

## Composite Racing Bodies



By Jennifer Sikorski,  
CF Assistant Editor

### **How many employees do you have in your company?**

Can I answer that, “Too many?” [Laughs.] No, I’m kidding! We have between 18 and 20.

### **What is the nature of your company?**

We manufacture parts from reinforced plastics. We’re very diversified. We use several different methods, anything from hand lay up, spray up, vacuum bag molding, vacuum infusion, auto pipe work. So we pretty much do the full gamut.

Some of the products we make—that are very near and dear to my heart—are the racing bodies. We’ve been doing corvette composite racing bodies actually all the way back since 1984. We’re working with General Motors on some of the products that we do. We’ve done various projects, including the ’84 C4 corvette. We also built the carbon fiber body that won the overall competition at Pikes Peak that was entered and run by General Motors. I believe it was three years ago they did that. We’ve done various parts that we’ve designed for the World’s Challenge series, a corvette racing mini-series. We’ve designed parts for Trans Am and Grand Am, which are the Grand American Road Racing Series. These are all corvette parts. Some people run fiberglass, but most of the time they use vacuum bag molding carbon fiber, Kevlar, honeycomb composite combination.

### **Do you like your job?**

Oh, I love it! Considering the ups and downs business has today, we really have a great group of people. I’ve got guys who have been with me for 20 years. In my opinion, I have some of the best pattern makers and mold makers in the business. They are creative, and they work very hard to make sure the customer’s needs are met. The whole thing is a teamwork deal as far as I’m concerned.

### **How did you get started in the industry?**

A lot of people say, “How did you get started?” and I tell them, “I bought a corvette,” and that’s pretty much true. I’d been doing composites off and on—let’s see if I can count this high—probably for 35 years. We’ve been doing it full-time for about 22 or 23 years. Advanced Composite Products was founded in ’83, and I was doing it pretty much full time at another company before that. I guess what

Kerry N. Hitt,  
President  
Advanced  
Composite  
Products, Inc.  
Harrisburg,  
Penn.



it was, was I started out with a corvette, doing fiberglass repair work. And that led to making molds to make parts for the corvettes. And then I was very involved with racing, and of course the cost to go racing is one of those things that always is ongoing. I had a friend who had a Subaru dealership, and he asked if I could design a spoiler and build spoilers for him. So I did that part time while I designed and built TV cable systems during the day and then at night I went home and made pieces in the shop. That’s how it all started out. It was going fairly well, and I had a fellow who had a lot of corvette molds and was making parts for these custom Cadillacs they were doing 25 or 30 years ago. I ended up buying molds, equipment, customer base, everything from him. And I built on it from that.

There have been ups and downs. In 1978, we lost everything that we had in a fire. And it took us a while to build back up from that. That’s how Advanced Composite Products was founded in 1983. We went back in and have been going strong ever since.

### **What is your company’s niche?**

I would say our niche is being able to do rapid prototyping and build things in a hurry, and do it all in-house. We hardly ever send out to have anything done. We have a pattern-making shop; we have a full machine shop. Everything is in-house that we need to be able to be creative. The race bodies and corvette street body kits are something that we’ve grown into over the last six years or so. We do a lot of parts for the transportation industry—truck bodies, that type of thing. We do work on aircraft repair. I try to stay very diversified and not really have a niche because I’ve seen a lot of companies that have a niche, and it’s literally feast or famine, like the boat industry for example—anything that has a cycle to it. We’ve tried to stay diversified enough so maybe we didn’t have that real great shot when it was going, but when things got bad, our peaks and valleys were not so high or low.

### **Did you face any problems when getting started in the industry? It sounds like the fire was a blessing in disguise.**

It kind of was, actually. Because of that, as crazy as it sounds, we ended up picking up one of our major customers to this day. And that all happened because of the publicity of the fire. People found out what we did, and before that they didn’t know anything about us. We were able to make that happen.

### **Can you describe your marketing efforts?**

I’m looking at doing some marketing on the Internet. I’m pleased to say, in the beginning we were doing the yellow pages and trade publications, things like that, but lately I’ve not had to do that. We’ve gotten a very good word-of-mouth, and our reputation has spread that way, and that’s been good. We’re doing the things

*(“Pulling Strings” continued on p. 43)*