

EYE-CATCHING UPGRADES

for Your Ride

MGP
CALIPER COVERS



Imagine you have just purchased a new vehicle, complete with all the upgrades: leather seats, sunroof, custom wheels with the new, stylish open rims. You get it all shined up in the driveway, stand back to snap the obligatory social media photo, and there, staring right back at you are these boldly out-of-place brake calipers peeking out from behind the wheel rims. They are those bulky little metal plates that you can see attached to the braking system of your vehicle.

What do you do?

Simple. You look up MGP Caliper Covers. Problem solved.

MGP is an American-based company with a manufacturing facility located in San Diego, California. After years of extensive research, the company has developed a process that allows them to take the technology used in the aerospace and recreation industries and translate that into aftermarket products for automotive enthusiasts. MGP Caliper Covers combine state-of-the-art technologies, along with 30 years of engineering experience, to offer the highest quality aftermarket parts that are held to OEM standards.

Spotlight on Business Magazine spoke with owner Mike Barland and Marketing Director Asher Stefani about the company and their unique products.



Caliper covers are a pretty specific and unique product. How did you get started in the business?

Mike: In my previous business, I was making titanium golf clubs. And at the time, I had purchased a suburban and had 22-inch wheels put on it. It was nice and we had done a few upgrades on the wheels and we put TVs in it for the kids. I washed it after installing the new wheels and sat to have a beer and admire my awesome truck, and the ugly brake calipers blatantly caught my eye immediately. I knew that there was a product out there to paint them but I didn't really want to use paint.

First of all, the paint doesn't stick well to casting — I'm a manufacturing engineer, so I know a lot about castings. And secondly, the brake dust gets everywhere.

So I sat out there and drew up what was in my head, and what I thought would work to cover the calipers. From there, I took the ideas to my facility and worked with my tooling guy. We developed some caliper cover prototypes. I tried them out and we found that making the cover itself wasn't a big deal. But the fastening attachment was where it really took some thought and effort.

The fastening mechanism was the hardest part to develop?

Mike: Yeah. I came up with this clip design, got it patented, and then after a few years, I lost my golf business. It ended up all going over to China. I had this idea already developed and I had some prototypes. So I built maybe 30 or 40 different sets for different types of vehicles. I tried them out on friends' and family's cars and things were working well. At that point I was ready to try and make a go of this.

What were your initial steps to getting the new product out into the marketplace?

Mike: I kept going to SEMA [the Specialty Equipment Market Association show] and petitioning them to add caliper covers as an accessory, which they eventually did.

Once we were about a year or so into manufacturing, I started asking Ford, GM and MOPAR for licenses. I was fortunate enough to get licensing with Ford first then GM, MOPAR, and a couple years ago we got Honda and Acura as well.

Once we got into the licensing, that helped give us a more legitimate product and we really gained a lot more attention. With the uniqueness, the fact that caliper covers change the four corners of the car and the profound visual impact they make behind each wheel — it has really taken off.

You manufacture the caliper covers in house, in San Diego?



Mike: Absolutely. My background is in manufacturing which made that part quite easy for me. We do all the development and we go right to the dealerships so we can take pictures and take measurements and make sure there's clearance from the wheels and rotors and anything else that needs to be looked at.

“I was fortunate enough to get licensing with Ford first then GM, MOPAR.”

The goal is to cover every car. I visit every dealership I can. I'm constantly trying to work out ways to get our calipers on their cars. We recently purchased a 3D scanner that has been crucial in not only expediting this process, but also producing even better fitment and we are excited about pushing harder moving forward.

That must be a tremendous number of cars! How many different types of vehicles can you put your caliper covers on at this point?

Mike: We currently have over 5,000 different vehicles which extrapolates into about 140,000 part numbers because

of the multiple sub-models, color options and licensed engraving choices.

So with your manufacturing process, it must be pretty customizable in a short period of time.

