

Photo courtesy of RHS.

racing, where everyone believes they have a better idea.

"Everyone is looking for a niche market that no one else is serving," added Fred Seay of Donovan Engineering, Torrance, California. "Everyone wants their engine a little different, and our goal is to make them happy. If you can think of it, we've probably already made it for someone."

"Engine block designs are also defined by the specific type of racing," added Gary Allison, also of Donovan Engineering. "You'll see major differences between a sprint car small block and a Late Model small block; and between a normally aspi-

PERFORMANCE

ENGINE BLOCKS, SLEEVES, BEARINGS &

TODAY'S racing engines require aftermarket engine blocks—and not only because the salvage yard blocks were exhausted years ago. "We've used up the capabilities of the factory blocks," commented Richard Maskin of Dart Machinery, Troy, Michigan. "We've overwhelmed them with horsepower and engine speed."

"Small blocks of 454 to 500 cid have become commonplace," added Kevin Feeney of RHS, Memphis, Tennessee, "and 700-plus horsepower on pump gas is easily achievable. Superchargers are boosting horsepower to over 1000 even at the street level. These trends have pushed the aftermarket to develop blocks that are long-stroke and big-bore friendly, and that have the additional strength to handle the higher horsepower, torque, and associated load on the crankcase—which is the foundation of the engine."

"It's always been about making more power, and doing it reliably," observed Rick Wilkinson of Alan Johnson Performance Engineering (AJPE), Santa Maria, California. "As power levels and engine speeds increase, so does the need for a block that can handle these requirements. And now customers are asking for new block designs in lightweight versions—making more power with less weight—today's primary goals."

Even where OE blocks are still available, "in a lot of cases, the cost to modify these blocks to suit the racers' needs has come closer to the cost of a true aftermarket block," noted Mike Schropp of Livernois Motorsports, Dearborn Heights, Michigan. True racing blocks are now more affordable, he added, and this, in conjunction with "the need for more robust blocks with more features, has pushed the aftermarket to release more new blocks than in years past."

Engines à la carte

Still, aftermarket blocks offer even more than additional strength and sophistication. They offer choices. And that's a huge factor in the highly competitive world of

rated big block and a blown big block for drag racing. Each of these applications requires a specific casting, with flexibility in the design to accommodate a variety of optional features. From our perspective, every block ordered is a custom block, even if it's configured as a stock replacement."

Last year we described in some detail Dart's cast iron LS Next block. Now Dart has released the LS Next in cast aluminum. It is available with standard deck height and cam location, raised deck and cam, and standard deck with raised cam. (Maskin pointed out that a raised cam may be required even with the stock stroke if aluminum rods are specified; aluminum rods tend to be bulkier than steel rods.) Among the most notable features of Dart's LS Next blocks is elimination of the Y-block style crankcase skirts, in favor of conventional-style main caps. This is just one part of a total re-engineering of the oiling system. "It is very frugal regarding how much oil it needs at high engine speeds," Maskin added. Dart also offers

DISCOVER HOW TODAY'S ENGINE BLOCKS HAVE ADVANCED TO MEET GREATER POWER DEMANDS AND ENGINE SPEEDS OF RACE ENGINES, ALONG WITH NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN SLEEVES, BEARINGS AND MAIN CAPS.

the LS Next in billet.

Additionally, Dart has “re-introduced all of our cast aluminum blocks—small block Ford, small block Chevy and big block Chevy. We’ve built new tools for some of them, and rebuilt the tools for others. But as horsepower levels have gone up, we’ve made changes in our alloys and in our heat-treats. We’ve worked with a small foundry in Ohio to get the rings to seal and stay sealed as well as they do in an iron block—and that’s using a conventional sleeve,” he said.

In cast iron, Dart has released the Little M 305 for the RaceSaver Sprint Series. “There are over 1000 RaceSaver Sprint cars running in the US and Canada,” Maskin continued, “and as you can

fastener size to increase clamping forces in high-boost applications.”

Meanwhile, RHS continues to develop its LS block, which was “designed from its inception to be long-arm friendly,” said Feeney. “The rest of the infrastructure and features were designed around that concept. The cam is raised, and the priority main oiling system was designed to accommodate the demands of a large-displacement engine. Overall strength, improved deck rigidity, and head gasket retention were also targeted to withstand the demands of boosted applications; while a thick deck surface and the LSX six-bolt head-bolt pattern help contain higher cylinder pressures.”

