KEVIN WHIPPS

EDITORIAL PORTFOLIO

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Hi.

My name is Kevin Whipps, I'm a writer based in Arizona, and I need a better headshot.

I've been writing professionally since 2000 or so, as an editor, writer, copy editor, author, copywriter and copy director. In that time I've published dozens of magazines, produced two books, written hundreds of headlines and even moved a few times. I currently live in Tucson, Ariz., but I'm open to relocating for the right position.

This portfolio is a way for me to consolidate all of the work I've done in various genres — and there's a lot of stuff to dig through. But if it does nothing else, it should give you an idea of what kind of writing I do, and the work that I'm capable of producing.

If you want to talk further, I'm on the socials pretty much everywhere as @kevinwhipps. Or you can always email me at me@kevinwhipps.com.

Kevin Whipps

TESTIMONIALS

Knew Kevin through mutual connections in the days of the Internet when blogging was the new hotness. Later, I came to work with Kevin as he was editor on an exciting new startup brand with expressions across print and digital platforms. He contracted me to write for him and I found the experience to be in the top 1% of editors I've ever worked with. He was timely, diplomatic and incisive with his edits and the final result frankly made me look like a better writer than I actually am. He's great! Work with him! I say this as a chief content officer for a major publisher and also as an industry veteran of 30 years who has worked with the best and worst the industry has to offer. Kevin is the real deal. Would cheerfully recommend him to anyone needing a quality wordsmith, and can only hope for the day when we might one day work together again on something. Anything!

Stephen George
Content Leader
Kalmbach Media

Kevin is an exceptional editor who not only pays attention to the details, but also will passionately advocate for good content and processes. He's got a proactive ethic that steps up to any project and is responsive to input from the rest of the team. Any publication would be lucky to get his talented hand.

A.J. Hackwith
Author
The Library of the Unwritten

I am so lucky to have been able to work with Kevin on Rebel. He is easily the most organized and driven editor I have met. Kevin has never missed a deadline and is easily the most important person to have on your team. Coming from the design side, these skills are make or break in the publishing industry. He not only has eyes like a hawk for editing, but he has an amazing way of telling stories that are thought provoking and inspiring.

Jenny Poon
Founder
CO+HOOTS/HUUB

Kevin Whipps and I both worked as copy editors at 944. During that time, we worked both together and separately on various projects. Kevin was always prepared and extremely organized, and he was great at brainstorming new ways in which we could streamline our department and production procedures. He is an incredibly detail-oriented worker who sometimes goes to great pains to do whatever it takes to guarantee that his finished product is not only his best possible work, but also exactly (or even above and beyond) what his client or coworker had in mind, making him an absolute pleasure to work with. Kevin is the guy you go to when you want something done right the first time.

Marie Look
Digital Editor
Masterclass.com

Courtesy of Barrett-Jackson Auction Company

1963 Chevrolet Corvette Split-Window Resto-Mod

It's a resto-mod, sure. And it sold for big bucks. But is it the right car for you?

By Kevin Whipps

Chassis number: 30837S117874
SCM Condition for this car: 1

- GM LS3 with 540 hp
- GM 4L70E automatic overdrive transmission
- Lokar shifter
- Art Morrison sport chassis
- Strange Engineering self-dampening shocks
- Six-piston polished Wilwood front brakes; four-piston Wilwood rear
- Power windows
- Air conditioning
- 18- and 20-inch Schott wheels with Toyo Redline tires

SCM Analysis *This car, Lot 240, sold for $357,500, including buyer's premium, at Barrett-Jackson's May Online Auction.*

This resto-mod 1963 C2 is a good-looking car that sold for huge money in comparison to original 1963 Corvette Split-Window cars. But is it just another cookie-cutter build?

A resto-mod for the masses

The Corvette C2 has been an auction staple for years. They're a fairly reliable sale, with many of them pulling in six figures and some even going (or at least listing) for over a million dollars.

But the market is changing. These cars are still out there and changing hands, but the examples you're seeing are a bit different than they used to be. Are full restorations still the way to go, or are we just going to see more and more resto-mods?

Dollars and sense

Let's begin with the basics: There were a little over 20,000 C2s made in 1963, with a roughly 50/50 split between convertibles and coupes. Their relative rarity — especially for the Split-Window coupe — is part of the appeal, as are the timeless looks. But because the cars have been around for so long, there's a lengthy history of them appearing on the auction block.

From a collector's perspective, one can understand the angle. Seeing all these huge paydays come down the pike sure is attractive. And if you've got yourself a 1963 C2 of your own — especially a special Split-Window coupe — thoughts might turn to restoring it, then selling it and buying a new yacht or a stately manor in rural Montana.

Were this five or 10 years ago, we might agree. But now? Well, not so much.

See, the audience for these cars is changing. Lots of people out there buy the rides they wanted from their childhood — or the ones they had

when they were first learning how to drive. It's all about nostalgia. And if you fit into the early-Baby Boomer market, you would've been around 17 when the iconic '63 Split-Window first hit the scene. Today, you'd be 74. Is that the right time in your life to spend six or seven figures on a car? Sure, maybe — or maybe not. It's possible that if you want your nostalgia fix, you'll just pick one up for under $100k and be just as happy.

And there's another factor here, too. These C2s have been around for 57 years, as has the C2 in general. Which means a lot of people have messed around with them, customized them in one way or the other, and that makes it even harder to find good versions that are all-original.

Enter the resto-mod

This brings us to the resto-mod scene. You have to be a certain type of person to find them appealing. You're not a numbers-matching collector, and you don't care how many owners it's seen. What you do want is something that looks and performs amazingly well — perhaps with the brakes and handling of a modern car. Maybe you just want a really pretty car — and that's it. Is it original? Who cares? It lays down a mean patch of rubber and looks like it belongs in a Hot Wheels collector case. That's all that matters.

This car brought a ton of money — well over the current SCM Median Value of $78,000 for a standard 1963 Corvette Split-Window coupe. In fact, this resto-mod sold for more than the SCM Median Value for a 1963 Z06 Split-Window coupe — which is the holy grail for many Corvette collectors.

This car is clearly a resto-mod. And, frankly, it's beautiful. No, there wasn't a clinical restoration done of the car with the perfectly rebuilt, numbers-matching engine, but will it get looks? Absolutely. And if you're the type who drives their cars (or even just shows them off parked), then yeah, this is a perfect car for you. It would stand out in a crowd of similar hot rods, but not overpower anything in the garage. It's just a clean, pretty car that gets attention. And who doesn't want that?

About that price ...

This car brought a ton of money — well over the current SCM Median Value of $78,000 for a standard 1963 Corvette Split-Window coupe. In fact, this resto-mod sold for more than the SCM Median Value for a 1963 Z06 Split-Window coupe — which is the holy grail for many Corvette collectors.

This brings us to the next sticking point — the price. Is $357,500 fair for this resto-mod car? Possibly.

Let's go to Barrett-Jackson's Scottsdale Auction on January 13, 2020, where a black 1963 Corvette Split-Window resto-mod sold for $385,000 (SCM# 6922270). When you compare the two cars, they're awfully similar. Both have the same wheels, the interiors are both red and they have almost identical drivetrains and suspensions. The big difference? One is black and the other is white — and that black one earned an extra $30k on the block. That all tracks, as the cars were both built by Jeff Hayes Customs and completed months apart.

You could chalk all this up to chance, but these resto-mod Split-Windows are often selling for bigger bucks than an original Split-Window. But is this really what you want?

