

A Conversation with ...

Rick Hunter *A.M. Metal Finishing*

A.M. Metal Finishing can easily claim it is one of the top finishing operations in the United States, having ranked as a *Products Finishing Top Shop* for both plating and powder coating almost every year since the survey began. Owner Rick Hunter runs the Orlando, Florida, shop with his wife, Sloane, and he took time while relaxing on his boat near Madeira Beach to give us some insight into how he and his company got to where they are today.



PF: How have things changed in 25 years?

RH: A lot of things have changed; it is not the same business it was 25 years ago. There are better coatings; the technology has come a long way. Customers are quality-driven with just-in-time delivery needed. Powder coating was in its infancy. A lot of the chemical film work has switched to powder coating. We put in a powder coating line 20 years ago, and I didn't want any of the other platers or anodizers to know. They would treat me as a traitor. It was platers against powder coaters then. Now, every successful plating shop is shifting to meet the demands of their customers.

PF: How did you get your start in finishing?

RH: I moved from Thunder Bay in Ontario, Canada, to Florida and wanted to try a new career. I bought an existing small plating shop from the owner, who had wanted to retire.

PF: How hard is it to plan an exit strategy in this industry?

RH: It is very difficult if you don't have family or employees or a next generation that want to take over the reins. Metal finishing is a very steady, profitable business. Unfortunately, it isn't sexy, so it takes a special kind of person who wants to own and run a demanding finishing shop.

PF: What's the best piece of advice you have been given?

RH: I am very open-minded, so I listen to a lot of advice in case there is a better way to do something. I don't know what the best piece of advice I received was, but I know the worst: A metal finishing supplier told me when I was starting out to know how to do everything in the shop. This probably held me back two to three years. To learn how to do every process we offer and be able to step in and fill someone's boots at a moment's notice is not an effective way to manage. You must entrust your people to do a better job than you could; that is why you are paying them. Everyone at our place is cross-trained and can work in different departments.

PF: What was your first job, and what did you learn?

RH: My father was a serial entrepreneur. At 12, in the summer, I went with him at 6:00 a.m. to his asphalt paving business. I did errands, cleaned the tools, etc. I got \$1 a day, and they were long days.

Get to know Rick



Family: Wife, Sloane, with whom I also work; a son, daughter-in-law and new grandbaby.



Favorite hobby: Riding one of my Harley's.



Favorite movie: "Papillon" (the original one).



What's playing in your car CD/radio: Coleman Hell's Love is Blind.

PF: What was your first car, and what is your dream car?

RH: I had a 1968 two-door Plymouth Fury hardtop. My dream is an Aston Martin DB11 Volante convertible. I just have a hard time parting with the \$270,000 needed to buy it.

PF: What leadership traits have helped you along the way?

RH: Be calm, keep the ship steady, treat everyone equal, look for positives in people and the jobs, try to get the team more engaged and communicate a lot ... a real lot.

PF: What did you want to be when you grew up?

RH: Not a metal finisher.

PF: Where would we find you on a typical Saturday?

RH: At work or on my boat in Madeira Beach.

PF: Personal heroes?

RH: Terry Fox, a Canadian who lost a leg to cancer. He started a fundraiser to run across Canada with one leg, raising money and meeting cancer victims.

PF: How do you motivate people?

RH: Get them involved, get them participating. Show them what the product will be used for. Whether it is parts on the Space Station, the bleachers in a football arena or the flower box at the local library, they can say, "I did that."

PF: What are your greatest passions?

RH: My wife, my grandson and family, and learning new things.

Read more of Rick's answers at PFonline.com