Additional features include dry sump capability and provisions for piston oilers. “We also added material to the casting to allow custom machining for features such as larger cam tunnels and lifter bores, and the cylinders can be rough-bored or finish-honed. All of our blocks are cast from aircraft-quality 357-T6 aluminum, and feature spin-cast iron liners for improved ring sealing; these liners are pressed in and serviceable,” Feeney added.

Jack McInnis of PBM-Erson-World in Louisville, Kentucky, described World Products’ Motown LS block as “a hybrid LS/SBC block that makes it easier and less costly to build an engine using the LS cylinder head design. The cylinder heads are where the power is made, and our Motown LS block allows the use of LS heads; but because its

PLATFORMS

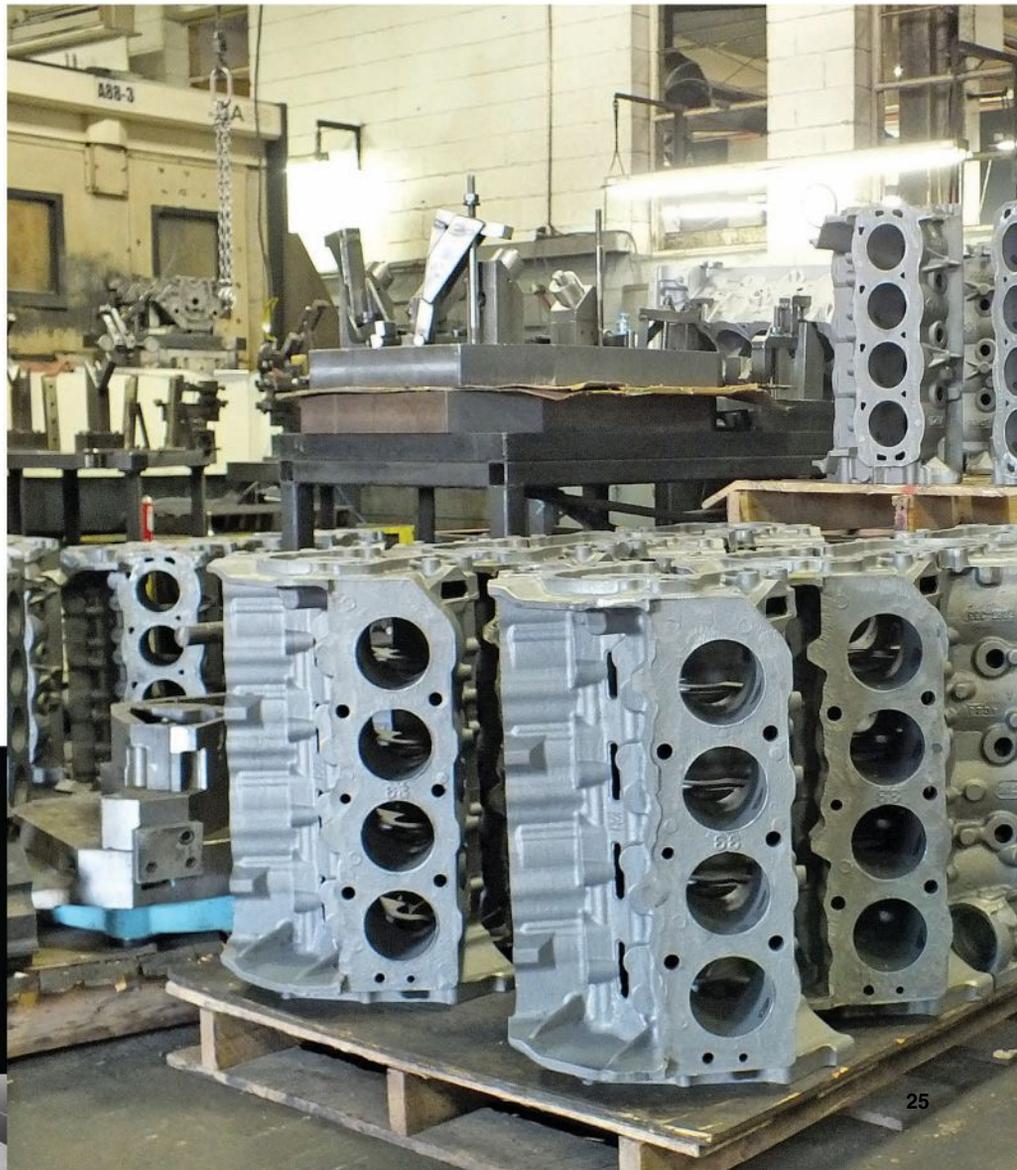
BY JOHN F. KATZ

MAIN CAPS

imagine, the world is running out of 305 blocks. So sooner or later they are going to need a Little M 305. And now NHRA has approved our Little M, Big M and SHP blocks for Super Stock and Stock Eliminator.” The SHP is Dart’s most popular block, and for 2014 it adds the option of 400 mains as an alternative to the standard 350s. Dart also offers a Pro version with steel main caps and larger cam and lifters. As for iron big blocks, Dart offers 17 of them, plus variations—“a replacement for every iron big block Chevy that General Motors ever made.”

New from RHS is a solid version of its own LS aluminum block, in both standard and tall deck heights, which Feeney called “a cost-effective alternative to a billet block for all-out drag race applications. Eliminating the water jacket provides additional strength throughout the block, and we’ve increased the head stud

Aftermarket engine blocks have become a necessity in auto racing due to today’s overwhelming horsepower and engine speeds. For example, one block manufacturer reported how small blocks of 454 to 500 cid have become commonplace, and 700-plus horsepower on pump gas is easily achievable. Superchargers, meantime, are boosting horsepower to over 1000 even at the street level. Photo courtesy of Dart Machinery.





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ENGINE BLOCKS, SLEEVES, BEARINGS & MAIN CAPS

bottom end is standard small block Chevy, it also accepts the huge assortment of readily available—and affordable—SBC cranks, rods, bearings, oil pans and accessories. This also means that it can be easily installed in any chassis where a small block Chevy fits, without all the conversion hardware that an LS engine would require. Additionally, the standard SBC pan rails and sump eliminate the high-rpm windage issues associated with the LS platform—offering superior oil control from proven components.”



