

Todd Hanson

Wauseon, Ohio

Most people who read *SignCraft* are familiar with Todd Hanson's work. His award-winning, almost-over-the-edge vehicle graphics have been featured in calendars, car and truck magazines and of course, *SignCraft*. It's been over six years now since



Todd was first featured in our magazine, so when it came time to begin working on this "Follow-Up" article, we naturally thought we'd catch him in the middle of one of his "convex striping" jobs [see *SignCraft*'s "Pinstriper's Corner", Jul/Aug 1993] or something like that.

But Todd isn't one to get in a rut, as evidenced by the first thing he said when we asked him what he'd been up to: "I've been sandblasting all morning! Gosh, I went through 500 pounds of sand! What a monster job. It was starting to get kinda tiring (laughter). It's nice out, though, about 50 degrees and sunny. This is the first blasting I've done in almost six months. It's not something that's real popular in my area, but peo-

ple are starting to find out about it. Even though we're not a tourist area, local people go on trips and see sandblasted signs and they come back and say, 'Hey, Todd, can you do this stuff?'

"But I don't do enough of it to warrant having my own equipment. There's an autobody shop about 20 minutes away who lets me use their blasting stuff—he's got a big blaster that runs on a V-8 motor. It can be a pain, but I like blasting. It's fun. I know a lot of guys ship it out and have somebody else do it, but I like to have my hands on all that stuff. It's a lot of work, but hey, it's better than sticking vinyl on signs."

What's new Since that first article ran in issue #42, Todd has learned a lot about himself, the business and the work he wants to do. He's also planning on building a new shop, and hopefully getting a new shop truck.

When asked what he's looking for in a new shop, Todd says the main thing he needs is more space, not a better location. "My shop is the garage behind our house, and I've worked out of it long enough to know I want to work at home. It's like today, for instance, I knew



I had to be home at 3:15 'cause that's when the kids get off the bus. I told them I'd be working here in the shop this afternoon, and I'd rather have 'em come here than to go to a babysitter. So what I'll do is just tear down the old place and build a new shop right here.

"The trick is going to be scheduling all the subcontractors as tight as I can so I don't have to interrupt my own schedule that much. Maybe I'll work it out so that I have a week of vacation, and schedule the next week of work out of the shop. I do a lot of my work away from the shop these days, so it's no big deal."

His current shop, a crowded 20 by 20 ft., will ideally be replaced by a 24 by 48 ft. He's not looking for something that will accommodate a semi; he just wants enough space to work comfortably. "Take tomorrow, for instance," says Todd. "I've got to drive to a town 20 miles south of here to do an enclosed trailer that's 20 ft. long and 8½ ft. tall. It's getting colder out, so I can't do it in my driveway. The guy's got a warm shop that I can work in, but still, you've got to get all your stuff together, load up the truck and go there. One of the biggest advantages of a bigger shop would be cutting back on travel time."

The fun projects Over the past few years Todd has tried to specialize. His favorite—and most profitable—work is vehicle graphics and custom hand-lettered signs. His efforts to focus on these areas have paid off, because he estimates that he has turned down more work this year than he actually did in his first full year of business. All of this year he has been booked at least a month or a month and a half in advance. "Vehicles take up a lot of my work now—I'd guess somewhere around 75 percent. And that's good for me because it's what I like doing. I get bored real, real easy—I don't like projects that take a long time. The fun projects for me are the ones where I'm constantly creating.

"I've been very fortunate in that people are willing to wait for me to do their work. I've had people say, 'We could have it done quicker over here, but we like the way you do your stuff, so we want you to do it.' I really couldn't ask for anything better than that."

One thing that has taken off for Todd over the past few years has been the graphics work he's doing for a nearby semi-truck dealership. He explains: "The whole deal came up through word of mouth. One of their customers had me do the lettering and striping on his new semi-tractor. When he took it back for service, one of the salesmen saw it and thought it was kinda neat. So they got hold of me, and I've been working there at least

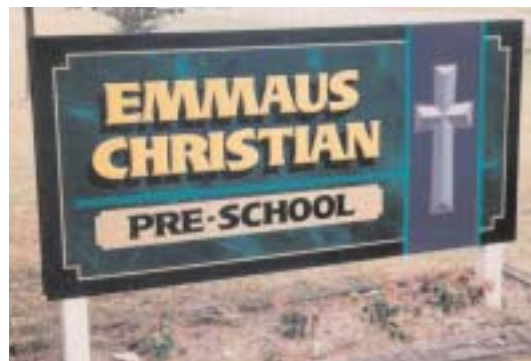


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one, sometimes two days a week ever since. They've turned into a real nice account. Eighty-five percent of what I do there is stripping. I do some lettering, but mostly what they want me to do is stripe the trucks they have in stock. It's really fun, because it's taught me how to work faster. Used to be I'd do one truck in a day and be kind of tired. Now, though, I'll stripe three or four trucks in a day—but that's starting early and ending late, about a 14-hour day.

