



parts & service

## Boutique Business

If you call this Ohio aftermarket accessory dealer and no one answers, it's probably because they're busy Out Motoring

by Peter D. DuPre

One thing that can be said of most MINI owners is that they are passionate about their cars, the MINI culture and the MINI community. Likewise, the people who own and operate MINI dealerships and MINI aftermarket accessory stores are equally as passionate about the vehicles and accessory parts they sell to said owners. To be sure, in order to be a successful business owner in the MINI niche market, passion (and possibly a lack of cognitive reasoning skills) is a prerequisite. You have to be nuts about the cars or you just won't succeed. A case in point is Out Motoring, a New Albany, Ohio MINI Cooper specialty boutique owned and operated by Aaron and Andrea Cornaby.

Cornaby, a graduate of the esteemed Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California, with a BS in product design (with Honors) took a job with a consulting group in Columbus, Ohio, as an industrial designer. For those of you who don't know, Art Center is a leading school for product design and is well known for producing automotive stylists and design engineers that garner good-paying jobs with automakers.

Cornaby's first job in Columbus

allowed him to design sporting goods products, bags and backpacks as well as medical products while paying him a nice salary. For a while, things went along pretty well. Cornaby had married his college sweetheart while in Pasadena and they already had a child and another was on the way. Life was, indeed, sweet. Then that pesky problem with cognitive reasoning, I mentioned earlier, kicked in. Cornaby decided that he needed something to keep him busy (As if a career, wife and a couple of kids weren't enough!) and opened up Out Motoring, a MINI aftermarket accessory boutique in his garage.

"When I was 15, I had my first car love affair with a Mini," said Cornaby. "But it was hard to find Mini parts then, so I settled on a VW, heavily modifying it but the soul, heritage, history and legacy of the Mini continued to intrigue me through the years and when I founded Out Motoring in 2003, one of the first things I did was to purchase a classic '76 Mini."

"I wanted to have a way to get quality parts for my car so the business idea just made sense," Cornaby continued, "if I made money with it so much the better. Of course with my background, having

experience as a designer and in graphic design, plus understanding the user experience with websites has given me a leg up over some other people."

The first thing any new business needs is a name. Cornaby and his wife chose Out Motoring because the name connected with the British heritage and also gave it some energy.

According to Cornaby, "Out Motoring is an action. An event. If you look at it in aggressive way, one would be physically "out motoring" the other drivers."

That is exactly what he wanted to do. He wanted to "out motor" the other accessory businesses. But that would take a lot of work and plenty of midnight hours.

Starting out on a shoestring, the company headquarters were ensconced in the couple's garage. A website was put together, stock filled the garage and the business was kept going by the burning of the proverbial candle during the midnight hour. Orders were packed after working hours at the day job were over and the kids were tucked into their beds and when he was too tired to handle things, Andrea always stepped in fill the void.

"I have no idea how we managed to keep everything running," said

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Cornaby. "If only our customers knew that their orders may have packed and labeled at 12 at night or in the morning intermingled between the napping and school schedule of our three kids!"

Through it all, the couple managed to maintain a high level of customer service. They quickly developed a dedicated following, thanks to strong word of mouth on forums such as NAM and were actually profitable from their first sale.

In fact, they were so successful, that they quickly outgrew the two-car garage attached to their house and with Cornaby still working full time as a designer, they moved the business to a nearby warehouse and continued to build the business with what little spare time they managed to find.

By mid-summer of 2006 it was clear that even without a toll-free phone number, inventory and order volume and were growing exponentially. It was time to make a major step, so he quit his well-paid job, "promoted" his wife, Andrea to full-time mom, chief cheerleader and Cornaby says, "idea bouncer-offer."

A hobby business is one thing, but a lot of people thought he was nuts to make the change. After all why would you quit a good paying job that you like?

"I get asked that question all the time, said Cornaby with a smile. "After all, I used to be a successful industrial designer. Now, I basically sell car parts and am sort of a shipping clerk.

You know, it took me two and a half years to settle in on the fact that one of my goals is to design custom car parts and this company allows me to do that. I now have a platform to sell products that I create and have gotten to the point of realizing that.

I had a high-profile job and now have an instant market for my products in a low-volume niche. Designing a product is only three to five percent of the development; the other 95 percent is getting it to the public. With Out Motoring, I can now do that easily."

In fact, Cornaby is already busy doing just that. He designed and produced the beautiful ARC MINI armrest and is in the

process of designing a number of new and innovative products.

And because he is an industrial designer Cornaby has very particular standards for other manufacturers' products as well as for the products he designs. Out Motoring only offers products that meet his strict quality and design standards and are such that he would install them on his own vehicle.

Being a stickler for quality doesn't just apply to the goods he sells. Cornaby applies the quality concept across the board to all facets of the business from his website design and the merchandise he sells to the way he packs merchandise for shipment, as well as the way he treats his customers.

The business may still be essentially a one-person operation but that doesn't mean Cornaby skimps on customer service. Every email and phone call is returned, letters are answered and shipments go out as promised or the customer is alerted. One result of this friendly, attentive service is that the company already has a well-earned reputation as a reputable business that pays attention to the details. That's the thing. Unlike some other MINI accessory businesses in the market, Out Motoring has achieved success by not being a discount house.

"We don't just throw stuff onto the web and hope it sells," said Cornaby. "We're not in the market to undercut other MINI tuners, nor are we a huge parts monster. We are just a small little gig doing what we enjoy. Our prices are set in line with the Manufacturers Suggested Retail Price (MSRP) or fair market price as to not fuel the Internet price-wars that tend to get out of control."



Opposite page: The OutMotoring Booth is a standard sight at MINI events. This page, top: Aaron and Andrea, "Mom and Pop" in this boutique business. Bottom: The arm rest is one of Aaron's first designs for the MINI.

Another thing that separates Out Motoring from some of the large parts discounters is the ongoing support for the MINI community. Since day one the business has sup-

ported clubs and events with giveaways and was one of the first businesses to sponsor Motoringfile.com (when it was bridger.us), Northamericanmotoring.com (when it was minicooperonline.com), MINI2.com, gomotoring.com, cooperspeed.com and others. In fact, they are a Charter Advertiser in MC<sup>2</sup>.

Since their beginnings, they have been attending and supporting MINIs on the Dragon, MINIs On Top, MINIs in the Mountains, AMVIV and other events.

When any business provides this type of support, it is always impressive but for Cornaby, it goes a lot deeper. Since the business was founded it has made it a policy to donate 10 percent of the profit generated from orders to charity.

"Some of my customers are shocked when they find out that 10 percent of the profit generated from their order is donated to worldwide charitable organizations that support those in need," Cornaby said, "but it is a part of who we are to give back to the larger community."

That last statement pretty much sums up Aaron and Andrea Cornaby and Out Motoring. These people love what they are doing, enjoy being part of both the world and MINI communities and they truly love the heritage and legacy of the Mini.

"We're passionate about the New MINI Cooper and the culture that it has created," concluded Cornaby. "We really love it and wouldn't even own this business unless we enjoyed the cars and the culture. We'll probably own a MINI as long as we live."

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