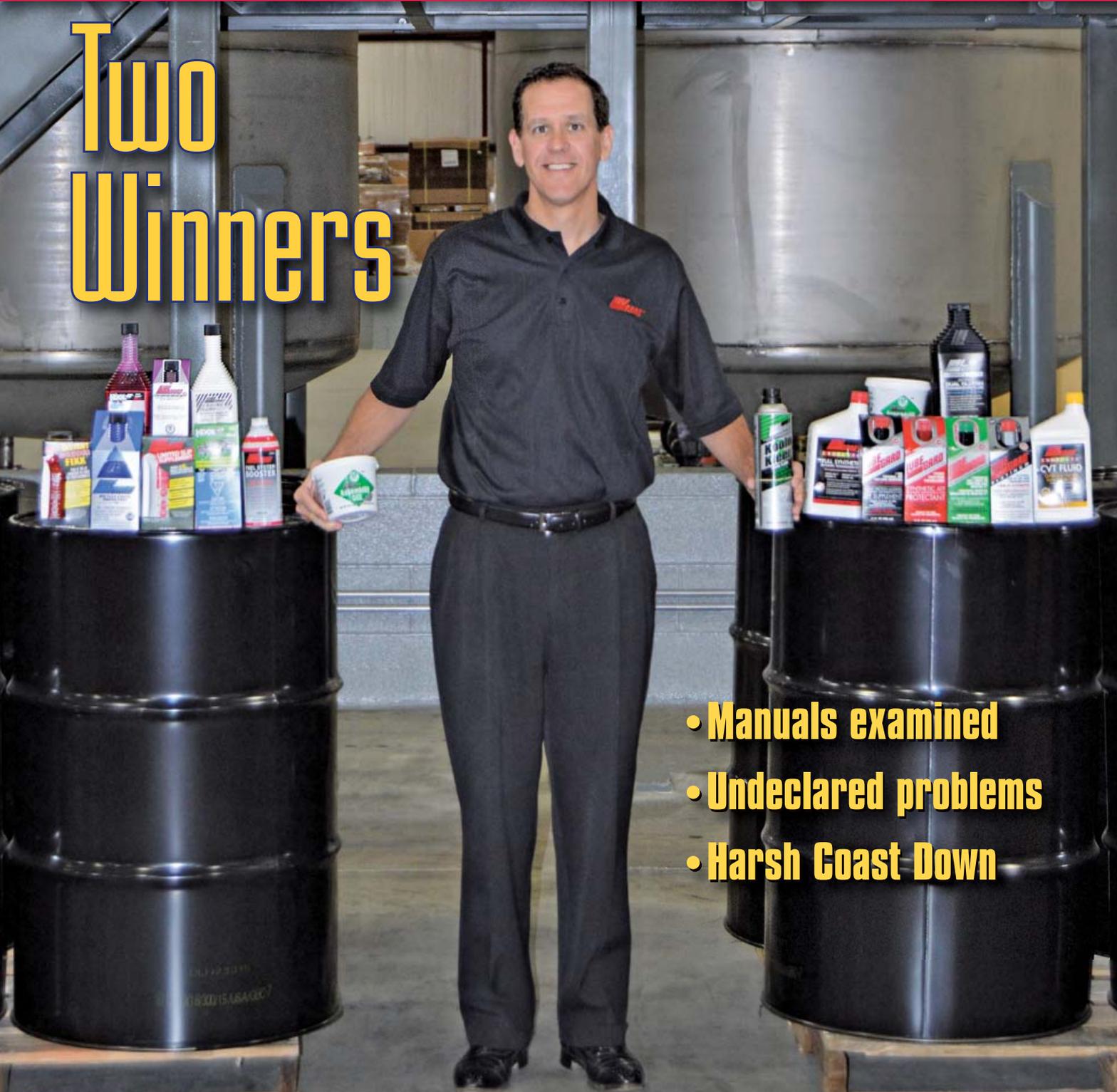


TRANSMISSION DIGEST®

The Automotive Powertrain Industry Journal

Two Winners



- Manuals examined
- Undeclared problems
- Harsh Coast Down

U250E • 4T65E • G56

Blending tanks dispense both base and additives into the automated bottling facility at Stellar's Seville, Ohio, headquarters.



