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Detroit Tuned **Bold New Ideas Born in Detroit**

Every healthy industry is characterized by a few innovative and entrepreneurial individuals who can see an opportunity before anyone else and are bold enough to take advantage of those opportunities. In the MINI aftermarket business, Chad Miller of Detroit Tuned has been one of the first small shop owners with this vision and nerve.

Way back in 1999 when the news of a new MINI came out, few suppliers paid much attention to the potential of this new brand of car for aftermarket sales in the U.S. market. Mini Mania was the first to start fitting a new MINI with aftermarket parts. Then a few other enthusiast suppliers like Moss Motors started gaining a head of steam to produce MINI parts.

It took a year or two, but the trickle-down effect of enthusiasm encouraged the mainstream aftermarket companies to start make parts for the MINIS. They were followed by establishment of online stores like Aaron at OutMotoring.com. Finally, the storefront service shops followed, as the community needed a place for installations and to buy the parts that were starting to flow into the market.

It was in 2003 that Chad Miller started business as Detroit Tuned (now known to many as “DT”) to service local Mini owners working from a large garage at his home. However, he is now outgrowing this site faster than a MINI on a tight autocross track.

The fact is, due to sales of his big brake kit, the various events he attends to promote business, and the MINIS that come to him afterwards, Chad will soon need that 2,000 sq. ft. commercial facility with office space. (If you’ve seen his girlfriend Tori’s pink MINI, you know she’s not going to allow it to be parked outside in a Detroit winter!)

Chad purchased his first MINI in 2003. Like most of us, he had grown up with Detroit muscle, and that’s how he applied his engineering degree, focusing mostly on restoring Corvettes, but also completing a rare Yenko Deuce Chevy Nova. He still indulges his passion for the quarter-mile track with his 12-second Nova.

Nevertheless, Chad’s newfound passion for taking the twisties in his MINI had him searching for parts and upgrades that were not readily available, such as big brake kits, and suspension components. One of his first Detroit Tuned products was a bypass valve.

It’s a simple fix for what owners say is a major annoyance with some of the 2002 and 2003 models. Attending the Dragon in 2005, Chad found that many owners experienced a “yo-yo effect” in the R53 MINI. The problem was characterized by the engine surging in top gear, usually between 3,000-3,500 rpm, at steady state motoring. DT developed the cure with the Detroit Tuned Bypass Valve that he now sells for about \$125.

parts and service



One of the first major changes Chad had to make in his daily driver, and especially in his weekend racer, was with the braking situation. The original big brake kit developed by B3 worked well, so Chad soon bought the company and made some cosmetic and detail improvements.

The DT big brake kit now features not only the Outlaw-sourced four-piston calipers (with 1.38-inch bores) with electro-plated surfaces and his unique logo, but also silver zinc oxide-coated rotors with slotted surfaces.

The calipers weigh a tiny 3.5 pounds, making them as light as most racing calipers. These calipers have the same force as many of the name-brand companies, but are much smaller, so they will fit a much wider range of wheel sizes without requiring spacers. The DT brakes will even fit the MINI dealers' own line of aftermarket wheels (like the R90 wheels) without spacers.

The kit includes hefty 1.259-inch/32 mm thickness rotors (weighing a substantial 16 pounds for the 16-inch rotors). Nevertheless, the full kit still weighs less than other highly touted systems, and the thicker rotors can handle much more heat during braking without getting the dreaded brake fade.

Both the 16-inch and 17-inch brake kits come complete with all brackets, hardware, stainless steel lines (with OEM-style bushings to hold them in place). For pads, Chad recommends the Hawk HPS or the Ferodo 2500 pads for those who want to autocross their daily driver, but customers can use any pad that fits their driving style and needs.

"The biggest selling points of this kit are the \$900 price, and the wide range of wheel sizes that it will fit," says Chad. "We know that most MINI customers are on a budget but still want to play and have fun. This kit fills that void."

A dealer for the prominent names of Alta, M7, H-sport, Milltek, Tyre Rack and several others, Chad recently sponsored Phil's Red Fury in the One Lap of America for the second year. He'd like to run a MINI in the North American MINI Cooper Championship too, but with growth the time devoted to servicing customers also grows. In addition, Chad is developing a 24-7 website service that he plans to launch soon so he's limiting himself to a few major events like the Dragon.

As many of us have noticed recently, with the growth of enthusiast for Minis, the number of small, service-oriented shops that can care for your MINI, offering basic dealer quality services and manufacturer parts, combined with the knowledge gained from racing, also is building quickly. What will separate those shops from the dealer and



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Opposite page, above: some of Chad's creations are lined up by one of old-line Detroit's abandoned factories, where lack of innovation brought death. Below, The pink Mini that Chad built for Tori, photographed here at the Dragon, is famous. This page, top to bottom: Chad races his own car enthusiastically as a test bed to identify needs and develop new products. An effective spoiler wing is currently under development. Chad rarely has time to fold his arms, but is happy with the development of his business. Chad's efficient, inexpensive, and flexible big brake kit is his best-seller.

the online sales-only vendor is their ability to fill specific needs with engineered products.

To meet some of these needs, Chad is working with auto design specialists to develop parts such as a wide-body kit and aerodynamic pieces that are specifically designed for aero improvements. "Unlike most so-called aero pieces on the market that are primarily cosmetic, these parts really will increase downforce, and add aerodynamic benefits to the MINI," says Chad. Using powerful CAD-CAM automotive design software, the team is tinkering with front brake air ducts and under-body panels, as well as a rear diffuser, and may be releasing a rear spoiler wing similar to the prototype shown here soon. The effort is all very hush-hush now, but Chad expects to introduce some products later this summer with others being released in 2007.

It takes a few years, but the development process in the aftermarket is ramping-up faster than it has been in the past for new brands like the MINI. And leading the way in unique parts will be companies like Detroit Tuned that realize it has to be not only "trick", but has to actually install correctly and work elegantly as it seamlessly integrates with the MINI.

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