A look into the future

What does this all mean then? Well, it seems like there's an industry out there for building resto-mod Split-Windows. If you buy one, you'll get a beautiful car like this one here, but it may share some traits with another one that follows it on the block. That's not necessarily a bad thing, because a good-looking car is a good-looking car.

But it's not really unique — there are other examples that are very similar. How much that matters to you is what's important. At the end of the day, spending over $300,000 on a car is a big investment. Spending this kind of money on a resto-mod has backfired many times when owners go to resell the car. In the past, the resale market for resto-mods — no matter how well they're done — has been shaky.

You may get your money back — and you may not. Collectors who value original Corvettes — a big part of the Corvette collecting world — will hate your car and will never buy it.

But if you're good with that, then a C2 resto-mod like this one isn't a bad deal. ♦

KEVIN WHIPPS is an American car guy through and through — he's a longtime custom-car and -truck magazine writer, and is the author of several books on GM truck restoration.

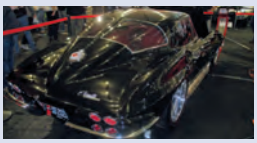
DETAILS

Year produced: 1963
Number produced: 10,594 Split-Window coupes
Original list price: $4,252
Current SCM Median Valuation: $371,250 (resto-mod 1963 Corvette Split-Windows)
Tune-up / major service: $200
Distributor cap: $12.99
Chassis # location: Under the glovebox on the instrument panel brace
Engine # location: Passenger's side front cylinder head
Transmission: 4-speed manual or 3-speed automatic
Club: The Corvette C2 Registry
Web: www.c2registry.org
Alternatives: 1963 Porsche 911, 1963 Aston Martin DB5, 1963 Chevrolet Corvette Z06 Split-Window coupe (stock)
SCM Investment Grade: B

COMPS

1963 Chevrolet Corvette Split-Window coupe
Lot 109, s/n 30837S108329
Condition: 2
Transmission: 4-speed manual
Sold at $128,800
Gooding & Company, Scottsdale, AZ, 1/17/2020
SCM# 6919168

1963 Chevrolet Corvette 327/360 Split-Window coupe
Lot 225, s/n 30837S106704
Condition: 1-
Transmission: 4-speed manual
Sold at $134,400
RM Sotheby's, Phoenix, AZ, 1/16/2020
SCM# 6922270



1963 Chevrolet Corvette Custom Split-Window coupe
Lot 1363, s/n 30837S119414
Condition: 1
Transmission: Automatic
Sold at $385,000
Barrett-Jackson, Scottsdale, AZ, 1/13/2020
SCM# 6922285

REALITY CHECK

What's the process like for evaluating a car before it's auctioned? The pros at Barrett-Jackson show us how they do it

by Kevin Whipps

Let's say that you're in the market for a new vehicle and you go to an auction to pick one up. You want it to be 100% original, numbers matching, the whole enchilada. If one comes across the block, how do you know it's authentic? Is it the real deal, or did someone build it up from a lesser example?

This is the problem facing buyers and sellers at every collector-car auction.

Barrett-Jackson has come up with a way to solve this issue. They don't offer a verification service with their sales. Instead, they confirm that the vehicle in question is, in fact, what the consignor claims it is in their description. This way, before the car even crosses the block, bidders know that what they see listed on the car card is what's actually out in front of them. And for good reason, too.

On the one hand, it's about liability. Say you bought your dream vehicle and you find out it's not what it was purported to be. In that scenario, Barrett-Jackson has a problem to deal with, and they don't want that at all. What if Barrett-Jackson makes up a tag for the window and makes a claim about something that the car doesn't have? Then they're not representing what's actually for sale, and that's not good for business, either.

Ultimately, they want to make sure that both the buyer and seller are happy. And to do that, they have to make sure that what's coming in is what it says it is, and that it's the same coming out.

This is not an easy process to do with a small amount of cars, but the Barrett-Jackson Scottsdale event had more than 1,900 in January, and that makes things a lot more difficult. Fortunately, they've been doing this for almost 50 years now, so they have a good handle on how it goes down.

The folks at Barrett-Jackson took us behind the scenes to see exactly what it's like going through the lanes, from initial inspection all the way to parking. Then they also showed us their verification area, where vehicles are checked out by experts such as David Wise (Mopar), Jason Billups (Ford), Jim and JB Mattison (GM), John Ballard (Corvette), Jerry MacNeish (GM), Mark Schwartz (Resto-Mod) and others in an effort to make sure the cars are what the sellers claim they are. It's a fascinating deep dive into what makes this powerful auction tick.

But there's one important thing to take away from this process: If you want to do this type of thing yourself, you either need to become an expert on the type of vehicle you want to buy or hire one to do the work for you. That encyclopedic knowledge of the model is critical to making sure that what's in front of you is what it's claiming to be.

HERE IT IS: The spot where every car that goes over the block starts. Vehicles are unloaded here, put through a basic inspection, and then passed on to the more thorough parts of the process.

1 Things run fast right out of the gate, and the car I'm introduced to is a 1966 Chevrolet Corvette 427/390 coupe. The very first step is an initial inspection, and that begins with looking under the passenger's side of the dash to verify the VIN.

2 Each inspector has a tablet to use for the process. As they go through and make sure everything is up to par, they check it off the list until everything is done.

3 Once the initial inspection is complete, a sticker is printed and stuck on the top of the driver's side of the windshield. This is a surface inspection at this point, so all they're looking for is the basics. The big stuff comes next.

4 A matching windshield sticker is also printed out and put onto the key bag. This will stay with the car and the driver until it's parked. Then it will be put into the Key Control Room, where it's secured and properly sorted.

5 Any additional notes that are necessary for the next step are put down on the key bag itself. This way, nobody has to hunt for things such as the VIN location.

6 The car is then carefully driven by a designated driver to the next stop. It's not a long stretch to drive, but with lots of cross traffic, it can be stressful.

7 Now at the next leg of the journey, the car is given a good once-over. If there are documents that come with it, they're presented here, then turned over to the Property Room. The idea is to make sure that everything that's on the window sticker (Barrett-Jackson calls it a car card) is actually on the car.

8 Another thing that happens here is that every bit of the car is captured on video using a tablet. This way if there's a dispute about the condition of the car later, there's proof of how it was delivered to the auction.

9 The check-in slip and all necessary paperwork are also verified.

10 Now the car card is gone through as well. The goal is to make sure that what's printed here is actually on the car. If it's not? Well, then they have to make a determination: Is it simple enough to just change the listing details? Or is it a big enough deal that it needs to go through a more thorough examination?

11 In this case, there was a problem: The listing said it had a side exhaust, but the car didn't. The solution? Scratch out that detail on the listing and send it off for correction.

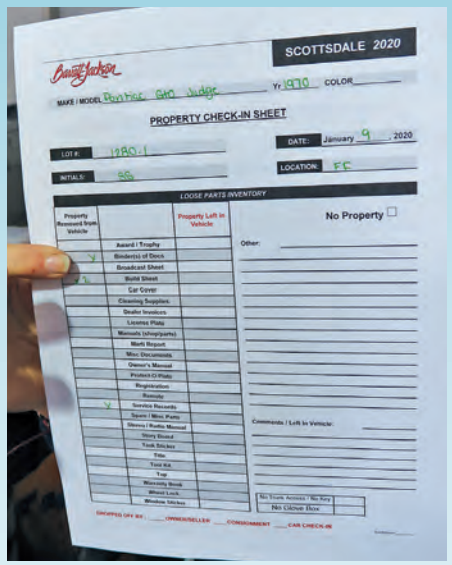
12 The car is then driven by the same driver to its designated parking spot, which in this case was in Tent 9. The driver is guided into a parking space, and — this is the tricky part — has to look only at the guide while driving in reverse. It's how all the cars get parked so perfectly, but it goes against your instincts as a driver.

