



Bill Ahern, owner of Lynn's Auto Air in Downey, says he has a lot of customers that want custom aftermarket air conditioning installed in their classic cars.

Downey, Calif.—Lynn's Auto Air in Downey has been known for top-quality factory air-conditioning, heating, and radiator maintenance and repair since Lynn Horn opened the shop in 1974, current Owner Bill Ahern said.

“But our specialty has always been installing custom aftermarket A/C and heating systems in classic and custom cars and trucks,” Ahern said.

“I started working with Lynn in 1971 at another shop,” he said. “Then from 1976 to 1980, I ran three ARA factory stores in Southern California, and Lynn was one of my distributors. In May of 1980, Lynn told me he wanted to sell the shop and said, ‘Why don't you buy this thing?’ and I said OK.”

Since then Ahern said he has expanded the shop's services to include alternators, starters, power windows, water pumps, timing belts, electrical repair, headlight replacements, and oil changes.

“We do a lot of factory power-window repair and replacement, as well as custom power-window installations from Spal in cars that didn't have them,” he said. “We also replace damaged, or yellow and cloudy modular headlights in older vehicles; there's good profit in that.”

Lynn's is also an air-conditioning and heating parts distributor for AC Delco, Motorcraft, and OE replacement parts, and keeps a large inventory in stock at all times, Ahern said.



When customers contact Lynn's Auto Air regarding service or parts, Marco Flores, who's worked at the shop for 32 years, handles the calls

"Our parts department is run by Marco Flores who's been with us for 32 years," he said. "Marco knows everything about A/C or heating systems and can answer anyone's questions."

However, Ahern said that custom A/C and heating installations are still the shop's specialty. "We carry and install underdash and vent systems from Vintage Air, Old Air, and Hot Rod Air on a regular basis in classics, customs, and hot rods," he said. "In 2009 we did a lot of 'lead sleds,' like Buicks and 1961 to 1965 Chevrolets."

Because every installation is different, the hoses can't be pre-cut and the fittings can't be attached at the factory. Ahern said. "That means we have to route the hoses the way we want them, cut them to length ourselves, and then attach the fittings."



Manny Ramirez of Lynn's Auto Air installs a new A/C compressor in Bill Ahern's full-custom 1933 Ford street rod.

Ahern said he also sells custom aftermarket A/C and heat systems through the mail and offers custom A/C and heating hose building for those customers.

“A customer just sends us a diagram showing the routing of the hoses, the exact lengths to cut them, and the way they want each fitting turned, and we’ll build them for them. We do it all the time.”

Classic car engines often need extra cooling with the A/C running, Ahern said, but there may not be enough room to install a larger fan, so the shop also installs Spal electric fans when needed. “We often mount a compact electric fan on the condenser and wire in a relay to turn the fan on whenever the A/C is running,” he said.

Recently, Ahern said the shop has built custom air-conditioning systems for several local ASPCA trucks. “They gave us complete diagrams showing where they wanted the system controls and the vents, and we did the rest; they came out very nice.”

The shop also does a lot of extended-warranty repair work on cars, trucks, SUVs, RVs, and even motor homes, Ahern said. “We also install A/C systems in just about anything you can think of, he said. “In the summer, you’ll see anything from motor homes to cranes to everything in between.”

Ahern said he primarily attributes much of his success to the quality of his crew and having the right tools for them to do the work. “You’ve got to have people that know what they’re doing,” he said.

“Most of my guys have been with me at least 30 years; in all we have a combined 140 years of A/C and heating experience. And we provide all major equipment, including leak detectors, identifiers, hose builders, and a number of Robinair R12 and R134a charging stations.”

Continuing training is another important factor in the shop’s success, Ahern said. “We provide on-site training, along with classroom and online training provided by AC Delco.”

The shop had a program with Bellflower High School several years ago, Ahern said, in which he brought in the top three students interested in automotive careers.

“We wanted them to know a screwdriver from a jackhammer, but we didn’t want someone that had been through an air-conditioning class because that’s not the real world.”

One of Lynn's ASE certified technicians, Benjamin "Benny" Balderrama, trained the students and got them going, Ahern said. "Manny Ramirez is one of the students from Bellflower that worked out well; he's been here six years now." He said he would probably start the program again this summer.



ASE Certified Technician Benjamin "Benny" Balderrama of Lynn's Auto Air uses a Robinair R12 machine to evacuate and recharge the custom air-conditioning system in a classic Chevy Malibu.

To help run his wholesale and retail business better, Ahern said he had a proprietary software program created for the shop by Innovative Accounting Systems in Rancho Santa Margarita to control inventory, bookkeeping, ROs, customer tracking, payroll, and more.

Ahern said the A/C business volume is where it was 10 years ago, but he has high hopes for the future. "Shops that position themselves right are going to prosper because when this thing turns around, it's going to be good."