Aftermarket blocks provide a wide variety of options for today's race engine builder, according to one contact, and aftermarket block manufacturers can now listen to engine builders and evolve their blocks according to their wishes. Indeed, many of the latest block evolutions have come from engine builders' and racers' suggestions, providing a wealth of choices when assembling race engines. Photo courtesy of Alan Johnson Performance Engineering (AJPE).

The cam location in the Motown LS is raised .134 inch, to allow the use of a 55 mm camshaft. “Raising the cam also provides clearance for a 4.000-inch stroke and H-beam connecting rods,” McInnis added. “So it is now possible to build 440 cubic inches, using the appropriate components for a high-horsepower application.” A special camshaft is required, because of the differences in valvetrain layout between traditional SBC and LS-style heads. However, Erson Cams carries these special stock cam cores, so a custom-made core is not required. World Products also manufactures cast iron blocks for traditional small and big block Chevrolets and small block Fords.

Jason Neugent of Brodix in Mena, Arkansas, has seen demand grow slowly but steadily for the company's 8B 5000 five-inch-bore-spacing big block. “Some

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of the racers are up to 700 cubic inches now, and our block will go to just over 800 cubic inches." Brodix also offers aluminum blocks in standard SBC and BBC configurations, as well as a small block with 4.500-inch bore centers.

Concerning special features and options, Neugent said, "That's what separated us from everybody else years ago—that we didn't make just one cookie-cutter block. We would do special work for any of our race team or engine-builder customers. Then we noticed that most 410 sprint car teams wanted the same options and modifications, so we put all of those things together under one part number and created a dedicated 410 sprint block." Features include side-water reverse cooling, priority main oiling, front oil scavenging, a solid front water pump housing, 9.020 deck, a 55 mm raised roller cam housing, and .904 lifter bores with the lifter oil gallery raised .100.

The newest blocks from Ford Racing in Dearborn, Michigan, are both members of the Coyote breed. "The M-6010-M50 is a stock block that fills the need for about 85 percent of our high-performance customers," said Tom Detloff, "while the M-6010-M50R has some water jacket refinements that improve deck strength in highly boosted applications."

