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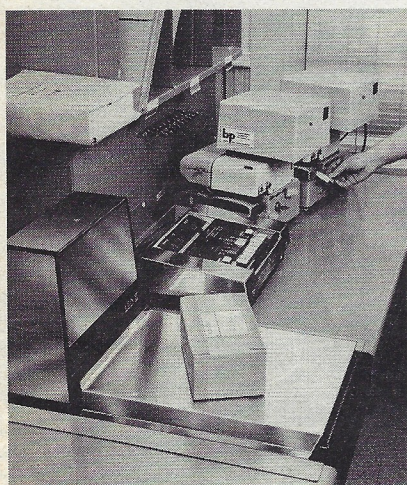
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the diversification  
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# New electronic parcel scale interfaces Parcel Post/U.P.S. meters:

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Thomas E. Fairbairn, Energystics' senior vice-president of research and development, who calls it "an entirely new phenomenon." The beam developed out of a study he began 25 years ago of the way that radio energy can "leak" into the air from a small surface. When radio-frequency energy is dissipated over a large surface, or antenna, radio waves are broadcast through the air. But if the same energy is concentrated at the tip of a rod, it jumps into the air like miniature lightning bolts, in a destructive effect that is familiar to broadcasters.

Fairbairn learned how to modify a radio-frequency generator to turn this erratic energy discharge into a stable "electronic flame" that burns away the rod. He pursued the discovery as a hobby for nearly eight years, then formed his own company in 1960 when he found that flowing columns of an inert gas such as helium could protect the electrode rod and turn the flame into a useful beam.

"The technology could have come up much sooner had the financing been there," says Fairbairn. He managed to finance his early work through unrelated business activities.

The other experimenters who have studied the Energy Beam agree with Fairbairn that it is something new. But few are ready to accept Fairbairn's claim

## A beam that can produce heat of 35,000F and costs \$35,000, not \$500,000

that a \$35,000, 10-kw Energy Beam performs 15 times as efficiently as a 10-kw laser system with a price tag that can run as high as \$500,000. The Navy's Fenneman puts the beam's efficiency at twice that of a laser, but he acknowledges that figuring the efficiency another way indicates that it is 10 times as efficient.

**Comparing notes.** Most companies interested in the Energy Beam echo the sentiments of D. Bruce Merrifield, vice-president of technology and venture management at Hooker Chemical Corp. in Houston. "It's a very curious device worthy of extensive study," he says, "but it's a matter of finding applications where it can do things that can't be done any other way." Hooker plans to begin testing the beam in a Detroit laboratory next month, both to discover how it works and to pinpoint chemical uses.

An admittedly impatient Sheperak, meanwhile, plans to host a technical conference on the Energy Beam this spring. He hopes that the meeting will let experimenters compare notes directly, accelerating their understanding of the beam. "The sooner we get to an explanation," says Sheperak, "the faster we can get to the applications." ■

## Custom stylists for Detroit

Last week, a sporty looking version of the Dodge Charger started rolling off a production line in Dearborn, Mich. Called the Midnight Charger, the car features a new grille and a bolt-on, vinyl half-roof that changes the shape of the rear window. It was a typical midyear happening in Detroit—except that the plant producing it is not a Chrysler Corp. plant.

Making the new Dodge model for Chrysler is two-year-old Motortown Corp., one of a growing group of companies that restyle cars or add options to them for the auto industry. Detroit auto makers are turning to such companies

## Auto makers hire small shops to add options, fatten sales of 'turkeys'

because they cannot handle the quick-turnaround times or the low production runs that such business involves.

Mass production helps keep auto prices down. But in an industry that regards 20,000 units as minuscule, it also limits Detroit to building cars and options aimed only at the widest tastes. In addition, the time and cost of tooling up for something new can leave auto companies lagging behind their own markets.

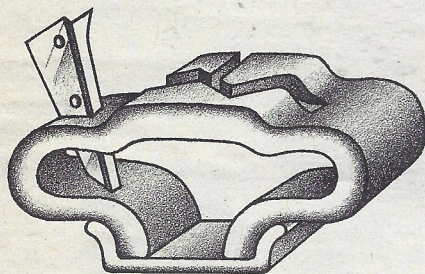
So when Detroit needs to juice up sales of a slow-selling car in a hurry, or turn a sedate family coupe into a muscle-bound "macho" car festooned with racing stripes and air scoops, it increasingly turns to Motortown and its competitors. "Our business is building hype," declares James Wangers, Motortown's marketing vice-president. "And business is good," he adds, "because every car manufacturer has a turkey in his line." The company's sales, \$1.6 million in 1975, zoomed to \$8.5 million last year.

**Flared fenders.** Wangers' strategy is simple. He picks out a car with lackluster sales, then designs a generally youth-oriented package of bolt-on styling tricks such as spoilers and flared fenders. If he sells the idea to the car's original manufacturer, Motortown can build up to 10,000 copies of the "new" model by modifying production cars in its own shops.