13 And there it is: Lot 1021 parked and ready for the show. A few days later, it crossed the Barrett-Jackson auction block and sold for $85,800.

14 Of course, we're not quite done yet. The next stop is one tent that holds two key spots: the Key Control Room and the Property Room.

15 All key bags are placed in the appropriately named Key Return Box.

16 Any property for the vehicle is now put into the system, and that starts by filling out the Property Check-In Sheet. Anything that comes with the car — extra wheels, paperwork, etc. — is all logged in here.



17 If it's small enough to fit into a manila envelope, it's placed in one, tagged, and sorted by day. Then it's put into the other half of the tent, which looks like it also might hide the Ark of the Covenant.

18 Tucked away from all the main action is this nondescript tent. Turns out this is where a lot of the real action is.

19 Inside are four four-post lifts and a few experts divided up by brand: Chevy, Pontiac, Ford, etc. These teams are there to do deeper dives into as many vehicles as possible, with the goal being to confirm whether the car is as authentic as the paperwork and owner claim it to be.

20 Inside, I meet two of those experts: Jerry MacNeish and Norm Meads, who walk me through an inspection of Lot 1004.1, a 1968 Chevrolet Camaro Z/28 RS. (It ended up selling for $72,600.) The first thing they check is the VIN, which is also stamped on the body under the cowl. If it's not there, or it doesn't match the one on the dash, it could be a body swap, and the appropriate actions are taken.

21 The underside of the car is inspected as well, with the numbers verified on the transmission and, moving back under the hood, the engine. The cool thing is that if they need to unbolt a part or move something to do their job, they will. It's just another way to make sure they've got the right vehicle in front of them.

22 Even the numbers on the axle are checked. If the paperwork says it was built at a certain time but the axle says otherwise, they'll also make adjustments to the ticket. This is particularly important in claims of having a numbers-matching vehicle. If anything isn't what it's claimed to be, Barrett-Jackson makes sure the car card is adjusted accordingly. If everything matches, the car is off to the auction.

Sold! Sold! Sold! — that's the goal when all's said and done

Courtesy of Barrett-Jackson

Announcements

Professional Designer Stickers

By Kevin Whipps on Oct 31, 2013 in Humor

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SUPERFLY
SUPER SLOW
CHANGES
SUPER SLOW
CHANGES
SUPERFLY
SUPERFLY
SUPERFLY

15 Design Sins No Client Should Ever Make Us Commit

Kevin Whipps · Follow

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Working with clients can be a mind-bag. On the one hand, you've got the awesome ones that know what they want and are willing to work with your creative vision. On the other side of the coin, they don't know what they want (but they'll know it when they see it) and demand you compromise your integrity to make that happen. Know what happens when you do that? Nothing good. Friends, Nothing good.

Which is why today we're going to talk about design sins. Specifically, the ones that those clients want to do to realize their "vision," let go against every fiber of our being. Sounds like fun, right? Oh, it will be.

Too many fonts

Ever seen a design where it looks like someone couldn't make up their mind about faster? You know the ones I'm talking about. They've got every font they could find for one-for the page, and the results are so disjointed and awful that even though you're positive the design will end up on someone's Pinterest page, it's just a horrific disaster. How do these things happen?

Sure, sometimes it's just a rookie designer, or someone that's learning how to design their first website. But more often it happens because of the whims of a designer client that wants things their way or else. And when I find out that was the case, I will the designer the best of luck, and silently curse the client into a world where no colors match and they're constantly on fire.

Using low-res images

Whether you work in print or on the web, there's a big difference between the kinds of images that you can work with. But if you want a site that works in all mediums, it's pretty simple: you can never have to high a resolution on an image.

Now you might be thinking, "But Kevin, I can't publish a 600PPI, 20mb/per image in my blog, and I'd respond, "Yes, you've correct." But here's the thing: resizing images down is easy. Going up? Not so much.

And with the advent of heavy ajk displays, iPads, and everything else that we view content on on, it makes sense to start with a high-resolution image, instead of some bad shot that someone pulled from Google Images. And when a client asks you to work with something like that, I achieve a level of frustration that's usually reserved for trips to the DMV or people that drive people under the speed limit.

Oversizing stock photography

We've all found ourselves in a situation where we need a stock photo for a page, and we just don't have the unique images we want. So we dive into the world of stock photos, sometimes finding something amazing, and other times ... not so much. That's how you end up with a document or website that looks more generic than a box of Honey Flavored O-Shapes cereal.

But we all know why these decisions are made. Usually it comes down to money: either the client has it, they don't, or — and this is the biggie — they have it, but don't think you or the project deserve it. Then they ask you for the site/magazine/flier looking like crap, like you were somehow the person pulling the purse strings. For those clients, I wish them to a death that involves nothing but being heard meetings with culturally appropriate members, just like the ones you see on stock photographs with the phrase references "business" in any way.

Besides, there's stock photography and good stock photography. It's pretty easy to spot the difference.

Using ALL the social icons

How many social media sites do you belong to? I personally have logins at most major ones, but when it comes to the upper-third I rarely regularly, it's usually just a handful at best. But do we need to reference every single social media network out there when I design a site? No. But some clients think we should.

This client wants all the icons. They want one for Dribbble, even though their site has nothing to do with design. They want WhatsApp because that's what they think the cool kids are using. And, of course, they want one for the App Store, even though they don't actually have an app. And why? To fill up the top bar! Because they want to seem edgy! Because they have a constant need for affirmation!

I'm guessing that last one.

Bad copy

This is a sensitive topic for me. After all, I am both a copywriter and a writer, and believe me, there's a difference. I could write a whole paragraph about the garbage that clients send me about copy. In fact, I think I will.

Look, I know my audience here is a group of designers, but the fact remains that copy and design go hand in hand. Without good content, a design can fall flat, and vice-versa. So there's that point that pushes copy on you that they wrote because "I was always told I was a good writer in high school," therefore I'm pushed off a cliff. A very tall one. With spikes at the bottom. Or whatever you'd call what happened to Ramsay Bolton in Game of Thrones a season or two ago. That'd be perfect.

Minuscule/Hard to read text

There's this one website I go to on a regular basis that uses what seems to be the tiniest font height possible, and does so in a color that doesn't contrast heavily with the background. It's difficult to read as a result, but because I love the content so much, I suffer through it. Needless to say, I'm an sufferer.

Clients do this to me a lot. They don't think about people that might need a larger font size for vision purposes, or that their sense of design doesn't match the world's. It's incredibly frustrating, and when someone asks me to go that direction, I want to push them off a bridge. Is that too violent? Nope, at least that's what I tell myself when I'm pushing.

Too much stuff

Back when I ran the editor of a magazine, I had a publisher once ask me what all that "black space" was on a page.

"It's whitespace," I responded.

"Fill it up with something, Leslie wrote."

Now the argument can always be made that there can be too much whitespace, but more often that's just not the case. And if there's little to no whitespace, it's then you've got a cluttered layout. And that sucks.

Cluttered layouts look horrible, whether you're doing print or the web, and it's usually the client's fault. They feel like they're paying for X amount of space, and all of it should be filled up with something, design-students be damned.

Nonsensical UX/Navigation

UX is a big deal, and as someone that regularly works with UX designers, I can tell you that they take their job seriously. They don't want to just jam a bunch of pages into their nav bars just because: they want things to be easy and straightforward for the user. But clients don't care, they just want their product on the page. Ugh.

This leads to crappy web pages, of course, with lots of nonsensical pages that seem to lead nowhere. Is it frustrating? Yes — for everyone except the client.