Mike: We have built a system that is very flexible, very fast and very efficient. We are really proud of that. And since we have everything in house, once we do the development, we have full control over the quality, and it also helps us turn around any custom choices that the customer wants quickly.

Let's talk about the customization for a second, what are people wanting in customization? What's trending?

Mike: It's interesting. Probably the biggest customization we do is color matching. Say somebody owns a specific vehicle, like maybe a sunburst orange Corvette, they'll often order the factory logo engraving because it matches their car. But they will also do a color match where we paint the caliper covers with an automotive paint that is an exact match to the color of their car. That is probably our highest customization request.

After that, people want a custom engraving. We do that as well, but it's all over the board. It costs an extra \$150 for a custom engraving, so that's not as popular as the painting but we still get requests to do a lot of it as well. A good example are car clubs. Their members like to upload their club logo to our website for their custom engraving and from time to time we will get some incredible custom designed artwork uploaded to be engraved from individuals as well. The custom engravings are fun and the customers love the result!

With the painting, are customers looking for the calipers to disappear in the color of the car or are they looking for them to stand out?

Mike: Actually, in most cases they are looking for the covers to stand out. For example, if you take that Corvette again, if it's orange, they may have chosen silver or black wheels. You put the orange caliper covers on the car so it really stands out and it looks like it's a part of the car. It works the other way too. If a customer has wheels that are the same color as their car, orange again for example, they can choose black, matte black or even carbon fiber to stand out behind the bright colored wheel creating a nice contrast that flows well.

I'm sure you have some great back stories on some of the customizations you have done. But you also do some charitable work for non-profit organizations. Breast cancer, for example.

Mike: Every year we get requests from some of these great organizations. Two years ago, we got the opportunity to do a full military car. We were asked to do the marines on one corner the army on another, and the navy and Air Force on

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the other two. It was a great tribute to the brave men and women in our armed forces.

Asher has gotten requests from breast cancer awareness organizations and a handful of others as well including Folds of Honor and the Chris Kyle Frog Foundation. We are happy to help where we can and donated to the Susan G. Komen foundation last year and the American Heart Association this year.

We had one lady who had won a vehicle and she was paralyzed. So they outfitted this SUV with all the things she needed to control it then called us and said "Hey, we're putting all the stuff together, will you do a custom set of caliper covers for her? We were honored to help."



You mentioned earlier that paint doesn't stick well to casting. How are your manufactured caliper covers different as to allow paint to stay on them better than standard casting?

Mike: The base material for our caliper covers is made of aluminum. You can powder coat or paint aluminum to hold up very well because it's a good clean surface for the paint or the powder coat to adhere to. It is important to have a perfect surface to start with. The paint fill is painted into the depth of the engraving, so it will never scratch off. The clips are all stainless steel and all that adds up to a long-lasting product that will hold up under any harsh conditions.

"We have built a system that is



very flexible, very fast and very efficient.”

Give me a scenario from your customer's perspective. For example, I'm a customer and I go to your website, and I find my vehicle type, what do I do? What is the process from the customer's point of view?

Asher: The first thing we must do is identify the year, make, model and sub-model of your vehicle. Say you have a 2015, Dodge, Charger, SXT. This vehicle comes with either a single or dual piston brake package so our website will ask you to confirm which one to ensure we have the information needed for an exact fitment.

Identifying the exact vehicle is a simple, yet vital first step of the process.

Once the vehicle information is entered, all the standard options will pop up including all the licensed engravings and our standard colors of red, yellow, black and matte black.

Along with the standard options, you can create a custom set of caliper covers designed exactly to your liking in a simple 4 step process.

First you choose the paint which includes standard powder coats and optional powder coats. Keep in mind, these are not color matched and they're powder coated colors, which is an industrial finish. But if you wanted an exact match, you could submit your VIN number and we would get the exact paint color and custom paint for your caliper covers to match your car perfectly.

Second you decide if you would like bolts going across the top or no bolts. They're basically faux bolts and you

can have that on your caliper covers or you can remove it. Smoother look without, a little more detail with.

