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# A clean, clear concept in car wash design

► *The unique glass design of Lassus BP's new car wash in Fort Wayne, Ind., is attracting customers day and night*

By Beckie Kelly

Jon Lassus Jr., construction coordinator for Lassus Bros. Handy Dandy BP in Fort Wayne, Ind., says his new glass car wash defies conventional wisdom—at least the assumption that most customers prefer to wash their cars during daylight hours.

Lassus's new car wash, which has walls constructed of 5/8 insulated glass, allows customers and drive-by motorists to see every part of the car wash while it's in use. During the evening hours, the car wash is lit by 14 different 400-watt metal halide lights installed inside it, attracting people to the newly rebuilt Lassus BP gasoline and C-store off of Interstate 69 on Dupont Road. All this during a time of day when most people would never think of washing their cars.

Lassus, a jobber who owns about 30 stores in northeastern Indiana and northwestern Ohio, employed the skills of Mike Kinslow and Norm Siegel, co-owners of U.S. Express LLC., out of Indianapolis, and Automatic Wash Co., of Greenwood, Ind., to design a car wash for his new site, which opened nearly two years ago. Kinslow and Siegel had previously designed and installed a car wash for a different Lassus site, and because of that mutually beneficial relationship, they came to Lassus when they had the idea for the revolutionary new concept.

"Jon allowed us to experiment at [the first] location, and immediately grasped the new idea," Kinslow says. "His brothers, Todd and Greg, also assisted with ideas to make the car wash even more customer-friendly. We are confident of our customers' desires, and we thought we had what the motorist wanted in our other car washes. But in this climate, you have to have a building that you can put this equipment in during the winter."

The new car wash is constructed of a



The glass car wash attracts customers around the clock.

5/8 polycarbonate roof with six panels that can be opened to release heat in the warm months. It also has entrance and exit doors that close automatically to

keep heat in during the cold months and the latest soft-cloth washers and dryers in car-wash technology.

The new 60-ft. tunnel wash, which opened in April, has four different types of washes to choose from and three different ways to pay. According to Lassus, it has surpassed his wildest expectations in sales.

## Why clear?

But Kinslow says the main reason he created what could be the first see-through outdoor car wash was to cater to the people who make up more than half of his customer base—women.

"Women are [forced to] think about security, but we've been asking them to pull their car into a dark tunnel to wash it," he says. "They couldn't possibly feel secure in this situation. Since women constitute the majority of our customers, it's imperative we make them feel comfortable."

With the new glass structure and abundant lighting, customers can see in and out and can feel safe using the car wash, day or night.

Kinslow says the see-through concept also appeals to most everyone because they are interested in watching the mechanical interworkings of the car wash.

And because the lighting during the evening hours allows unattended 24-hour usage, Lassus BP receives business







that conventionally designed car washes don't. This helped bring in \$13,000 of car wash revenues in the first month, and sales of 200,000 gallons of gasoline.

**"We've done a lot of nighttime car washes because of the lighting and design of the building," Jon Lassus of Fort Wayne, Ind., says. "You can see everything that is going on from both inside and outside the building."**

This translates into an 18% increase in sales from the highest grossing month before the car wash was open. Siegel projected that in the future, the car wash would average \$20,000 in car-wash sales per month and help bump gasoline and C-store sales accordingly.

Lassus says before he opened this car wash, he had just accepted the fact that car wash sales usually slow after the sun goes down.

"Well, we've defied conventional wisdom with that point. We've done a lot of nighttime car washes because of the lighting and design of the building," Lassus says. "You can see everything that is going on from both inside and outside the building."

The soft-cloth car wash equipment for the new structure was all manufactured by AUTECH Car Wash Systems, of Statesville, N.C., and was installed by U.S. Express Car Wash, LLC. The general contractor for the project was Burns Brothers, of Fort Wayne.

The building itself sits atop a 2-foot concrete block kneewall. The structure is made of aluminum that can be powder-coat painted. The sidewalls are constructed using insulated safety glass. This safety glass prevents the walls from shattering or becoming scratched or clouded. The roof is made of polycarbonate panels.

**Quick service**

The new car wash is hydraulically driven, not electrically, as some car washes are. This allows for a quicker, yet thorough wash.

Kinslow said most rollover washes take five to nine minutes. But the longest—and most expensive—wash on the Lassus car wash is only 80 seconds.

Because customers can continue to drive through each part of the cycle, each wash doesn't take as long as conventional car washes.

Because the car is still for only a short period of time, Kinslow estimated that the car wash can turn out 40 to 50 washes per hour, where a

lot of other rollover car washes will only perform 10 to 15.

Kinslow says he's tried to combine the speed of a conveyerized wash with the safety and consistency of a rollover wash. Because it's hydraulically driven,



AUTECH helped make the clear car wash possible with its equipment.

if one of the sidewashers comes into contact with an area on the car that it's not supposed to, it slows down or stops turning, rather than damaging that area. The machine then automatically continues with the wash process.

**What about maintenance?**

But when Siegel and Kinslow worked on the prototype for their new car wash, the first question they had in mind was how much maintenance a glass car wash would need. They decided to go with the glass despite

small reservations and were pleasantly surprised when the glass went six weeks before needing its first cleaning, despite having washed thousands of cars.

"If we didn't have the glass, it wouldn't look as nice, so we didn't ever care if the glass was a maintenance nightmare. It was going to be worth it because of the marketing aspects," Siegel says.

In fact, the success of the car wash is being attributed to its self-marketability, as Lassus has yet to finalize a design for a sign to be placed on the property advertising their newest feature. While the car wash is set back from the road and has a separate drive entrance available only from the C-store parking lot, it is clearly visible from the road, C-store and parking lot. Some people drop in just to watch it complete a cycle, Lassus says.

Customers can pay for a wash at the pump via credit card or radio frequency identification, inside the C-store or at a console as they enter the wash. The four different kinds of washes—good, better, best and supreme—range in price from \$2 to \$5 with a fill-up and \$4 to \$10 without.

"We've had nothing but positive comments," says Ed Price, manager of the store. "People are just curious, and they sometimes just want to try it once. But if we get them in there once they see the great pricing and the things it does, and they will want to come back."

The car wash has shown so much success that Lassus and U.S. Express are already looking at four different sites for future duplication of their new car wash.

"We think that we have got a concept that is doable, and we were very protective of it," Siegel says. "We have started the first one here and are convinced we can make this thing work anywhere."

*AUTECH Car Wash Systems can be reached at (800) 438-3028. U.S. Express Car Wash LLC., can be reached at (800) 204-4358. Burns Brothers can be reached at (800) 736-2650.*