Two Winners

“At the time Stellar acquired Lubegard-branded products, many questioned the business decision,” Justin Archer, president of Stellar Automotive Group, recalls, explaining the 2012 acquisition of Lubegard parent company, International Lubricants. “But over 50% of Stellar’s customers were also Lubegard customers. That percentage is quickly rising. It was a good synergy! We looked at similar acquisition possibilities and we felt that, in addition to its profit potential, Lubegard afforded us a tradition of unique, patented industry-leading technology as well as a strong international sales base. The marriage of these two companies is a big win for both.”

Stellar was founded in 1990 by Pat O’Sullivan as a recycler of automatic transmission rings (*Transmission Digest*, July 2000). The Archer family acquired Stellar in 2007, followed by the Lubegard acquisition in 2012.



Stellar CEO Justin Archer

The company is headquartered in Seville, Ohio, and operates the Lubegard facility in Seattle as well as a southern California warehouse and shipping facility.

"The difference between Stellar and other distributors in the aftermarket," explains Archer, "is that we sell our products only to distributors, not to shops."

"We are, I suppose you might say, a distributor's distributor," Stellar Vice President Nora Howsare says. "As such, we are in a position to supply the parts houses with much of what they need to support the transmission shop customer.

It's natural that they'd prefer the supplier who isn't competing with them.

"We are experts at finding all the products that distributors need to put on their shelves," continues Archer. "We have relationships with top OE and aftermarket parts manufacturers throughout the world. We don't do much advertising, so when someone discovers all that we are supplying, they tend to be surprised. Many were familiar with Stellar 15 years ago when it more narrowly concentrated on acquiring new unused components rebuilders accumulated from overhaul kits."

But Stellar's footprint has grown and will continue to grow in 2016. "Stellar is traditionally thought of as a distributor of soft parts, although we've always carried some hard parts. Luke Epstein was recently brought aboard to help us develop more of the hard-parts lines. Luke's tasks are to expand the hard parts line and increase our hard-parts business by making sure our customers think of Stellar as a source for all their transmission parts.

"Overall, the company product assortment has grown. We now do quite a bit of development work, creating specifications for the components we have manufactured for our bushing and washer kit lines. Keith Simmerer is the technical adviser who is responsible for putting together our designs for those. When Keith's work is completed, we send drawings and samples to be manufactured.



Nora Howsare, vice-president of Stellar Automotive Group



Keith Simmerer measuring a part to create exacting specifications for aftermarket components Stellar manufactures

"Most of what we package is private labeled. Because we usually develop product in response to a customer inquiry, some of what we develop, particularly bushing kits, might be nearly exclusively for the non-domestic marketplaces."

Howsare observes, "This is an exciting time for Stellar as we've grown a lot over the years but now have the resources and the opportunities to see further substantial growth across a number of different market segments to become a full line transmission parts distributor."

Kelley Bolas handles marketing and promotional duties for the organization. She sees synergies between Lubegard and Stellar as opportunities for both companies. "Our teams are incredibly customer driven. We have processes that allow us to be nimble and first to market with new products as well as quickly react to customers' needs."



Lubegard Marketing Director Kelley Bolas



The automated blending and bottling facility at Lubegard's Seattle facility

Recent product introductions such as Dual Clutch Transmission Fluid underscore this point. Bolas says that Lubegard products represent a technological superiority due to the presence of patented LXE® and Synergol® technologies. "We test it, re-test it and continue to find that we can use a generic ATF with our additive products and it will be the equivalent of the OE's, often at a price that is 50% less. Lubegard's technologically superior products will save the user money.

"People have expressed a high regard for the GM-licensed Dexron VI product that can be used in a number of newer domestic and foreign vehicles. By adding a Lubegard Platinum bottle to a Dexron VI base, we're able to duplicate that OEM-licensed product but at a significant cost savings. Esters contained in the Lubegard products result in increased wear protection, which in turn extend the life of the transmission.

"The Lubegard red bottle has been around for more than 30 years. It remains a workhorse for retail shops throughout the industry. If you add the red bottle to ATF it's like giving it a vitamin. You will decrease the heat in the automatic transmission and increase the life of the ATF. The red bottle remains one of a very few products tested and approved to do those things. It can be added to nearly any ATF with the exception of Type F Ford and CVT fluids."