Splitting your content into multiple pages with no need

I've got this one that I visit regularly that ponders for ads more than common sense. They'll take an article that should be one page, and stretch it out to two or three via camping and rambling content. Why? Pageviews, obviously, which may deliver more ads, but also gives the user a poor experience. Somewhere, there's a boss/client demanding they make more money, and the only way to do it is to commit a horrible design sin. But oh well, it's money, right?

Ignoring mobile

I'm not a coding this so-and-so power right now, aren't you? Yeah, probably, and that's why mobile is such a huge force on the web. If you're not designing a website to work with mobile by using a responsive design, you're of date — or, you have a client that thinks they can save some cash.

To intentionally hamper your audience and their mobile experience will over sin because you want to save a few bucks is spectacularly dumb. And yet, it happens. A lot.

Using outdated or awkward tech

Steve Jobs famously didn't put Adobe Flash on the original iPhone, and it's been doing a slow death ever since. And yet, some clients still want to use it on the outdated technology, as well as a bunch of other garbage that they think will either save them money, or grab attention. Spoiler: it doesn't. In fact, it just turns viewers off, and they navigate away from the site.

Ignoring everything below the fold

There's this obsession that some web clients have with making sure that all of their "good" content sits above the fold — that area where a viewer has to start scrolling. This obsession is not always valid: people will look at the rest of the page if there's something they want to see there. It's not like you can put them on empty page and pray to the SEO gods, or anything. Yeah, that's not how it works.

Overdoing it on graphics and effects

When I was in my teens, I designed a page for my parent's office that had a header bar with their logo inside. Here they used orange and black as their colors, I spent a good hour in Photoshop trying to mix the two hues into some every gradient and filter I could imagine. The result is a mess, but it worked for a time, I guess.

My parents are not horrible clients. But the ones that are force you to overdo the graphics to a level that would make anyone a bit nauseated. Sometimes it's best to keep things plain and simple. In fact, that's often the case.

Poor color usage

Picking up on that last point, let's talk about colors in general. I had a boss once that swore he was a color expert. The suggestions he'd make for second shades in the magazine were scary bad, to the point that I started trying to avoid his opinion completely. Did it work? Well, kinda, but with varying results. Some months stuck, they're not.

Papyrus/Comic Sans

If a client asks me to do this, just quit. It's not worth the hit to your sanity.

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Hi My name is Kevin Whipps, and I'm a writer and editor based in Phoenix, Arizona. When I'm not working taking pictures of old cars and trucks, I'm either writing articles for Creative Market or traveling sections at Whipps Stories Co.
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10 Comments
Visualmatic WordPress Themes
Excellent post! Thank you for share!
Reply
Red Fat
"...clients curse the client into a world where no colors match and they're constantly on fire.
"...I achieve a level of frustration that is usually reserved for trips to the DMV or people that drive (things) under the speed limit."
"For these clients, I wish them to a death that involves nothing but being heard meetings with culturally appropriate members."
"...I'd end it ...deserve to be pulsed (if a cliff. A very tall one. With spikes at the bottom."
"...when someone asks me to go that direction, I want to push them off a bridge."
BRIL: I agree with every point you made, and I myself have anger issues with some of the clients I have had in the past. I don't usually recommend this, but DUDE... take some drugs...
Reply · Oct 29, 2014
Melissa Stavsky
"Papyrus/Comic Sans. If a client asks you to do this, just quit. It's not worth the hit to your sanity." Hahal Love it!
Reply · Oct 29, 2014
Navpreet Singh
"not worth the hit to your sanity". This one had me rolling :P
Reply · Oct 29, 2014
Sarah McFarland
I laughed so hard at the GOT reference. Great article Kevin!
Reply · Oct 29, 2014
Christina Gale
This was a delightful read.
Reply · Oct 29, 2014
Scott
Great classes to simulate you now how a simple word mistuse or a single jumbled letter, as seen in "...cause the client is high a resolution..." can throw me off the rhythm of the rest of the article. It's the same with design. Sometimes, I'm so focused on the overall composition, I get overloaded, or out of balance, and it takes down the entire composition.
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Gabrielle Marion
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Gina Smith
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Join the Dark Side

Lewis Black, the Master of Angry Stand-Up

Written by Kevin Whipps

There are a lot of good stand-up comics out there, but not many can match the pure rage and hatred that Lewis Black can dish out at any appearance. Many consider him to be a political comic, but really he's more of a commentator, shedding light on the outrageous and asinine things that the government has done over the years. He has a regular segment on Comedy Central's *The Daily Show with John Stewart*, has appeared in multiple movies and, at one point, was even a playwright. Yes, the man who makes his money yelling at politicians once wrote musicals for a living, and that's just one of the fascinating things we learned about Black recently. We spoke about the election, why he went into stand-up, and his real feelings about comics turning into politicians.

"Look, you want a shitty government, then elect people who don't like government. That's the best way of getting shitty government."

944: What was the defining moment that made you decide to become a comic full-time?
LEWIS BLACK: What kind of made me choose to [do] that was when I was in Houston, Texas, at the Alley theater. The Alley produced a play that I wrote with Rusty McGee, it was a musical, Rusty wrote the music and lyrics and I wrote the book. And we thought, "This is it! We've made it." It was a major regional theater, and we had finally been found. It was just a hideous experience for a variety of reasons. I had been in theater a long time at that point and this was like the final straw. It was just really supposed to be a workshop in a sense, we were supposed to be able to figure it out and work on it, none of the things really happened the way they said they would happen. I went across town at that point to a place called Spellbinders, a comedy club, and said, "Can I audition for you guys?" And I did. They said, "OK, you've got a job." They were going to bring me back two months later because somebody had dropped out, another comic. I was a headliner, I'd get paid the same thing I'd get paid as a playwright for one week's work as opposed to the two years I'd put in on the musical, a better place to stay and a car for the week. I just went, "OK, that's that." And I didn't look back.

You're pretty well known for your political views and your political humor. Where do you think that the Bush administration went awry? Was it right after September 11 or was there another incident you can recall?
That was the one that allowed them to skid out. That was the beginning of it, when they responded much the way that a chicken responds when its head is cut off. I thought it was nuts, what they did. I did from the very beginning, and I talked about it from the very beginning. Because it was like, "Really? This is what you guys are going to do?"

Do you think it's pompous that we feel the need to bring democracy to everyone? Because it's not like it's a perfect system.
Democracy and capitalism together is not a perfect system. Not by any fashion. "It's the best one we have." You don't know! You haven't lived under other systems, have you? It's beyond belief to me. I just never felt, unless ... Afghanistan, for sure, because they ... But you just don't have a preemptive strike. You just don't do it. It's not what we do. We don't care. If you're gonna do it, you have it dead to rights. You have to find those weapons. You don't just go, "Fuckin' oops."

What do you think about Al Franken's bid to become a Minnesota Senator?
Well for me, it kind of allows me to go further up the ladder. [laughs] I think that's an evolution that started about five years ago. As he became more political as a comic, he then became a pundit, and then you kinda go, "I can do this." Plus, it's Minnesota. They voted for Jesse Ventura. They seem to be OK with stuff like that. In a sense, it's putting your money where your mouth is.

