

The Scangrip Sunmatch LED Color Match Light is a very versatile tool. In addition to being a good light for color matching, it can also be used to check for swirls and imperfections when buffing out a vehicle. And the light swivels on its mounting. The mounting is magnetic and will hold the light in place while it's being used. This can come in very handy as the light can also be used as a work light.



# TOOL CANDY

The fun of discovering new equipment to make life easier.

By JoAnn Bortles

**T**he question for this article is: where do you find your tools?

Do you find them online? On a truck that comes by the shop once a week? In magazines? In a store that you happen to be in?

It's usually a combination of all these, at least it usually is for me!

The SEMA Show has always been a show that focused on the parts made by all kinds of manufacturers, big and small. But over the last few years, the tool section of the show floor has grown significantly.

The tool area used to be barely an aisle in the North Hall. The tool exhibitors now make up almost a quarter of the booths in the North Hall. And the SEMA Show now has a new section over in the Westgate for first-time exhibitors, many of which are tool manufacturers.

This is good news for both the shop owner and the toolmakers, especially the smaller mom-and-pop operations.

## THE LUXURY OF TIME

The bad news is, most of the attendees tend to gravitate towards the more "glamorous" Central and South Halls, which feature the eye candy of the aftermarket. In fact, many of the people I talked to did not even make it over to the North Hall or the first-time exhibitor area.

What many attendees don't realize is that the SEMA Show is associated with another automotive trade show that happens at the same time. AAPEX (the Automotive Aftermarket Products Expo) goes on at the Sands Expo and Convention Center, which is located about 10 minutes away.

While the SEMA Show focuses on the

aftermarket, AAPEX is directed toward the repair industry. And many SEMA attendees either don't think or don't know about AAPEX. While AAPEX does feature parts, the show is known for attracting many tool and equipment companies.

I recently spent almost a week attending the SEMA Show. I don't usually have the luxury of time to walk the entire show. Like many attendees I focus on the large Central Hall where most of the hot rod companies are located. I also check out the paint and collision-related companies in the North Hall, but never walk the entire North Hall show floor. I also do not make the time to check out the first-time exhibitors over at the Westgate.

This is a big mistake, as I have been missing out on discovering tools and equipment that would make jobs go smoother,

In all my years of turning wrenches and fabricating, I have only once found a set of pliers that held up. Sadly after 25 years, some of the pliers had been lost and cutting pliers were completely worn out. I have been needing a new plier set for years now, but it was one of those purchases I kept putting off, trying to find the best combination of quality and price. This plier set from Sonic fits that perfectly and the quality is incredible. I like how the organizer for the pliers fits perfectly in the drawer of my toolbox.



faster and really help me in my work.

Normally I wouldn't realize this, but this year was different. I wanted to slow down my pace at the show and get more out of it. And it really paid off.

I discovered a few tools that I had needed for a while, but had not bought them, as I had not found the right tool at the right quality or the right price. And as I had not been looking too intensively for tools at the show, it was only by mistake I came across them.

### OPEN UP THE EMAILS

Every year we attend the New Products Awards Breakfast. I enjoy this event, as it's a great way to get a free breakfast and find out which products were picked as the best of the SEMA Show.

This year at the breakfast the Colli-

sion Repair and Refinish Product Winner caught my eye. I have been needing a color-match light for some time now. But the pricing of these lights was more than I could budget for my shop.

Innovative Tools and Technologies' Scan Grip Sunmatch LED Color Match Light won that category and is priced very competitively. The light has a two-step operating system—Step 1 provides 100 percent and Step 2 provides 50 percent. One feature I really like is the very long life of its lithium-ion battery. It has a battery indicator on the front and to avoid the risk of overheating, it has a built-in system that switches off after three minutes of use at high mode.

Innovative Tools sells these lights and many other pretty awesome and affordable tools and equipment for the refinish industry. I have been getting their emails for years, but had never even opened one of them. What a mistake!

