

# PUTTING YOUR HOBBY TO WORK

HOW TO MAKE A LIVING  
DOING WHAT YOU LOVE





**If you love collector cars, there are many ways to make them part of your career. The automotive world is vast, and possibilities to work in it are endless. Some jobs require study in a specific field, others only a general knowledge of cars.**

This is a general overview listing possible career choices, along with a few main duties of each position. Many of the employment areas listed flow into other parts of the industry as well. The core areas of work in the collector car hobby are:

- Street Rod & Custom Building
- Restoration & Bodywork
- Teaching
- Parts & Supplies
- Auto Museums and Private Collections
- Vehicle Sales
- Publishing
- Fine Art



## **STREET ROD & CUSTOM BUILDING**

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**Those who work in street rod and custom building are true craftsmen. They create unique vehicles – one-of-a-kind rods and customs – with their specialized skills.**

These builders have typically followed a specific path. They have basic mechanical skills and probably some early hands-on involvement with custom or modified vehicles. To get in on the ground floor, you should at least know how to shape metal and work with body filler. With time, you can work up to a master-level custom builder. You'll learn how to modify a vehicle with techniques known as chopping, nosing and decking to customize a rod.

Most of the jobs in this category are listed under Restoration & Bodywork. But with unique street rod and custom vehicles come unique specialists:

**Paint:** Painters on these high-end vehicles know their craft. They apply specialized finishes like pearlescent and candy colors, and may even come up with their own custom colors and schemes. Custom paint techniques include special effects, airbrushing and pinstriping. True artists handle the specialty paint jobs on these rides. In addition to applying paint, they must have incredible patience for the hours of sanding prep before paint is applied and between coats as part of the final step.

**Design:** Designers learn techniques for special effects. Like paint specialists, designers are artists adept at laying out and designing graphics for everything from older vehicle restorations and motorcycles to tuners, street rods and lowriders. They also create certain shapes and components of a vehicle, modifying parts from the original frame.



### **CHOOSE THIS FIELD IF YOU...**

Have a specialized skill and consider yourself an artist. Typically, you have to be up on trends and be an expert in the field to work on these special vehicles. To get started, seek a mentor at a shop or start messing around in the garage creating custom paints or working on design elements.

## **RESTORATION & BODYWORK**

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**People who work in the fields of restoration and bodywork have a great understanding of cars.**

They've either worked on cars for years on their own, learned about them through a vocational or accredited college automotive restoration program, or have years of on-the-job experience that gave them the knowledge and direction necessary to work on these specialized vehicles.

Restoration and bodywork share much of the same skills, though restoration work is a more involved process. Completely disassembling and building a '38 Ford street rod or a '68 Camaro requires more knowledge than normal bodywork, which might only include bumping out a damaged fender or installing a new windshield. Typically, these folks work on and fix vehicles that have been damaged in accidents or from old age, thereby needing new parts.

Consider a career in restoration or bodywork if you have a great understanding of cars.

*Photo courtesy of McPherson College*

Careers in restoration and bodywork include, but are not limited to, the following:

**Mechanical:** Mechanics deal with issues like rebuilding an engine or transmission, installing a new brake system, doing tune-ups and making sure that every component is operating properly. They also need to be able to troubleshoot problems when they occur. These jobs are normally found in specialty dealerships, independent repair facilities and restoration shops. There are numerous vocational high schools and post-secondary technical schools that teach the skills required to be a dealer or independent technician. However, a degree in mechanical engineering could give you more knowledge, a higher salary and a jump up the career ladder. Quite a few of the top restorers today have engineering degrees.



**Paint:** Except in the largest or most specialized shops, painters are responsible for much of their own preparation. That means they'll often do the final filling and smoothing of the panels, wet sanding, applying multiple coats of primer, more wet sanding and applying all finish coats. In most shops, painters will also color sand and buff the paint, plus participate in the final assembly of any panels removed for painting. In addition to the actual application of paint, the painter will usually mix the primers and paint, and care for the expensive spray guns and spray booth. In shops that do a lot of custom work, the painter will often be involved in designing and applying special paint schemes. The best painters are very patient and have spent years honing their skills. A few have even worked as chemists for paint companies.