What are your thoughts on the next administration and the promises that President-Elect Obama has made? Are we really going to get the change that we've been promised?
It's a big change. I don't think we're going to see the bigger changes because you don't get big changes in this country because we're like slugs. But, the big change is that you have people who are actually going to read résumés. And that's kind of exciting. Your lifestyle could be where you're fucking a Saint Bernard. But as long as you do that privately, and you have a tremendous skill at Arabic, you'll get hired. It's basically that they're going to read the résumé and nobody's going to be asking questions about what your religious beliefs are and all of that other crap. You have a résumé as an actor and at the bottom they have "skills." Like, I can ride a unicycle. That's what [Bush's administration did]. At the bottom, skills were: born-again Christian. I'm serious. That's a major change. It's a respect for government. Look, you want a shitty government, then elect people who don't like government. That's the best way of getting shitty government. If nothing else, the thing that both those guys comprehend, and a lot of Republicans have lost sight of — some — is that they care about government and how it works. And think, actually think, that it's a tremendous service position.

In theory, Washington is supposed to be full of the smartest people in the country …
Yeah, well, I lived around D.C. That's really a theory.

How do you feel about where the country is at and where it's going?
It's just a question of whether or not these guys are smart. I mean look at what the numbers are — it's half conservative, half liberal. So what does the country want? The country wants you to figure out what is the best of your liberal philosophy, and what is the best of your conservative philosophy and put it together in terms of something of a work. And I don't have time for your fucking arguments anymore. We have no time for your discussions and your stinking spins. You figure it out. You go, and you do work, and you say, "Look, we agreed on something." Because I've spent a long time … It's been 16 years of them ripping at each other's throats and there's just no time for it. None. We've run out of that kind of luxury.

For more info check out www.lewisblack.com. To read the full interview, go to 944.com.

by KEVIN WHIPPS

@SQUARE

THE CREATOR OF TWITTER ISN'T DONE YET

In the past few years, there have been a few major game changers in the world. eBay changed the way people make purchases online, Craigslist decimated the newspaper industry with free classified ads, and now, Square is going to change the way people pay for products.

Enter Jack Dorsey, the man who brought Twitter to the masses. At 33, most men haven't conquered folding their own laundry, much less an industry as volatile as the Internet. Which is why when he stepped down as CEO of Twitter in 2008 and started considering other ventures, he thought big: healthcare and the financial industry. "Given that we've just had this major crash, it's this kind of clearing of the slate," Dorsey says. "All the abstractions that have been built upon other abstractions and created this massive exchange that no single human understands, has kind of been erased." Which one to choose came to him in the form of a problem.

"My co-founder Jim McKelvey was trying to sell a piece of his glass art," Dorsey says. "He found that if he could not accept the form of payment that people would want to use, he would not be able to eat that night, for instance." The dilemma led to a conversation over the phone between the pair. "We have these iPhones, and we have every single thing we need in the palm of our hand to complete that transaction and make that payment. Why wasn't that possible?" That led into research on the topic and then the duo decided to take matters into their own hands and start a new company, titled simply, Square.

The new firm developed a product, designed to fit into the headphone jack of any smartphone with a square dongle on the end that contains a magnetic card reader. This allows the owner to take credit card payments securely over the Internet, and produce a receipt on the spot. Better yet, it won't cost much, either. "The idea is to make the hardware extremely cheap — cheap enough that we could give them away to everyone who wants one, so that we enable terminals all over the world in any capacity and any situation," Dorsey says. "Anyone who can pay with a credit card could receive with a plastic card. There's no reason why I shouldn't be able to do that."

On the surface, this doesn't sound like a very revolutionary idea. After all, PayPal has been making credit card payments on eBay easy for anyone to perform. But Square makes the process mobile and more personal. "The exchange of value is inherently social. It's often times a face-to-face thing," says Dorsey. "Ninety percent of commerce in the world is still done face-to-face — not online — yet, it's never really been designed as a social element."

With Square, Dorsey aims to change that. Now custom receipts have been designed with maps of the store's location, as well as a copy of the signature, all sent via e-mail or text within seconds of making the purchase. Photo identification is available as well, making the process more secure than traditional transactions. It's currently being beta tested in San Francisco, St. Louis and New York, with more sites on the way.

In the coming months, more and more Square units will be popping up across the country. As more people get exposed to the concept, they'll slowly adjust to the change and, eventually, treat a purchase on a Square device the same way they would any other option. And then, when Square takes off like Twitter did, maybe Dorsey will have some free time on his hands to handle those other projects he's been thinking about. Like healthcare.

See the new bill at www.squareup.com

UNFILTERED

Stu Oltman: The man, the myth & the legend.

BY **KEVIN WHIPPS**
PHOTOGRAPHY BY **CARL SCHULTZ**

Stu Oltman is nothing if not opinionated. Often found with a hand-rolled cigarette in one hand and glasses slightly sliding down his nose, he's always free to tell a tale or two about how decisions made without good information resulted in costly mechanical damage. Between that and his penchant for using colorful words like poetry, he's gotten a bit of a reputation as a grumpy old man — a curmudgeon of sorts. It's a status that he wears like a badge of honor.

But sit down with him on his back patio and have a cup of coffee and things are a bit different. Yes, he may lack the filter that many of us use to bite our tongues, but that's exactly what makes him so fit for the position he fills — a guy who tells readers the unvarnished truth. Not everyone likes what he has to say, sure. But that doesn't mean that he's wrong.

We wanted to take a moment and tell his story. He's led a fascinating life, including romance, intrigue, adventure and even a few gunfights. And that's just scratching the surface.

C TOOLS

THE EARLY YEARS

Like most 18-year-old men in the mid-1960s, Stu had two choices: go to school or go to Vietnam. Stu chose school and moved from his family's home in Philadelphia to Tucson, Ariz., to attend the University of Arizona. Three months later, he finds that he's not spending as much time in class as he should. With nothing else on the horizon, he packed up his '56 Chevy and went back to Philadelphia. "When I got there my old man said, 'It's great to see you, but you are a big boy now, so go and find yourself something to do.'" Stu recalls. "What am I going to do? I'm only a high school graduate."

With his diploma in hand, he went down to the local Army recruiting station and made the other decision — the one involving Vietnam. After taking a few tests, he qualified for Officer Candidate School and signed up as a buck private. It was October 1966.

In November of the following year, Stu rode his first motorcycle, a borrowed Yamaha twin 125 two-stroke. He had just graduated Officer Candidate School as a brand-new Army lieutenant and although he was more into cars than anything with two wheels, he gave his roommate's bike a spin around the block. "He showed me how to start it, and I treated it and rode it around much like a bicycle. I never got much above 35 miles an hour."

Around this time, Stu meets a girl near Fort Bragg in North Carolina. Shortly thereafter, they get married, and since this was in the thick of the Vietnam War, watching his fellow classmates get shipped overseas, he knew his time was coming. "I was supposed to spend six months with an infantry unit to get some experience under my belt, becoming familiar with troop command and generally drying out behind the ears," he recalls, but he was also getting antsy and wanted to move forward. How could he get out quicker? Well, they needed helicopter pilots, so he applied for flight school, got accepted and transferred to a small town in Texas to learn the trade.

Helicopter flight school came in two phases, with the first being at Fort Wolters in Mineral Wells, Texas, where he spent six months. For the next portion, he could choose between two bases, one of them being substantially better than the other with a spot on the beach. He applied and became one of the few lieutenants in a herd of captains to take advanced flight training at Hunter Army Airfield in Savannah, Ga. But his new bride wasn't in for this new move and while Stu went off to training, she went back home to her mother.

Once he arrived in Georgia, Stu moved into a house on the sand with three other officers. He's young, there's a butcher's shop next door and he has disposable income. "If I wasn't in training, then I was on a motorcycle exploring around some place," he says, and that was the lifestyle he led for quite a long time.