Only because I went to the breakfast, and saw that these lights were available through Innovative, did I make the time to go over to their booth in the North Hall and see that light and some of the other equipment they sell, like their UltraRack Paint Stand, which is a heavy-duty and very well-built paint stand that can mount anything from hoods to doors and it adjusts to swing them into almost any position to mimic the parts positioning on the vehicle.

The locking wheel casters are also heavy-duty and roll like a dream. I now make sure to open up the emails that Innovative Tools sends me.

### A SHORT HELLO

The other tools that got my attention were found at another booth that I never would have stopped at normally. In fact, I was only cutting through the First Time Exhibitor Section of the show, not looking at the individual booths. But I saw a friend of mine, Jean Jennings, at the Sonic Tools



DJS Car Moving Dollies were made to be used—easily. The big wheels and all the cool adapters make them very versatile.



Sonic has some very interesting ratchet wrenches. Each side of the wrench is a different size. That means one wrench fits four different sizes.



booth and stopped in to say hi.

Jean told me to take a close look at the tools. Sonic is a German company with a focus on precision. The quality of these tools is mind-blowing! And their tool designs are very innovative, like their super-thin wrenches to fit in tight places. They are thinner than regular wrenches, but heavy-duty enough to really crank hard on.

Their super-efficient designs extend into their toolboxes and workbenches. Even the organizers the tool sets come with are designed to fit into the toolbox drawer. A short stop to say hello turned into almost an hour discovering what turned out to be the best tool candy I have ever seen.

## MORE HAPPY ACCIDENTS

Those were two companies whose products I found totally by accident. Wondering what other cool tools I may have missed, I asked two friends of mine if they had found anything interesting.

My business partner David Malkin also discovered an interesting product at the Awards Breakfast. The Red Baron Tool Organizer was a runner-up in the Tools and Equipment Product category. It's a benchtop or workcart top tool organizer that rotates and can hold 250 tools. It has three levels, one drawer and four swingout compartments. It's another item where you can't help but notice the high quality.

Another interesting thing about this very new small company is that it is family owned. Owner Craig Carlton runs it, along with his wife and daughter.

Trade shows like the SEMA Show offer these small companies opportunities to show their products to the public and get the attention of the big tool outlets, like Summit Racing, that can sell the item to their customers.

Amy Mattinat owns Auto Craftsmen in Vermont. Being a repair shop owner, she spends most of SEMA week over at the AAPEX Show.

There were two pieces of equipment that got her interested enough that she now has them both in her shop. She had been looking for a set of car-moving dollies for some time.

"But they all have these tiny wheels on them that make it useless trying to move a car from the shop's parking lot to an inside bay," Amy says.



I really like the Sonic work stations/toolbox. They are very efficient with a towel holder and the folder/paperwork holder on the side of the box, plus the nice, big casters so the box moves very smoothly. The toolbox drawer organizers are very unique. Instead of the wrenches lying flat, the organizer holds the wrenches at a sideways angle. This means more wrenches can fit in each drawer. Plus being on their sides makes it quicker to pick them up.

She discovered the DJS Car Moving Dollies by accident when she was running from the SEMA Show back over to AAPEX. And it's another family-owned small company.

"I like that it's a woman-owned business. Her husband started it, but passed away and she and her awesome staff are keeping it alive and thriving," Amy says.

Not all tools are glamorous. There are unexciting, but very necessary, tools like the Mueller Kueps Press Support. Amy's shop had needed one for some time. It makes the shop press safe and easy to use by creating three points of contact for stability and is adjustable to fit irregular-shaped objects. This makes wheel bearing jobs much safer and easier to do.

By the way, those trucks that come around once a week loaded with tools? Most of us are like kids in a candy store when we walk into those trucks. We look

around and want everything. One of these, two of those. For any gearhead, it can be a serious addiction. And they make it so easy. It's like having a drug dealer that does financing.

Maybe they should have a support group for tool truck addicts...Tools Anonymous? **TS**



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