

Dallas Center business races into custom market

A new company in Dallas Center could put the city on the map - at least in some race car circuits.

The year-old Sugar Grove Custom Cars designs, builds and sells high-end custom rods and pre-assembled or ready-to-build kit cars, mostly for drag racing, autocross and road racing. It also plans to produce race-ready cars to take to race schools.

Sugar Grove recently acquired the assets of Mystique Racing in California, a company that designed and produced the M-5 Mystique Formula First race car. Formula First could be the next generation of Formula Vee, an open-wheel race car that has made racing affordable for 45 years and predominantly races in Sports Car Club of America competitions.

"We see Sugar Grove Formula First cars as something we can sell nationwide - either as a turnkey or a kit," said Jim Woodsmall, whose vision prompted development of Sugar Grove Custom Cars. "We think we're catching this on the upswing and that we're in the right place at the right time."

An M-5 Formula First kit retails for approximately \$8,000. Completely assembled, it can cost \$12,000.

Formula First is not yet accepted across the board by SCCA as a race class, but after about five years in production, its reputation is growing, Woodsmall said. As of last fall, about 12 other companies were manufacturing a Formula First car.

Sugar Grove Custom Cars also has Brunton Super Stalkers, a clone to a Lotus Seven, a two-seat, open-top sports car with a V-6 engine that can also be driven on the road. It also sells a Cobra Replica by Shell Valley. Woodsmall said he is contemplating adding the '55 T-bird Regal, a Thunderbird replica, to its inventory.

Woodsmall, who lives in Johnston, partnered with Ron Jarboe, who had an alignment shop in Dallas Center when they formed Sugar Grove Custom Cars LLC last year. They have been joined by Mike Knorr of Grimes and Dick Hoover of Dallas Center.

Each man adds his own expertise to the operation, Woodsmall said. Jarboe does maintenance and repair of the street rods and is what Woodsmall calls "the car dealer." Knorr is the fabricator whose background is in fabricating ultra-lights. Hoover has a mechanical background.

Woodsmall calls himself the landlord and the one with a vision.

Before starting the company, Woodsmall, 58, was known for his smoked meats. Since 1994 he has traveled nationwide for barbecue competitions. For a short time, he ran Jumpin' Jim's BBQ on Hickman Road.



JOANNE BOECKMAN/THE REGISTER

Jim Woodsmall, owner of Sugar Grove Custom Cars in Dallas Center, polishes a spot on his shop's M-5 Formula First race car. "We see Sugar Grove Formula First cars as something we can sell nationwide — either as a turnkey or a kit," Woodsmall said.



JOANNE BOECKMAN/THE REGISTER

Woodsmall checks the engine of a Brunton Super Stalker race car.

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The leap from smoking meat to smokin' cars was a switch from one passion to another.

While on the competition circuit, he began designing rigs of trailers and equipment for smoking meat and had them manufactured by S&S Trailers and Truck Equipment in Des Moines.

He oversaw production and delivered them to the buyers. Then he noticed that about half of all rigs at competitions were his.

"I was thinking saturation," he said.

He turned his interest to cars. It was logical, he said. His background is as son and grandson of Ford dealers in northeast Missouri. In college he built a 1965 Mustang from the ground up.

He commissioned someone in Nebraska to build a 1932 Ford Roadster for him. When he bought a 1950 Ford "farm rod," he looked locally for someone to help him work on it, and he found Jarboe.

It was the seed of their new venture as Sugar Grove Custom Cars.

They built a showroom and production facility in Dallas Center last year.

Sugar Grove Custom Cars is perfectly positioned with its proximity to a number of Midwestern racetracks, Woodsmall said.

"We're doing something significant for mid-Iowa and for Dallas County," he said. "We're putting something back into the economy and offering opportunities to educate people. They can stop in and ask about these cars."

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