square-foot facility opened in November.

Arme thinks Brown's is a good fit for his skills and has no plans to open his own customizing shop. Then again, he's only 30.

## Goodguys 6th Spring Nationals

**When:** March 13-15. 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Friday and Saturday; 8 a.m.-3 p.m. Sunday.

**Where:** WestWorld of Scottsdale, 16601 N. Pima Road.

**Admission:** \$20 at the gate, \$17 online before 11:59 p.m. March 12; \$6 for ages 7-12; discounts for active and retired military with ID. \$5 for parking.

**Details:** 480-312-6802, good-guys.com.

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