That said, "the foundation of Ford's pushrod crate engine business" continues to be the iron Boss series blocks, available in 302 and 351 configurations, the latter with a choice of 9.200 or 9.500 deck height. "The Boss series covers a wide spread of applications," Detloff continued. "The oiling circuit is similar to the design we used in NASCAR prior to the FR9. They can be bored to achieve a 460 cid Windsor-based engine. They are used in many professional racing series, including Australian V8 Super Cars. And they are the only replacement blocks available from Ford for Ford's traditional pushrod small block engine families."

Ford's only aluminum small block is the M-6010-Z351, which is based on the 9.500-inch deck height of the 351 Windsor, and forms the foundation for Ford's 427 cid aluminum crate engines.

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And for four-cylinder racers, Ford offers the M-6010-16K and M-6010-16L, new and stronger castings of the Kent and Lotus blocks, respectively.

Building with Billet

For all the options now available on cast blocks, with billet, the opportunities for innovation are endless. "A billet block is limited only by your imagination," said Maskin. "To change a cast block, you have to change the tooling. With a billet block, all you change is the program.

"And billet is much stronger," he continued. "Tensile strength for plain-vanilla aluminum billet is in the 35,000 psi range, but we have alloys that exceed 60,000 psi. And a billet block has ductility, which means it will bend an awful long way before it will break. That's a huge advantage in an off-road truck, where the engine is part of the chassis and the vehicle has three wheels off of the ground most of time. And now dirt modifieds are starting to use billet blocks. The cost is higher in the beginning, but they are looking at cost over a long period of time."

AJPE has introduced two new billet blocks for 2014. "First, our new 'Light' Hemi block was designed to address the competing concerns of increased power and weight reduction," said Mark A. Meza. "We were able to remove approximately 15 pounds from our original design without compromising any critical areas, such as the main line and cylinder bore areas. We designed a 65 mm cam core to correspond with a spread-lifter-bore option, which allows for the larger intake ports that are demanded by NHRA, PDRA, Outlaw Pro-Modified classes.

"Second, our 'Light' 481X block is 90 percent complete," as of late June, he said. "It is completely interchangeable with our current block design, and will be offered with 10.000- or 10.400-inch deck heights, plus a 65 mm cam tunnel and 4.560-inch bore-center options."

The two new blocks join AJPE's line of Chrysler-based Hemi blocks and Chevrolet-based 481X blocks. "We offer the Hemi in multiple configurations," Meza continued, "depending on specific use, along with class and rule requirements."

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Deck heights of 10.225, 10.725 and 10.825 are available, with cam tunnels from 2.125 inch to 65 mm, and lifter diameters from .904 to 1.062. Bore sizes range from 4.187 up to 4.500. The standard 481X block is offered with 10.000- or 10.400-inch deck heights, a 2.125 or 65 mm cam tunnel, and .904 or .937 keyway lifters; and can accommodate bore sizes from 4.440 to 4.560.

Amateur vs. Professional?

Despite all of this specialization, very few of the manufacturers we contacted differentiate between engine blocks for professional racers versus sportsman—or even street enthusiasts. “We don’t have a street version,” said Neugent of Brodix. “All of our blocks are built with the same technology. You can buy one to use on the street, but it’s going to be the same block we’d sell you to go racing.”

“We do not sacrifice quality for cost,” emphasized Bill Mitchell of Bill Mitchell Products (BMP), Ronkonkoma, New York. “We make one version that fits all, from street performance to professional racing. Our aluminum blocks feature a 357 T6 material—the strongest—and ARP main cap hardware. Billet steel main caps are pinned in place by a ring dowel around the inner studs, in addition to the OE pan rail registers.” Additional features include cross-lifter oiling through center valley ribs, centrifugally cast ductile iron cylinder sleeves, “and last but not least, we machine all our blocks to factory specs, leaving very little machine shop work to be done before assembly. Unlike some other brands, we do not leave certain specs tall or small and say it’s to give the engine builder flexibility.”

“The differences between the blocks we provide for the amateur classes and the higher-end professional classes are largely a matter of features and options,” said McInnis. “Amateur racers are generally more concerned with cost, and do not require such high-end features as billet steel main caps, main studs, and cam and lifter upgrades.”

Donovan’s Norm Woodruff believes the differences—or lack thereof—are “all about competition versus cost. Even the

well-funded teams want the best bang for the buck,” while “the smart people know that cheap parts get you bad results. Using the best materials and processes makes our blocks expensive in the short term and cost-effective in the long run.”