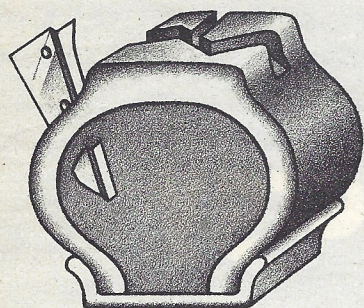
Moving such customizing work outside auto assembly plants speeds up Detroit's ability to produce a new model in midyear. "Options take up space we may not have," explains James W. McLernon, the new president of Volkswagen Mfg. Corp., who formerly was manufacturing manager for General Motors Corp.'s



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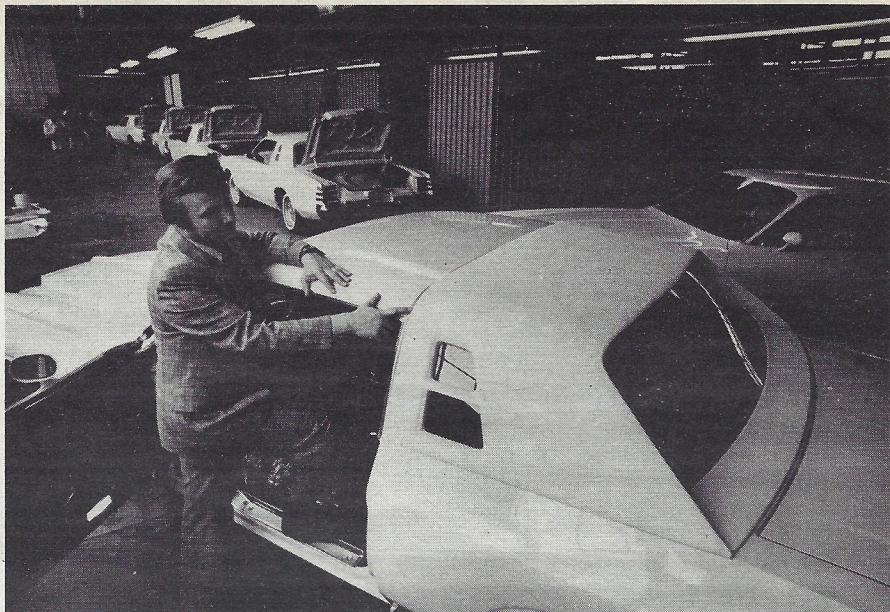


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Brandon Ross

**Motortown's Wangers:** The bolt-on, vinyl half-roof helps make a "new" Dodge Charger.

Chevrolet Div. "If you have to take a car off the line to work on it," he says, "the job gets very expensive."

Motortown's approach offers a thrifty alternative. The small company usually pays for its own design and tooling, then gets it back in the \$100 to \$800 extra that the new package costs car buyers. "We can even build in an amount for advertising so the car generates its own promotion," adds Wangers.

His company also sells conversion packages as kits that a dealer or another after-market outlet can apply. But when

#### **An option package for the Ford Mustang II hatchback. Motortown sold 26,700**

Motortown converts models that are distributed by the manufacturer, its stylists must work closely with the auto maker's own engineers. "If they do one of our cars and tear it up, that hurts our image," explains Victor H. Dutchik, senior engineer in charge of sunroofs and other special body projects for GM's Fisher Body Div.

**Hatching a success.** Motortown's flashiest success so far is the Cobra II package for Ford Motor Co.'s compact Mustang II. It sold the idea to Ford in mid-1975 as a 5,000-vehicle marketing experiment to bolster sagging sales of a hatchback version of the car. The package proved so successful that Motortown built 26,700 Cobras before Ford brought the model in-house this year.

Motortown also produces such performance-image models as American Motors Corp.'s Hornet AMX, Plymouth's Road Runner, Dodge's Aspen R/T, and Pontiac's "Can Am" LeMans. But Wangers concedes that "there are only so many stripes and spoilers you can throw at a car," and he is hoping that a new roof cap he has developed will gain him a niche in the luxury car market.

"Roof treatments are the hottest thing going," says Don M. Current, director of marketing for Cars & Concepts Inc., in Brighton, Mich. His one-year-old company is trying to edge out well-established Hurst Performance Inc. in marketing the T-roof—a split roof design with removable panels over the driver's and passenger's seats. The sunroof specialists point out that their work requires a lot more engineering than Motortown's. "It doesn't take much to put decals and bolt-on parts on a car," sniffs Current.

**Sunroofs? Shh.** Those two sunroof shops, however, are small potatoes next to American Sunroof Corp., which sells a reported \$100 million worth of sunroof conversions to dealers and manufacturers annually. However, the Southgate (Mich.) company is sensitive about its role in furnishing an option that most car buyers assume is factory-installed. "We try to keep a low profile," a spokesman says.

Despite its detractors, Motortown intends to stay clear of the sunroof business, which it regards as too competitive. And it has found a new market for its kind of styling packages—foreign imports. The company is currently discussing marketing plans with Datsun, Honda, British Leyland, and Volkswagen.

Already, Wangers has a deal with Southeast Toyota Distributors Inc. in Pompano Beach, Fla. Motortown designed seven so-called "future cars" with names such as Tiger, Sundevil, and Leatherneck, and the Toyota organization will produce them at a Jacksonville (Fla.) facility. James M. Moran, the distributorship's president, says he will make a 9.4% profit on the conversions' retail cost, which ranges from \$700 to \$1,000, and the dealers will clear 40%. Moran expects to sell 10,000 of the custom Toyotas this year. "We don't have any 'cold' cars," he says. "Our purpose is to make hot cars hotter." ■