When he was done with flight school, he received orders for Vietnam with a 60-day delay. Basically, it meant that he could take a 60-day vacation, and now, with his wife back in his good graces, he had someone to travel with. The couple packed up his car (a brand-new '69 Mustang) and drove down to Acapulco, Mexico, ready to have an adventure.

On the way back, the couple witnessed some kind of military procession that they thought might be a parade. Leaving his wife in the car, Stu hopped out to take some pictures and capture the moment. That was a bad idea. "The next thing I know, a guy comes up — a military guy from the Mexican army comes up — and confiscates my camera and leaves my wife there in the car." He's taken to the police station to get grilled in Spanish, a language that Stu does not speak, and there are no English translators. After what seemed like forever, he's finally asked for identification. "I pull out my military picture ID, the interrogator takes one look at that, and I swear his hair turned white right on the spot," Stu says. "He ripped the film out of the camera, gave the camera back, and said I was free to go and to have a nice trip."

OVERSEAS

Upon his safe return from Mexico, Stu boarded a plane and headed west towards Vietnam for a one-year tour of duty. He only spent two weeks on the ground — enough to earn his combat infantry badge — and then did his job as a flight platoon commander. "We flew 12-15 hours a day," he says. "I was shot at a lot, but if you lived through the experience, at the end of the day, you came back to a well-stocked officers club and a clean bed. Those poor guys on foot in the jungle had it a lot worse."

Then there was the day when coming home wasn't a certainty.

Stu was a co-pilot then, working with another pilot in the jungles of Vietnam. This meant that if they had to land, the only spaces they could use would be somewhere that a bomb had blown up the surrounding foliage or a natural clearing big enough to fit a helicopter. The pilot would have to center the vehicle on the landing point, then slowly lower it down vertically, making sure not to hit any trees with a rotor.

"We get about 10 feet off the ground and bullets start flying 'cause the bad guys would always wait until you are in a position where you could not go anywhere," Stu says. "And then they start shooting at you. So the pilot, naturally, gets a bit spooked. It's hard to concentrate on what you are doing when you have got bullets flying around. And you can hear them and windows start breaking and he starts moving the controls erratically. And then one of the rotor blades contacted a tree."

At this point they're 50 feet in the air, with no form of upward thrust and nothing to cushion their fall. They hit hard in the bottom of the bomb crater, windows shatter, the tail boom breaks off and, amazingly, all they have are a few cuts and bruises. The only weapon that Stu had was a .38 Special — it was all that they gave pilots at that time — and with the turbine engine still running wide open, he runs off into the jungle, looking for Americans. That's when he realizes that his crew has turned back around towards the aircraft to get their cooler full of ice and beer. The words that Stu uses to describe these two gentlemen are both colorful and impolite, but nonetheless appropriate.

Stu empties his .38 into the radio encryption gear to prevent it from being captured intact, then tosses it to the side and helps the duo drag their beer. He's got an injured back (that would require surgery decades later), blood running down his brow line from where the face shield on his helmet had driven into his face and he's not doing well. But they survive, running through the jungle farther and farther. They saw some strange things on that foot trek — horrors that shouldn't be relayed in any medium — until they finally get help. It's 1969 and Stu is just 21 years old.

STATESIDE

With his tour of duty complete, Stu was able to pick his next destination, so he once again selects Hunter Army Airfield. He meets his wife at the airport with her family and she's ecstatic to see him because apparently she knew he'd make it. "And really, how did you know that?" he asked her at the time. "She says, 'Because you are too mean to die.'"

Things didn't last long from there. She went back to her mother and Stu initiated divorce proceedings. Now he's single in Savannah, Ga., with his bike and a brand-new '72 Corvette convertible. He works half-days as a flight instructor training South Vietnamese Air Force cadets, and this is where he learns the fine art of teaching technical subjects to folks with absolutely no background in the material. He spends his off time riding his bike, fishing or just goofing off. It was perfect. But all good things must come to an end. Because he was an officer without a college degree and the Army was doing some housecleaning, his position was eliminated, forcing him to move on.

IT'S HARD TO CONCENTRATE ON WHAT YOU ARE DOING WHEN YOU HAVE GOT BULLETS FLYING AROUND.

The job market for civilian helicopter pilots wasn't looking promising, so he went to a local Kawasaki dealer that he had visited as a customer. "The owner decided to take me on and allowed me to go to Kawasaki service school — at my expense, of course." But it started Stu on the path to the motorcycle business. Soon he was taking private courses at night, and learning new equipment and techniques. He found that he loved working with electronics and that became his passion. But again, paying the bills became priority and motorcycle technicians weren't paid much, so Stu used the GI Bill to complete a course in crop dusting and landed his first civil flight gig in suburban Chicago. That led to a better position flying passengers out of O'Hare and doing movie and commercial work. A bit later, Stu found work carrying camera operators up in the sky to shoot various projects and that's how he got onboard the legendary movie *The Blues Brothers*, starring Dan Aykroyd and John Belushi. The next time you watch the film, look for the spot where one of the cars goes flying through the big corn cob parking garage or when the Pinto drops through the Chicago skyline. He flew the helicopter that filmed those scenes.

PROGRESSION AND DIGRESSIONS

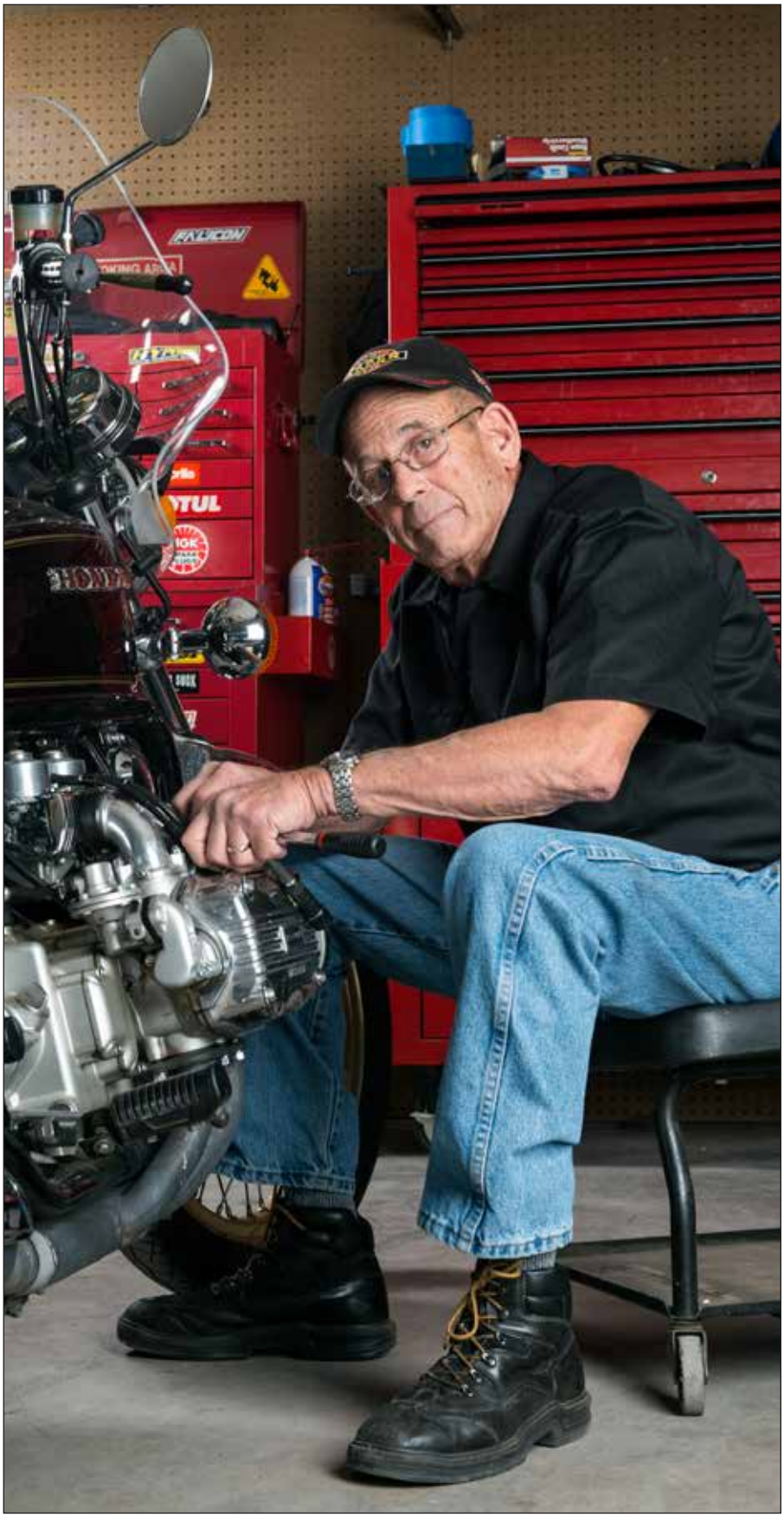
In 1977, Stu developed a disease that caused his body to reject both of his kidneys. As the job market was still strained (and now he had medical bills to contend with), he found himself working in the Tonto National Forest in Arizona, flying for the U.S. Forest Service, and fixing cars and motorcycles on the side. He had a trailer in Pine, Ariz., and he wasn't doing a whole lot on one particularly snowy day when a song came on the radio. "I will never forget this — you could never forget it — It was group named Styx," he says. "It was a number called 'Time on My Hands.'" It was inspiration, and with a fresh outlook he called up the University of Arizona and explained his situation. After a meeting with the dean, he enrolls as a 32-year-old man, but moves into the dorms with 18-year-old kids.

