

Shift Motors finds pre-owned success with niche Tesla, Lotus markets



Independent pre-owned dealership Shift Motors specializes in luxury and sport vehicles, including the BMW, Tesla and Lotus nameplates. Photos courtesy of Shift Motors.



By Sarah Rubenoff, Correspondent

BURLINGTON, Ontario — From the day he got his driver's license, Paul Repar has been directly involved in the automotive business. On that same day, the now president of Burlington, Ontario's Shift Motors also bought his first car — a 1988 Mustang 5.0L — and went to work for Meray Mercedes Oakville as a co-op student to launch his auto career.

"And I haven't looked back in the 25 years since," Repar told *Auto Remarketing Canada*.

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Repar's focus on luxury vehicles started early on in his career, too.

interested in alternative brands and ideas, such as electric vehicles, "first and foremost being Lotus as a lightweight, reliable and economic vehicle with supercar performance," he said.

Knowing he couldn't "dabble" in off-makes while working for BMW, he decided to take the plunge and start his own dealership.

And Shift Motors was born. But Repar didn't fully remove his BMW hat. In fact, the Shift Motors president said his "BMW connection" was one of the most important factors in the store's early success.

"Having the relationships with BMW Canada and many of its franchised stores gave me access to first-run automobiles, namely off-lease, late-model trade-ins and corporate employee demos, so I always had very clean and desirable cars on the lot," said Repar.

He also developed relationships with the Lotus stores in Canada and is able to procure trade-ins for his own stock from these stores.

The Tesla effect

Shift Motors also specializes in Teslas — a unique offering for a pre-owned store, or dealership in general, considering Tesla's well-known direct-to-consumer model.

When asked about the program, Repar said that as much as he had always been interested in electric mobility, he always figured his car-enthusiast client base would be turned off by the lack of clutch and stick shift in most EVs.

But then in 2014 at the Toronto Auto Show, Repar visited the Tesla booth and investigated the impressive new luxury EVs. This led to the test drive of a lifetime for Repar.

"I'll never forget the roller coaster thrill of being planted in my seat by the incredible and near silent acceleration unlike anything I had ever experienced before," he said.

Having driven Teslas almost exclusively for five years, Repar says he never want to drive

anything else ever again on a day-to-day basis.

"I tell almost each and every client through my door that I plan to sell them a Tesla one day, and if not this time, the next time around perhaps," Repar said. "Even those clients who are not really 'car people' and may be in buying a Mini Cooper for purely economical and practical reasons, get a bit of my enthusiasm for Tesla rubbed off on them, especially if time allows for a proper demonstration."

Repar even tells customers how he rents out his personal Tesla Model X 100D through car sharing marketplace Turo to production companies for film and TV series to offset the upfront cost of the vehicle.

"This helps to overturn the high price tag argument," he added.

A 'massive appetite' for vehicles

As for the market for luxury, rare, pre-owned vehicles, Shift Motors seems to attract customers whose preferences mirror those of its employees and management.

"We at Shift Motors are all enthusiasts. And by carrying primarily fun, sporty, rare and leading edge vehicles ... we attract that same kind of enthusiast client base, which in turn creates an environment that is friendly and completely non-pressure," Repar explained.

He added there is a "massive appetite" in his market for the types of vehicles the store carries. And although the store is located "somewhat off the beaten track," according to Repar, word-of-mouth, referrals and repeat clientele keep the dealership busy.

Repar explained Tesla's "cult-like status" also renders marketing efforts virtually unnecessary.

And models like the Lotus Elise have actually been increasing in value over the years, says Repar, which will play a role in getting these customers back in the dealership in the

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STORE: SHIFT MOTORS
LOCATION: BURLINGTON, ONTARIO
WEBSITE: SHIFTMOTORS.COM

"My first boss at Mercedes was the wholesale manager who turned me on to BMW, and I was hooked ... I personally owned over 25 BMWs on and off over the years even before starting my own business," Repar said.

And he knows the lines well, having owned everything from a 1978 BMW 528i to most recently, a 2016 BMW M2.

Not surprisingly, his career eventually led to a sales position at Downtown BMW in Toronto, and on to a BMW Canada sales position in the then-newly built BMW Toronto.

But as much as Repar loved the BMW brand, he was also becoming more and more

coming years and in a new vehicle.

"So when I can offer a client everything back that he paid for one year later when he is ready to upgrade or try something else, it keeps the cycle going and almost always eliminates the loss of a deal due to deflated trade values," Repar shared.

Social media and messaging is "huge" for the dealership, Repar said. Shift Motors also offers a specialized monthly newsletter for shoppers interested in Lotus or Tesla that previews upcoming inventory and offer newsletter subscriber-only benefits — once again catering to the store's unique niche market.

As for how the dealership works to stand out in the market as an independent store, Repar says it comes down to specializing in "enthusiast and unique" vehicles.