Then you choose the engraving you would like whether it is licensed, optional or a custom logo that can easily be uploaded to the site. Here you can select one engraving for the front two caliper covers and a separate engraving for the back two if you would like.

Last you choose the fill color for the engraving and bolts if you chose to add them.

You can also customize the fill color in the engraving as well with the multiple options available.

As you add in all these customizations, there is a running total below to show how much the job will cost. And you can always go back and change your customizations if you want to. Our customizer allows you to see the finished product which brings peace of mind and confidence in the purchase.

They look easy enough to install but what would I do if I wasn't so mechanically inclined?

Mike: We prefer customers taking them to a tire shop. We find the tire centers are more customer oriented than a standard mechanic, so we try and steer customers toward the tire centers for installation.

Who are buying caliper covers? Are you working mostly on corporate vehicles, individuals, or is it all over the map?

Mike: It's kind of fun, we have a pretty diverse group. We are kind of blessed because the new wheel designs, even from the factory, are quite open and show the caliper. So we



have a very diverse customer base and are doing extremely well selling direct to the customer.

In one instance, I wish I had a recording of the conversation with this 70-year-old lady who wanted information on how to install the caliper covers herself!

“Every year we get requests from some of these great not-for-profit organizations.”

Asher: Yes, it's wide open at this point and I do not see that changing. Anybody with a vehicle is a potential customer which means we are barely scratching the surface of our potential here. People across the US are buying caliper covers from California to Texas to New York. The age factor is fascinating as Mike mentioned.

The average age for our customer base is between 22-55 for the majority but can easily be higher or lower as well depending on the region and vehicle type.

But the customer base is really anybody including men and women, young and old, in warm and cold weather, it is truly across the board which is incredible.

How are you getting the word out there and letting people know that you exist and you want to make their cars look better?

Asher: We started off by having our distributors and vendors do a lot of that work for us. They would be doing their advertising, whether by print or online and it was great early on. We also attend a lot of industry shows and go to SEMA every year.

We participate in numerous automotive shows across the US throughout the year to increase local awareness while having a physical presence in different areas.

The last couple years we have been pushing brand awareness online along with a revamped digital marketing and advertising strategy that is really taking off for us.

I feel we are absolutely heading in the right direction and as I said before, barely scratching the surface. We do a lot of social media work now, and Google is amazing for us as well. All the brand awareness online has made a huge difference for us and really improved our brand authority and reputation which is vital for a business to maintain continued growth.

Down the road, Amazon is going to be huge for us and we

“The last two or three years we have really been pushing brand awareness online.”



have some big plans for 2018 including some TV features on the Velocity channel which is strictly automotive, guest appearances on relevant automotive radio shows and of course having this cover story in Spotlight on Business Magazine!

Over the next few years, our goal is to continue rapid growth in the US through all the channels I mentioned and eventually work our way into international markets where MGP Caliper Covers can really take off to another level of success.

What do you do about people who come to you with an odd antique vehicle or something you haven't worked on before?

Mike: That falls into the "hot rod" category, and we can work with that but it tends to be something where the customer must call us directly. We will e-mail them a template and they will have to take some measurements and maybe shoot a couple of pictures to us so that we can figure it out. But we deal with hot-rodders directly all the time.

Are there other people out there doing what you do?

Mike: We virtually have no competition. No one else is silly enough to do all this work! First of all, I have a patent on the attachment system. And secondly, we cover so many vehicles that it would be difficult for anyone else to take on this project. And we've been doing it for 10 years.

"We virtually have no competition. No one else is silly enough to do all this work!"

Our whole goal is to give people some color and distinction behind the wheel while providing some added benefits like significantly reducing brake dust and dissipating brake heat by 15-30 degrees. We make it easy for them to order the exact set of caliper covers they want for their car. We want to make it simple and we have a great product for the \$200 price range. It's a great enhancement to the visual effect on a car for that kind of money. ●