Stu is motivated and trying to work hard, studying as often as possible in his room. One day, some of the kids are drinking and throwing basketballs down the hallways, making it impossible to study. Stu isn't happy. "And finally, I grabbed one by the throat as he came by my door and I said, 'You bounce that ball down the hallway one more time and I am going to bounce you down the hallway!'" The fearless boy makes a retort in regards to Stu's age, to which Stu gave an appropriate response. The next morning he's in the dean's office.

This could've signaled doom for his future, but Stu had made a connection with the dean, and they both couldn't understand why Stu had been placed with incoming freshman. He moved him to the graduate students' dorms instead, which is where he would meet Hilo, his future wife.

The two dated throughout the rest of college and she stayed in Tucson about six months after she graduated. She found a job in Denver and the two are separated. "For the first time in my life, I had met somebody that I discovered I did not want to lose," he says. He applied to the University of Colorado, got accepted and finished his education there. After Hilo's job moved the couple to Portland, Ore., they got married and it's been happily ever after ever since.

As time moved on, Stu found it difficult to find work again, so he opened up a retail tool business with Mac Tools, driving a truck daily. "I knew the tool business well," says Stu. "But I learned more from my customers than they did from me. I found the practice of diagnosing and repairing cars electronically fascinating." The couple would move to Arizona with another job transfer and while Stu still had the



tool business, his kidneys could no longer take the strain. He needed dialysis, which eventually leads to a transplant. Now he can't pass a flight physical, so he can't pilot a helicopter anymore and he was tired of the retail tool game. An opportunity arose to teach car technicians in Phoenix what his customers in Portland had taught him, so he spent a couple of years with a major manufacturer of diagnostic equipment doing just that. Then one day while putzing around on the Internet, looking at various motorcycle forums (since he was still doing motorcycle work on the side), he found the Gold Wing Road Riders Association forum. He signed up under the arrogant and appropriate screen name of "Mr. Know-It-All," and proceeded to answer the technical questions that no one else could solve. Eventually, he's told by another Member to contact Nick Hoppner, then-editor of *Wing World*, and Stu declined. But the Members were persistent, and without Stu's knowledge, they went ahead and made the connection for him. In 1998, Stu came onboard as staff and the rest is history.

A LIFE IN WORDS

Looking at the total picture, one could see why Stu might be called a curmudgeon. Sure, he's a little rough on the outside, but anyone who had gone through what he has would probably be a bit grumpy, too — possibly worse.

In the end, Stu is what he is, and that's an amazing writer with a wonderfully technical mind who expresses his thoughts as eloquently and completely as he can while sometimes fighting the urge to let folks know what he really thinks of their actions. And we wouldn't have it any other way. WW

NO RESPECT

It's Hard to be a Comic in Phoenix

Written by Kevin Whipps

It's a Saturday night in Phoenix, and people are starting to line up at the Tempe Improv to see this week's headliner. The huge crowd wraps around the top balcony and back down the stairs. Four hundred or so people pack the club on this night, plunk down a few bucks to fill the two-drink minimum and maybe have a meal. It's the kind of place where any comic would love to perform.

But one thing noticeably absent from this particular performance? Local comedians. Tonight is Saturday night, after all, and tonight is the moneymaker. Comics from the Valley get their chance for five minutes of fame on Thursday and Sunday nights when for two hours, 12 guys or girls get the chance to go on stage and make an impression on the club's owner, Dan Mer, and see if he can help skyrocket them to fame. But first, before they get a chance to even do that, they've got to work their way up.

So they start at the bottom.

THE OPENING ACT

It's a Wednesday night in Phoenix, a night that most people spend at home on the couch watching the latest reality show or sitcom. In a small bar near the heart of downtown, a mic cracks and up to a small stage walks a guy in his mid-20s wearing a shirt and tie that's so tight he looks like a sausage link with paisley wrap. He grabs the mic and says, "How's everybody doing tonight?" The people in the crowd clap.

Both of them.

It's a typical Wednesday at The Hidden House, and although it appears to be a dive bar in Central Phoenix located in a strip mall, in reality it's a dive bar in Central Phoenix located in a strip mall that also has a weekly comedy show. (Oh and $6 steaks, served complete with french fries, a roll and half a can of corn alongside whatever condiments could fit into a recycled Miller high-life bottle six-pack case.) The club is poorly lit, the stage is cobbled together from what appears to be an old door and some two-by-fours, and the stools are so uncomfortable that standing seems like a better option.

Slightly obscured from view is an oval-shaped bar that's surrounded by comics, all of whom will go up at one point or another during the night. They're the regulars at the Hidden House, the crew who's here week after week, practicing their craft and getting better — hopefully — with every punchline. Their hands alternate between holding a pencil that's furiously scribbling on a yellow pad and a glass of whatever liquor they can get comp'd.

The guy in the paisley tie started the evening in the audience, blending in with the other regulars, the only difference being a cheap micro cassette recorder that's turned on to record before he gets on stage. As the evening progresses, the audience starts to swell in size, and by 9 p.m., the Wild Turkey is flowing, the floor is packed, and everyone's having a good time.

Kirk Buckhout and Steve Maxwell are two comics who have been performing for the better part of a decade here in the Valley, and helped to start the Wednesday night shows at the Hidden House. They've heard it all before: "Why live in Phoenix? Why not move to LA?" In Buckhout's case, he did. "I moved back to Phoenix because you can do longer sets here with people who want to do comedy," Buckhout says. "If you want to be a celebrity, or an actor, you move to LA. But here we're doing it because we want to make people laugh."