**Auto Body Repair:** These specialists work in auto body shops and specialty dealerships. They are sometimes called bodymen, framers or preppers, depending on the job. They straighten bent frames, repair or replace damaged body parts, remove and replace chrome and glass, and often perform their own paint work. Among the specialties within the auto body field are welders, painters, estimators and glass installers. Generally, people in this field enjoy working with tools and machinery. Knowledge of tools and how to use them properly is a must, as is knowing how to properly disassemble and assemble a vehicle. Courses on auto body repair are offered at vocational high schools and post-secondary trade schools, and several colleges offer full programs in restoration.

**Electronics:** Even some collector cars can be laden with electronic devices and modules. A good specialty dealership technician needs to be able to trace faults and replace malfunctioning components. It's also necessary to be able to resolve any short circuits or other wiring problems. On the restoration side, the electrical issues are very straightforward; but in the street rod, custom, lowrider and tuner worlds, real electronic expertise is required for properly installing and maintaining complicated power accessories, including video and

stereo equipment. Electronic skills are also in particular demand for motorsports, where a degree in electrical engineering or computer science is often required.

**Fabrication:** Fabrication consists of custom and specialized sheet metal cutting, shaping and fitting. Fabrication departments or shops generally concentrate on the metal preparation, welding and assembly aspects of a vehicle. The process involves welding sheet metal into shape, but it could also include machine work. Fabricators repair, replace and make panels and complete bodies out of sheet metal. They might also work with fiberglass or carbon fiber.

There are many jobs within the restoration and bodywork fields – like fabrication, which consists of custom sheet metal work.



**Interior:** Trim or interior work involves restoring, replacing or creating a new interior for a vehicle, including upholstery, carpet, headliner, dashboard, inner door panels and other components. Interior specialists also work on convertible tops and may customize a dash, seats, carpet kits and panels. Installing a stereo – or even a DVD player – isn't out of the question in this line of work.

**Detailing:** Whether a car is brand new, an unrestored original or fully restored, it can almost always benefit from being carefully cleaned and prepared. Detailing generally starts with washing, removing surface debris from the paint, polishing and waxing. Every surface on the car will be cleaned and given the appropriate treatment to ensure both the proper luster and longevity. Detailers often work independently or may be employed by dealerships, larger restoration shops and auction houses. Most detailers learn their skills on the job.



### **CHOOSE THIS FIELD IF YOU...**

Like to work with cars, plain and simple. If you're a competent mechanic, are experienced with tools, like to weld or get into the mechanical or electrical aspects of your own ride, then try a career in it. You might end up falling into something great.

## **TEACHING**

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**If you have a specialized skill – or even if you have basic knowledge about collector cars – consider teaching.**

Whether it's for a high school, adult education, a vocational school or kids around your neighborhood, we need the next generation to learn the skills necessary to keep these cars around for years to come. Most formal teaching positions require a bachelor's degree, while public schools require teaching certification. Standards at independent secondary schools and private vocational institutions vary.



Also included under this category is public speaking. Many collector car clubs relish having a master restorer or an auction analyst speak during a seminar or club meet. Vocational schools and colleges also invite speakers into their classrooms to benefit the students.

### **CHOOSE THIS FIELD IF YOU...**

Like teaching and mentoring youth or adults – even if it's just as a hobby on the weekends. One of the best ways to ensure the future of the hobby is to use your skills and interest in automobiles to help others get started in the field.

## **PARTS & SUPPLIES**

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### **Every single vehicle, new or old, custom or stock, requires parts to keep it on the road.**

These parts have to be designed, manufactured and distributed. You can work behind a counter at an auto parts store, work at a specialty dealership or become a national distributor, responsible for selling parts to dealers, auto stores and individuals. There are also hundreds of companies that manufacture, distribute and sell reproduction and original components for restoration and rod building. Those who design parts often have degrees in engineering or industrial design with skill at a drafting table or in CAD programs. Others involved with developing and producing parts have a background as a machinist or tool and die maker. Although basic knowledge of automobiles is helpful, most of what you need to know for a job distributing or selling parts can be learned on the job.

