

## Custom wheels is big business

By Blair S. Walker

Car lovers know that few things accentuate a car's beauty like a set of BBSs. Fittipaldi, Cragar and MOMO look pretty fine, too.

The aforementioned companies all manufacture custom wheels, and their gleaming, imaginatively designed products have adorned many a Nissan, BMW, Mustang, Honda and Lexus. Whether the wheels feature spokes or wires, a set of slick, aftermarket wheels shout, "Look at me - my ride is more than just transportation!"

Of course you can't throw any old tire around a set of custom wheels. What



kind of fashion statement would it make to match dowdy whitewalls with some sleek American

Racing Equipment wheels? The word "nerd" comes to mind.

The best tire candidate for customization has a low profile, meaning it has a small sidewall. The less rubber on the rim, the more attention is drawn to one's new wheels, which can come in gold or matte black, but generally have a silvery hue. Replacing four stock wheels with glistening pieces of mobile art can be costly. Each wheel can set you back anywhere from \$40 to \$1,000. Since thieves appreciate custom wheels too, wheel locks are mandatory.

More than 10 million aftermarket wheels were sold last year, generating \$800 million in revenue, according to Crain Communications. That means that people are dumping the sedate wheels that came with the new car for something more dynamic that they can buy elsewhere. Most sales, 66 percent, took place

at tire stores. The remainder were made in automotive accessory stores like AutoZone and Pep Boys, autobody stores, repair shops, catalogues or through e-commerce.

The overwhelming majority of custom wheels sold -60 percent - were comprised of aluminum/alloy. Imports account for only 10 percent to 15 percent of sales. Crain says. Imported wheels tend to have more cachet among African-American car enthusiasts than products made by U.S. manufacturers.

Purchasing custom wheels may sound suspiciously like a man thing, but it's not. Last year, 45 percent of aftermarket wheel buyers were women, according to Automotive Marketing. And over half of all purchasers were under 35. An interesting observation about custom wheel fans - they either have ample disposable income or not much income at all. Automotive Marketing found that two-thirds of buyers made either less than \$20,000, or more than \$40,000, annually. Don't think car manufacturers are oblivious to the custom-wheels market. More than half the cars and light trucks made in North America in 1998 featured some sort of styled wheel, says trade publication *Tire Business*.

African Americans On Wheels is a supplement to key Black newspapers across the U.S. and zoned editions of three metro dailies. If you can't find *African Americans On Wheels*, call our toll free number, 1-877-847-9060, for information on how to get your copies.

The Dallas Weekly

The Michigan Chronicle

The Charlotte Post

The Afro-American Newspapers  
(Balt.-Wash.)

The Washington Informer

News Dimensions

Philadelphia Sunday Sun

The Atlanta Tribune

The Cleveland Call & Post

The Chicago Defender

Westside Gazette

Louisiana Weekly

New York Amsterdam News

Portland Observer

St. Louis Metro Sentinel

Tri-State Defender

Post Newspapers Group

Tennessee Tribune

The Mississippi Link

The Houston Defender

Chicago Citizen

Philadelphia Observer

Savannah Herald

The Detroit Free Press/Detroit News

Los Angeles Watts Times

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