If a race engine building shop does not already offer cylinder sleeving, this is one business opportunity to investigate further. One sleeve manufacturer explained, “Any shop that has the ability to bore blocks should consider sleeving. There’s still some apprehension out there, but nowadays it’s unfounded. Once you’ve learned to install cylinder liners with confidence, you’ll add another profit center to your machine shop. Practice on broken blocks. The profits will come.” Photo courtesy of LA Sleeve.

Modified Stock

At the same time that aftermarket blocks are proliferating, so are blocks from the OEMs—and that creates a growing demand for modifications to support racers running this newest generation of stock engine blocks.

Livernois Motorsports modifies OE blocks for applications where no aftermarket block is yet available—“newer platforms,” said Schropp, “such as the Ford Raptor 6.2, Coyote and Boss 5.0, and EcoBoost V6; as well as GM’s newer Gen 5 LT1 block. We’ve heavily modified all of these with bigger cubes, thicker and stronger sleeves, main cap modifications, etc.” Livernois also modifies the Ford Modular 4.6 (in aluminum and cast iron); the Ford Shelby GT 5.4; and the GM 6.0, 6.2, 7.0, LSX and RHS blocks. “Our Street Series blocks benefit from standard machine operations to increase both performance and durability,” but retain standard oiling, and standard bore sizes and

ENGINE BLOCKS, SLEEVES, BEARINGS & MAIN CAPS

stroke capabilities, while “our Pro Series has considerably more modification, including aftermarket sleeves, larger displacements, clearance for stroker cranks, and modified oil systems.”

Sleeves

“With the increase in new block designs,” noted Jeff Zaugg of Advanced Sleeve, Mentor, Ohio, “we are seeing daily requests for improved materials, along with exacting specifications from engine builders to meet their customers’ demands for increased performance with durability. We offer a complete range of cylinder sleeves for all current and non-current automotive engines. Our manufacturing processes allow us to design and manufacture customer-specific sleeves in a timely manner, to meet or exceed the expectations of engine builders large and small.”

Additionally, Dave Metchkoff of LA Sleeve, Santa Fe Springs, California, reported “a resurgence in building race engines using OE blocks, such as the Ford Coyote, GM LS, and Porsche 996.” Engine builders know that OE sleeves may not be up to the rigors of racing, “so we’re sleeving brand new blocks before they ever see gasoline. We use a centrifugally spun cast ductile iron far superior to the OEM material. So engine builders are installing our sleeves to reduce stress on their builds—and on themselves.”

Darton International of Carlsbad, California, “supports the aftermarket engine manufacturers with continuing new technology, new products and creative engineering,” said Dave Clinton, “to withstand the rigors of today’s ultra-high horsepower and high cylinder pressures.” A cylinder sleeve may not constitute the entire combustion containment vessel—the head has to do its part—but the sleeve is major wear surface and, in combination with the block, must contain the combustion forces within its own cylindrical shape. To accommodate these very high pressures, and to avoid bore distortions, which could cause leakage, Darton heat-treats its sleeves to be harder in the upper region, where their tall flanges meet in a “siamesed” interference fit, helping them

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resist combustion forces.

Clinton pointed to the new Ford Coyote block, which, while marketed as a performance piece, was also engineered for minimum weight to help achieve fuel economy goals. "Unfortunately, that kind of design impedes the racers' desire for more, bigger and stronger. At the 2013 PRI Trade Show we were inundated with Ford enthusiasts wanting improvements to the Coyote block. So with the blessings and assistance of Ford Racing, we engineered a new MID kit for the Coyote block, and shipped the first unit to a Ford-sponsored racer."



Today's sleeve manufacturers are working more closely than ever with engine block manufacturers. For example, Darton Sleeves has been selected by Dart Machinery to provide MID kits for its LS Next block, as well as its small block Chevy. Dart now offers its customers the option of a conventionally sleeved block or Darton's MID block for an increase in potential output of up to 2500 horsepower. Seen here is a Dart LS block that has been machined to fit Darton's MID sleeve. Photo courtesy of Darton Sleeves.

(It is worth explaining again that Darton's patented MID technology—for Modular Integrated Deck—requires the original cylinder bores, and all the block material between them, to be machined out and replaced with self-supporting wet cylinder sleeves.)