### **CHOOSE THIS FIELD IF YOU...**

Are generally knowledgeable about collector cars, but aren't necessarily a true mechanic. It helps to have a basic understanding of how an automobile works and of where to find parts, services and the right cars.

If you have a specialized skill and like to mentor, think about becoming a teacher or even a public speaker in the industry.

## AUTO MUSEUMS & PRIVATE COLLECTIONS

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**As a curator or manager of a collector vehicle museum or private collection, the task at hand is to make sure every vehicle is in tip-top condition.**

The job doesn't mean only handling the maintenance schedule, but it includes public relations, too. Many large, private collections welcome guests. There are also special exhibits and events to organize, as well as working with the media. Jobs include director, curator, restorer or maintenance, and archivist or librarian.

For the most part, museum and private collection positions go to those individuals with extensive knowledge of collector vehicles. Museum and collection directors and curators are likely to hold a bachelor's or master's degree. These individuals are often required to write display materials and grant requests. With smaller collections, the manager is likely to have mechanical skills. As a collection becomes larger, or in a large museum, there's probably a need for someone with excellent writing and managerial skills, plus usually prior museum experience.



### **CHOOSE THIS FIELD IF YOU...**

Like to be around cars and are good at organizing and managing projects as well as public relations. You should have some knowledge about collector vehicles. Contacts in the media and the industry are a must. With previous experience at any type of museum, you'll have one foot in the door.

## VEHICLE SALES

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**Selling is a skill in itself. To sell something, you have to understand people and what motivates them.**

Selling collector cars is fun if you believe in what you sell. Most collector car salespeople love vintage cars and sell them by communicating their automotive passion to other people.

**Sales:** At a specialty dealership, the more you know about cars, the more people will trust your advice. You don't have to be a mechanic, but knowing the basics of a car is a big advantage. People will feel more confident buying from a knowledgeable salesperson.

**Auction:** Selling vehicles at auctions takes savvy. You have to know enough about each make and model that passes the auction block to be taken seriously. Auction jobs include auctioneer, consignment specialist, ringperson and office manager. Auction houses often hire freelance writers and photographers to assist with preparing catalogs. The list of extra people grows on sale days when a host of detailers and car handlers are needed.



### **CHOOSE THIS FIELD IF YOU...**

Naturally love to sell and want to be around cars, but not necessarily work on them. If you have a knack for dealing with people, consider sales.

Live auctions include many positions – including the auctioneer – but you need to be very car savvy to do it.



## PUBLISHING

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**Magazines and book publishers specializing in automotive topics always need creative writers and photographers.**

But they also need staffers with at least some automotive knowledge. Once you're part of the team, you'll quickly gain more knowledge about all sorts of vehicles.

In this field, there are online-only publications as well. If you are web savvy, consider this avenue. You will probably have to seek additional knowledge on your own. A good place to start is by getting in touch with writers and editors already working in the field.

Photographers will easily gain access to their subjects just by going to any car show or event. The thing to remember here is the part of a collector car that is photo-worthy: badges, grilles, lines that are unique to the model and, naturally, overall shots.

### **CHOOSE THIS FIELD IF YOU...**

Are a good writer looking for a new niche and are a collector at heart. If you know enough about collector cars to write about them, consider freelancing for an automotive magazine – you just might happen upon a new career.





If you're an artist, it typically doesn't matter if you have had experience with collector cars; all you need is the medium.

*Photo by Michael Furman*

## FINE ART

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**In theory, one area that requires no specialized automotive skill is the fine art field.**

Sculptors, painters and illustrators need to be a master at their craft, but they don't have to know how to tune up the car they're depicting in paint, clay or steel. Many of the top automotive fine artists started out either as graphic artists or as trained automobile designers who have a thorough understanding of the cars they're capturing in their work. If you're an artist who loves cars, you can visit a car show to seek inspiration for your next work of art.



