

Tow Story

Brock Supply CEO restores a vehicle that launched his lucrative career in wholesale auto parts business, and displays it at this year's ARA annual convention.

By Heather Miles Austin

Fifty years ago Jerry Brock was a young man working in his auto salvage yard in Tempe, Arizona. Today he has built a reputation as a national leader in the wholesale auto parts industry through Brock Supply Co., which has over 400,000 shipments a year and growing. The catalyst for such tremendous success is an unlikely source, a 1958 Chevy, Holmes 525 Wrecker.

In the 1960s Brock was responsible for towing wrecked vehicles that he had bought for his salvage yard. Soon however, with the addition of reliable radio equipment, Brock was busy towing for the Tempe Police Department, Maricopa County Sherriff's office and the Arizona Highway Patrol. As word spread of Brock's responsiveness and availability, demand for his services grew.

some vehicles from his towing jobs. But after five or six years, Brock had to make a decision. He had just implemented a new hotline service and needed to be traveling more frequently. He couldn't keep towing and meet the increased demand of both the hotline and auto salvage yard.

"I enjoyed towing so much, but I had to make a decision to dedicate myself completely to the auto salvage business and capitalize on the opportunity the new hotline created," Brock said. "I sold my beloved truck for \$2,500 and from then on focused completely on the new hotline and salvage yard."

History Lost and Found

With the same dedication to service that he applied to the towing business, Brock poured himself into building his company. His decision paid off, Brock Supply Co. now provides new aftermarket parts to customers all over the nation with almost 60 employees in three locations, including a new location under way in Terrell, Texas. But even after years of success Brock hadn't forgotten about that tow truck.

"That truck was so important to me early in my career, and I loved the towing business," said Brock. "I have restored several cars and often wondered if it would be possible to find and restore my truck from 45 years earlier."

Inspired by long-time friend Ronnie Bauman, of Bauman Tow Services in Riverside, California, who has been collecting and restoring cars for decades himself, Brock started the long journey of tracking down his truck, sending thousands of e-mails to salvage and towing companies. He was able to locate the original buyer, Marvin Tipton in Tacna, Arizona, and found out that he had sold it to another gentleman that had since passed away. From there the trail went cold for months. Brock continued to contact customers and friends from all over the nation to try to find the original truck. In doing so, he enjoyed many stories and made new friends with other salvage and tow truck owners who



Above: Jerry Brock and daughter Alex in 1964 with the original 1958 Chevy, Holmes 525 Wrecker, and in 2010 with the restored truck. Inset: The refurbished interior of the tow truck.

"I didn't miss a call day or night," Brock explained. "Even if we went out to dinner we took the tow truck. We simply bundled up my six-year-old daughter Alex and the whole family would go along for the pick-up."

While towing was a source of extra income for the young father, it also provided tremendous salvage opportunities, and Brock capitalized by purchasing



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answered the call for information, but his '58 Chevy, Holmes Wrecker remained out of reach.

Brock decided to move forward with a restoration despite his unfruitful search and upon Bauman's urging purchased a truck to restore and three others for parts, including an old Holmes Wrecker and used new parts from all over the country, including from Brock Supply.

"The truck was given a much needed frame-up restoration. A 350 Chevy crate motor was installed and all the modern conveniences," Brock explains.

After months of hard work, the results have been rewarding to Brock as he is finally able to give proper recognition to a vehicle that launched his career. The truck was recently entered into Tempe's Veteran's Day Parade, which can be see on www.brocksupply.com and YouTube.com. In addition to providing Brock with a new set of wheels, it will be displayed and entered into car shows, and showcased at the ARA 67th Annual Convention & Exhibition.



Brock had a toy replica made at 1/37th scale of the restored 58 Chevy, Holmes Wrecker to share with his family, friends, and customers. Every person who registers for the ARA 67th Annual Convention will receive one.

Miraculous Discovery

A month after the restoration was complete, Brock received a call from Chuck McBee from Phoenix. He had seen Brock's restored tow truck on YouTube and he believed he had the original one. After describing several unique characteristics, including the initials JB cut into the steel plate on the back of the wrecker, Brock confirmed it was

his original truck. McBee had bought the truck a few months before Brock gave up his search. Although the truck wasn't for sale, the mystery was finally solved.

"The restoration process has brought back so many memories of what this town and this industry used to be like," said Brock. "It is nice to remember all the individuals I've worked with and learned from over the years. This truck isn't just a tribute to my business success; it signifies the efforts of hundreds of individuals who have supported me and reminds each of us about the values this industry was founded on – hard work, entrepreneurship, and teamwork." ■

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