Bolas points to company literature describing the red protectant that proclaims: "Proven better than ATF alone, Lubegard's ATF Protectant is clinically



Components of a Stellar bushing kit that will be packaged and private labeled for one of the company's distributors

and field approved to reduce heat, eliminate torque converter shudder, soften harsh shifts and extend fluid life. It is engineered to raise the thermal and oxidative stability levels of ATFs. When it operates at elevated temperatures, it does not thin out and pyrolyze, burn or react with oxygen. It gives new life to old fluid. ATF Protectant is the perfect add-on sale between transmission fluid changes."

"That," Bolas adds, "explains what we mean when we use the term technologically superior."

Noriko Anderson, Director of Sales and veteran of



Lubegard Director of Sales Noriko Anderson works from Seattle where the conference walls feature *Transmission Digest* Top 10 awards the company has won through the years.

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www.lubegard.com

DEM ATF AND CONVERSION CHART
10th Edition

There are well over 225 types and brands of ATF today. Using the recommended ATF base fluid in this chart along with the corresponding LUBE GARD product, you can eliminate the need to stock various OEM ATFs.

HOW TO USE THIS CHART

LOCATE Locate your vehicle by manufacturer make, model, year, then verify the engine and transmission.

VERIFY Verify the OEM factory ATF. This information should be available in your owner's manual.

DECIDE If you decide to use the OEM factory ATF, we recommend adding LUBE GARD Automotive Transmission Fluid Protection (ATF), or LUBE GARD Platinum Universal Protectant (PUC) for added transmission protection. Do not use with Ford Type F or CVT fluids.

If you choose to use an alternative fluid to the OEM factory ATF, we strongly advise you stay within our base fluid recommendations. Please note that this chart is only for use with LUBE GARD products.

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“Lubegard’s Conversion Chart is an industry staple and another way we make life easier for the shops,” explains Justin Archer. “The 40+ page guide provides details on nearly every powertrain combination of engine, transmission and transaxle in the world, with instructions indicating which base ATF and which specific Lubegard product should be used. It also details fill capacities, which eliminate any guesswork for shops performing transmission fluid changes.”

Lubegard, agrees and observes, “Without the red bottle there probably wouldn’t be a Lubegard line. When we sit down to develop a new customer we find that everybody knows about this red bottle. It’s a starting point from which we can discuss an entire product line with prospective customers. We believe that the vast majority of fluid fill and replacement jobs that take place in the aftermarket do or should call for a bottle of the red ATF Protectant as part of that job.

“Similar to Stellar, many people do not realize how extensive the Lubegard line is and how many of our products are considered excellent general automotive repair store products. Along with our transmission products, our Kooler Kleen Trans Flush, Limited Slip Supplement and Evaporator and Heater Foam Cleaner are among the best sellers in the general repair industry.”



Stellar Director of Operations Neil Smith

Operations Manager Neil Smith says he’s been very busy preparing for the recent start of blending and bottling operations at Stellar’s home facility. Lubegard has long had a similar facility in Seattle. “This new line takes advantage of automation and extends capacity over our current Seattle facility. Together, the two facilities will have the capacity to keep up with expanding customer demand and keep our costs down as well.”

Archer continues, “It’s important to note that the additional blending facility and three distribution centers allow for efficiencies and reduced transit times for both Stellar and Lubegard. When we merged the companies, we added efficiencies with state-of-the-art ERP systems making transactions, from beginning to end, more economical and streamlined for our customers.

“Going forward, the main focus of both Stellar and Lubegard will be product development. Stellar is quickly becoming a full line transmission-parts distributor. We will continue to develop the hard parts line and even the hard-to-find parts. We want to become our customers go-to for all their transmission needs.

“Lubegard already has several new products in the pipeline being tested. We continue to formulate products that provide the user with superior chemistries that offer proven results. We understand there is a trend in the marketplace for transmission shops to become more general repair and we are working on adding products to make this transition easier. While we have some of the most popular transmission additives and now, whole fluids, expect to see some new additions that take Lubegard further into the general repair arena.” **TD**