### **CHOOSE THIS FIELD IF YOU...**

Have strong fine art skills and find cars to be a compelling subject. If you're a sculptor looking for a new model or a photographer searching for something other than people or scenery as subjects, consider the collector car field.

## GETTING STARTED

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**Many institutions, automotive museums and even restoration shops offer apprenticeships or on-the-job training. For those still in high school, take classes such as drafting, engineering and auto shop. For those past high school years, many colleges and vocational schools offer coursework and majors in specific fields related to the careers listed in this pamphlet. Either way, choices abound.**

**Advanced Technology Institute** – Virginia Beach, VA: Programs in Automotive Technology, Automotive/Diesel Technology, Diesel/Heavy Vehicle Technology, and the School of High Performance. [www.auto.edu/](http://www.auto.edu/)

**Art Center College of Design** – Pasadena, CA: The school offers a degree program in Transportation Design. [www.artcenter.edu](http://www.artcenter.edu)

**Berks Career & Technology Center** – Reading, PA: The secondary school offers automotive tech and automotive collision repair programs. [www.berkscareer.com](http://www.berkscareer.com)

**Calhoun Area Career Technical School** – Battle Creek, MI: The school offers Collision Repair Technology, Automotive Service Technology, Computer-Aided Drafting and Welding Technology programs. [www.calhounareatech.com](http://www.calhounareatech.com)

**Clover Park Technical College** – Lakewood, WA: Programs include Automotive Collision, Automotive Restoration & Customization, Automotive Tech and Automotive Upholstery and Glass. [www.cptc.edu](http://www.cptc.edu)

**College for Creative Studies** – Detroit, MI: A Transportation Design specialty program is offered. [www.ccsad.edu](http://www.ccsad.edu)

**McPherson College** – McPherson, KS: Offers an accredited four-year automotive restoration program. Two-week workshops are offered during the summer. [www.mcpherson.edu](http://www.mcpherson.edu)

**Universal Technical Institute** – Avondale, AZ:  
Programs consist of auto technology, collision repair and more. The Motorcycle Mechanics Institute is also part of the school. [www.uticorp.com](http://www.uticorp.com)

**Washtenaw Community College** – Ann Arbor, MI:  
Offers certificates and degrees in Automotive Technology, Automotive Mechanics, Collision Repair and Welding programs. [www.wccnet.edu](http://www.wccnet.edu)

**WyoTech** – Laramie, WY: Programs in Auto Technology, Auto Body and Motorcycle are offered. Additional campus locations. [www.wyotech.com](http://www.wyotech.com)

## RESOURCES

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### **U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor**

**Statistics:** For an outlook and overview of the career field you're interested in, visit <http://stats.bls.gov/>. It lists job duties, trends in the field, plus compensation and working conditions.

**iHireAutomotiveProfessionals:** This is an employment site listing jobs around the country in the automotive field. Some require basic skill; some require a high level of talent. Registration required, but it's free. Go to [www.ihireautomotiveprofessionals.com](http://www.ihireautomotiveprofessionals.com) to find out what's available.

### **U.S. Department of Labor Employment & Training**

**Administration:** Look here for apprenticeships in your state, [www.doleta.gov/atels\\_bat/](http://www.doleta.gov/atels_bat/). You may also visit [www.careervoyages.gov/apprenticeship-main.cfm](http://www.careervoyages.gov/apprenticeship-main.cfm). The site gives employment stats on wages, employment growth, and the college or training necessary for the specified field of interest.

These are just some of the many ways that you can combine your love of cars with your work. For more information on careers in the collector car hobby, visit your local library, contact your local community college career services department, or link to one of the resources above.

Hagerty is the premier source for safety and protection information about the collector car hobby. For more information on enhancing your collector car ownership experience, log on to **[www.hagerty.com](http://www.hagerty.com)** or call **800-922-4050**.



## Towing & Benefits Program

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