Even though I'm doing more vehicles now than I ever have, I'm still as critical of my work as I was 10 years ago. I look at things like this truck I did yesterday—I had a blast on it. It was a black semi, and I blended some pinks together to get some scallops and I threw some purples on there and put a blue dry-brush thing in the middle. The guys there in the garage came over when it was finished and were telling me how good it looked and all of a sudden I thought, 'Aagh! I screwed the whole thing up! I shoulda used orange there instead, and it would have just exploded right off the side!' I'm picking my work apart all the time, but that's just me."

Looking back "Just the other day I was look-



ing through that first article," Todd recalls, "and I kind of chuckled to myself because I said something in there about not being much of a talker. Well, you had caught me in the first year of being in business on my own. Everything was still in the scary stage because in the beginning, you're not really sure what you're doing or which way you're going. But now I don't worry about things as much as I used to. In fact, I think too many people have a tendency to worry just about making money. Of course, everybody has to have money to survive, but if you do good work and charge a fair price, the people will come to you and the money will take care of itself. I think people panic too much. I used to be that way when I was younger—sometimes you just can't see an end to starvation (laughter).

"Now Vickie and I have three kids, more responsibilities, and more time is taken away from me at work. But I've actually tried to take more vacations and get away from the work more often. It has helped keep me a little more fresh. I was really burnt out there for a while—I just worked all the time, all the time, all the time. It started not being fun. So now I just try to enjoy life. Over the past few years, Vickie's been through some very serious health problems. You take a different attitude once you've experienced difficulties in life. Happiness means a lot to me—I want to see the kids happy, and I want to be happy.

"I think there are too many people who live just for signs. They don't think of anything else. Let's face it; there's a heckuva lot more to this world than if you've got a serif letter on a sign instead of block letters. Nothing's that important. That's the thing, too, with computers. It's why I don't have one yet and I don't know that I will ever get one. I'm only 33 now and I look at it this way: painting signs is what I've always liked doing. I like



drawing the design from my head, not putting something up on a monitor and all that stuff. And someday when I quit—or I don't know if I'll ever quit, I like it that much—I want to look back and say, 'I'm glad I did it this way, because I did it the way I wanted to.' I don't want to look back and see that I went out and bought a computer just because it's what everybody else was doing, and then was unhappy with what I do. That's my point about money not being the most important thing in the world."

We asked Todd what he thinks he'll be doing ten years from now, and what his biggest goals are. His answers were quick and specific: "I hope to be doing what I'm doing, and my biggest goal is to get a better camera (laughter)!"

"I'll tell you something I'm doing here this week that has me more nervous than any lettering or graphics project I've done in a long time—I'm teaching an art class for my son's 3rd grade class. The teacher and I were talking and she asked me to come in and give about an hour lesson a couple times this year on making letters and working with colors. It's kind of exciting to me, because it's a way to pass on something that you really enjoy. There might be just that one kid there that it really hits, and there you go. That's a big thing to me—teaching stuff to kids.

"That brings me to something I'd like to comment on, and that's kids and Letterheads meets. I don't see anywhere near enough young kids at Letterheads meets. I think if we want to keep our craft going, we need to get our kids involved. We can't be selfish and just overlook the youngsters who are coming up."

Next time you're at the store... "You know what's funny," says Todd, laughing, "is the way my family relates to my work. It's one of the big reasons I keep pushing myself. They really don't get too excited about anything I do. I could do the best job that has ever been in the whole state of Ohio, and I'll go, 'Hey everybody, look! Look at this one!' And what I get is this: 'Oh, Yeah. By the way, we need garbage bags next time you're at the store' (more laughter). You're constantly trying to prove yourself to your own family, because they're a bigger critic of your work than you are. I get the biggest kick out of that, because my kids are so used to seeing cars coming and going out of here. To them, it's just Dad working. It's all routine to them. To me, it's kind of a blessing that my family doesn't care all that much about what I do, because otherwise they could blow your head up way too big. It helps keep you humble." ❦