THE FEATURE PERFORMER

Tucked off Third street in Old Town Scottsdale, right next to Dos Gringos and the one parking garage in the area, is The Comedy Spot. It's a Friday night, and taking cash at the door is the club's owner, Sean Dillin, a retired comic himself who now hosts shows, comedy classes and whatever else he can fit into the small room on Third. It's a nice room to be sure, with professional booths organized throughout and the standard brick wall façade behind the mic that's become the go-to design for clubs since the '80s.

The audience is led to their seats by a young kid in his 20s with spikey hair and a *Star Wars* T-shirt, who, as it turns out, is also tonight's MC. Tucked in a corner booth is a trio of loud guys who sit with a pair of attractive young girls. They'll be tonight's performers, some of them alternating between the 8 p.m. and 10 p.m. shows. The headliner has been performing for 15 years, but has been living a life in obscurity. It's not that he's not funny, because he is — in that dick/fart/pussy joke kind of way. Throughout the course of the evening, the audience is treated to a routine from a woman in her 60s about her nipples scraping the floor, a few pedophile one-liners and so many pot references that maybe next time there will be a "bring your own bong" sign on the door.

> "If you want to be a celebrity, or an actor, you move to LA. But here we're doing it because we want to make people laugh."
> — Kirk Buckhout

But there is one thing different about this show. Through all the dick jokes, the so-so service from the wait staff, and the headliner's weird resemblance to Kathy Bates, there's one standout stand-up. He's a face familiar to regulars of The Hidden House, Kirk Buckhout.

Sean Dillin is the propreitor of The Comedy Spot, a small club located in the heart of Old Town that's been steadily climbing the ladder for six years now, which is longer than a lot of the competition. "I've seen other comedy clubs, even comedy chains — Rascal's came into town and tried to make a go of it, and they lasted a year," Dillin says.

The competition has gotten pretty fierce through the years, too. "There's been a lot of things that have happened behind the scenes that a lot of people don't know about which has gone far beyond just a business rivalry. Which I don't want to really go into," Dillin says. "It's one thing to compete, businesses back and forth, it's another thing when a business seeks out ways to close another business."

But some of the comics who have worked with Dillin in the past aren't afraid to speak out about their experiences with the former stand-up.

Brian Ricci is a stand-up comic who currently works as an assistant manager for the Tempe Improv. Before he started working for Mer, he spent three years helping out at The Comedy Spot. Ricci says, "Sean would send people to try to find out — he'd even send me and say, 'See who's performing there tonight. Go see who's doing this. If they're doing that, I don't want them here.'"

Ricci though, isn't the only comic claiming this. "Do you know how many MySpace friends I've lost because of Sean? He's made them delete me," says Jill Bryan, another local stand-up comic who has a weekly show at Bongo's in Chandler. Ricci put it a little bit more bluntly: "You put somebody else in charge of that room, none of that will happen. It comes from the top, and that all feeds down."

Different rooms have different audiences, and different types of owners. Maxwell explains: "Rather than launch myself up Dan Mer's ass, or taking any of Sean Dillin's bullshit, you can still work one of those rooms without becoming one of their flying fucking monkeys."

For his part, Dillin doesn't want any part of the controversy. "I just want to keep things positive, I want to produce my shows, and that's it," he says. "If people want to be involved in soap operas, then I don't wanna be involved in that." He's not blind to the rumors, though, and wants to put them all behind him. "If anybody wants to do stand-up comedy, I've got a club, you're welcome to perform," Dillin says.

> "Rather than launch myself up Dan Mer's ass, or taking any of Sean Dillin's bullshit, you can still work one of those rooms without become one of their flying fucking monkeys."
> — Steve Maxwell

THE HEADLINER

Sunday night isn't exactly prime-time for comedy, but it's not apparent at the Tempe Improv on this particular day. And any signs of the local comedic community infighting are hard to find at first glance. The show was supposed to start at 8 p.m., but by 8:30 the stage is still dark and people were still loading into the building, filling up the balcony. It's time for the Comedy Draft, a monthly event where a hat is passed around the audience and anyone who wants a chance to wow the crowd is given five minutes to showcase their skills. It's a popular event that seems to bring out all sorts. To the left of the stage, about five tables back, a couple is receiving their dessert, a freshly baked cookie with vanilla ice cream melting over the top that looks delicious. Adjacent to them is another table that's packed with people, laughing hysterically even before the show starts. As the evening goes on, everyone at the table goes up to perform — except for two very familiar looking people.

Two of the comics from The Hidden House.

It's not a stunning revelation to say the Tempe Improv is the biggest club in the Valley, and it's maintained it's popularity by providing a family-friendly environment. Which is a way of business that not every comic sees eye to eye on. Some even go so far as to voice their opinions. Loudly.

Buckhout isn't a fan of the comedy performed at the Improv. "It's the Applebee's of comedy," Buckhout says. "The local people they put up — they'll put up the 'wacky weather guy' Brad Perry. The only way that's going to be more offensive is if they put blackface on top of his black face." Buckhout has appeared on the Improv's stage, but the act he performed there wasn't really his best work. That routine is a little more … blue.

One of the problems, it seems, is that the easy way to get laughs is to curse and swear. After all, dick jokes get reactions. "A lot of the young comics are so blue and so dirty and not clever, not funny. I wanna see a — I love Jerry Seinfeld. He does not use a swear word. I love Brian Regan. He does not use a single swear word," says Mer. "I also — my favorite comic in the world was Richard Pryor. I loved Lenny Bruce. I loved George Carlin. But those guys were genius when they used that language. They didn't use that language before they were doing stand-up for 20 years.

"Because we have standards and because we care about comedy, it means you've got to be funny," says Mer. "You have to understand, at some point somebody's got to take responsibility for what goes on that stage, and that's me."

ENCORE

It takes a long time to work up way through the ranks as a comedian, and there are lots of hurdles to jump along the way. At the beginning, there are clubs like the Hidden House that may not spring to mind as being great places to perform, but they do have good crowds. After spending some time trolling clubs, a stand-up can work their way into the smaller clubs, like The Comedy Spot, and if they're good enough, the Tempe Improv. Everyone has a different idea of what's funny, but when a comic figures it out, the world is their oyster.

Buckhout is one of those comics. He's worked for seven years now, and he's found an act that works well for him. It may not be clean enough for the Improv, but that's OK with him. He's in it for the love of the art, and ultimately, that's the most important thing.

All of this leads back to the original question: Why stay in Phoenix, with it's hierarchical club war and constant competition? According to the comics and club owners, while LA has the celebrities and Vegas has the casino crowd, here in Phoenix, it's all about the comedy.

WANT TO CATCH SOME LOCAL COMICS DOING THEIR THING?

The Tempe Improv Comedy Draft 930 E. University, Tempe | 480.921.9877 www.tempeimprov.com | September 28 @ 9 p.m. | $10 Admission

Arizona Joe's Monthly Monday Comedy Show 417 S. Winchester Rd., Apache Junction | 480.983.6115 | September 22 @ 8 p.m. | Free Admission

Bongo's 4080 W. Ray Rd., Chandler | 480.831.0000 | Tuesdays @ 8 p.m. Free Admission

The Comedy Spot 7117 E. 3rd Ave., Scottsdale | www.thecomedyspot.net Last Sunday of the month, 6 p.m., 8 p.m., & 10p.m. | $10 Admission

The Hidden House 607 W. Osborn Rd., Phoenix | 602.214.4482 Wednesdays @ 8:30 p.m. | Free Admission | Special appearance by Thai Rivera, Thursday, September 25 @ 8:30 p.m. | $5 cover

JJ's Cantina 409 N. Scottsdale Rd., Scottsdale | 480.990.3477 | Fridays @ 8:30 p.m. | $5 Admission