"Darton has also been selected by Dart Machinery to provide MID kits for their LS Next block," Clinton continued, "as well as for their ageless small block Chevy."

Race Engine Development, Oceanside, California, is closely aligned with Darton Sleeves, and is one of the patent holders of Darton's line of MID sleeves.

"MID (Modular Integrated Deck) sleeves are high strength ductile iron wet liners as opposed to the more common pressed

Continued on page 41

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continued from page 36

or cast fragile gray iron dry liner, which is used in most production aluminum engine blocks," said Steve Demirjian. "A wet liner is self-supporting where a dry liner relies on the surrounding aluminum engine blocks.

"A wet liner is in direct contact with engine coolant, increasing heat transfer and it is sealed to the block via O-rings at the crankcase end," he continued. "They can be removed and replaced fairly easily. The MID wet liner can be made the same outside diameter as the original cast aluminum cylinder wall, which is the reason for the greatly increased strength. The ductile iron used in Darton sleeves approaches a tensile strength of 130,000 psi, which is more than three times the strength of the aluminum or gray iron used in production engine blocks."

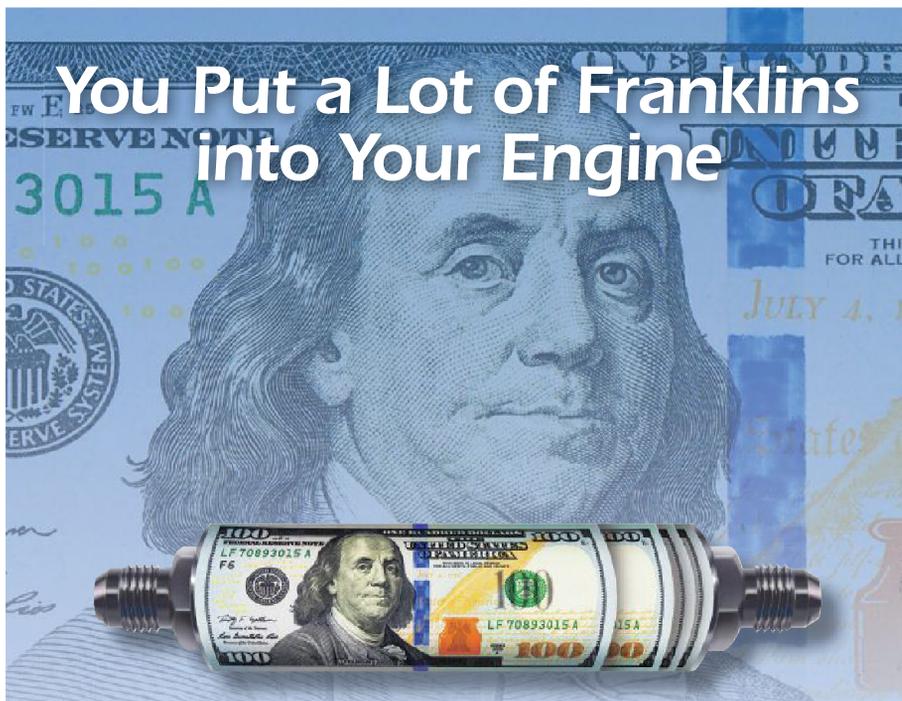
Race Engine Development has developed a few new designs this past year, including an MID sleeve kit for the Subaru BRZ, Scion FR-S two-liter engine.

"Next was the MID sleeve kit for the Ford Coyote 5 liter engine block as an option to the already available flanged Darton dry liner for the Coyote," he added.

Race Engine Development offers flanged ductile iron dry liners for Dodge Viper engine blocks, Gen II, III and IV, "which will increase the bore size to 4.080 inches for the Gen II and III and to 4.125 inches in the Gen IV," Demirjian said.

Metchkoff emphasized the business opportunity offered by cylinder sleeving. "Any shop that has the ability to bore blocks should consider sleeving. There's still some apprehension out there, but nowadays it's unfounded. Once you've learned to install cylinder liners with confidence, you'll add another profit center to your machine shop. Practice on broken blocks. The profits will come."

And so, presumably, will more new aftermarket blocks. Still, Mitchell cautions customers to keep their expectations realistic. "People always ask, 'How light is the block?'" as if that should be a determining factor—and yet their next question is, 'How much horsepower is the block good for?' You can't have light and strong. At some point one outweighs the other." 



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