

Yes, but there are shoals in these glamorous waters. We hope this helps you navigate safely





**T**here's money to be made in performance parts sales and installation — lots of it — but installer beware. Before you take the plunge make sure you understand how deep you can go before you risk incurring big regulatory agency fines and legal liability. Unfortunately, there's no way any single magazine article can give you the specific information you'll need to make an informed decision about entering the tuner business because each state has its own laws that may or may not adhere to the guidelines laid down by the EPA in accordance with the Clean Air Act. In fact, some state or even local laws attempt to override EPA regulations.

## Local Knowledge

The obvious first step, then, is to talk to specialists and speed shops in your area who are involved in high-performance work. As fellow car guys, most of them will be glad to share the basics with you in an informal conversation, and to warn you of any particular dangers. It's sort of like mariners sharing what they call "local knowledge."

While you don't want to sound like you're interviewing them, there are some points you should try to cover:

*Left: An array of SPT high-performance components available from your local Subaru dealer's parts department.*

- Liability — who's responsible should the modification be deemed illegal by someone in authority?
- If a vehicle equipped with high-performance engine parts comes to your shop for a state-mandated inspection and performs to given specifications, is it legal? In other words, is just the presence of non-O.E. parts enough to make the car an outlaw even if its emissions levels are fine?
- What happens in the case of a performance-enhanced vehicle and an accident with personal and/or property damage?
- If a part says "Off-Highway Only," are you supposed to determine exactly what use the customer intends for the car? Do you have to get something in writing from the owner? Will you be violating federal laws if you install the part in the first place?
- What about "Hold Harmless" agreements? In your state, can the customer sign away his rights if the part says "Off-Highway Only?"
- Is legal liability borne by the high-performance parts manufacturer, or do you share in it as the professional installer?

*Continued on page 8*





## Wanna be a Subatuner?

### Internet Resources

All good questions, and all have answers — and many depend upon the location of your business. Beyond your initial conversations, where should you go for answers?

Well, there are several places to turn to for answers and before deciding to take the tuner plunge you should first consult them. The Specialty Equipment Manufacturers Association (SEMA) has an arm that specifically watches, advocates, lobbies and informs consumers, professionals and government officials on the topic of aftermarket parts. The SEMA Action Network (SAN) has a comprehensive website [www.semasan.com](http://www.semasan.com) that is chock full of information for you to wade through that is also specific to your state.

SAN has even developed something similar to a Patient's Bill of Rights called a Consumer Bill of Rights, reproduced here directly from the website.

## Your Rights to Personalize Your Vehicle

**ARTICLE ONE:** You have the Right to buy high-quality, reliable aftermarket performance and specialty parts, accessories and styling options.

**ARTICLE TWO:** You have the Right to use high-quality aftermarket parts and know that your new car warranty claims will be honored. In fact, your vehicle dealer may not reject a warranty claim simply because an aftermarket product is present. A warranty denial under such circumstances may be proper only if an aftermarket part caused the failure being claimed.

**ARTICLE THREE:** You have the Right to install and use emissions-legal aftermarket performance parts without incurring hassles and onerous procedures during state vehicle emissions inspections.

**ARTICLE FOUR:** You have the Right to actively oppose any proposed (or existing) laws or regulations that will reduce your freedom to use aftermarket automotive parts and service or will curtail your ability to take part in the automotive hobbies of your choice.

**ARTICLE FIVE:** You have the Right to patronize independent retail stores and shops for vehicle parts and service. The U.S. aftermarket offers the world's finest selection of performance and specialty parts, accessories and styling options. These aftermarket products satisfy the most discriminating customers seeking personalized vehicles for today's lifestyle.

Another good resource is the Automotive Service Association (ASA) [www.asashop.org](http://www.asashop.org). We've included a screen shot of the legislation tab, which contains a trove of information that directly affects your business.



### Incredible Potential

If this article is starting to sound a bit like a surgeon's general warning, so be it. But as daunting as all this might seem, the opportunities are terrific for both profits and career satisfaction, and demand is ever-increasing in direct proportion to today's horsepower ratings. Or, would it be more apt to call them horsepower wars? If you remember the days of rejiggering carburetors, installing reground cams and cherry bombs (the mufflers, not the firecrackers), then you might also recall the excitement generated by leafing through the Isky Cam and J.C. Whitney catalogs (to name just two), perusing the pages for the latest high performance offerings.

Guess what, bunky? Those days are back in spades. Today's gear heads are just as interested in performance as Baby Boomers were when they were young, and their means of getting performance are, paradoxically, both similar and quite different. Similar because the basics of how to hot rod an engine or tune a chassis still apply; different in that today's engines include overhead camshafts, multiple valves per cylinder, fuel injection, turbochargers, and on and on, and are controlled by that all-important PCM.

Further, they're similar because the same principles of geometry still apply to tuning a chassis, but today's suspension systems are MacPherson struts, multilink, and perhaps multiple shock, with disc brakes and low profile tires thrown into the bargain. And today's advanced polymers and light-alloy metals open up a wide array of sophisticated bolt-on handling.





**Above:** Substituting a higher-than-stock volume turbo is one of the main ways Subatuners get those incredible horsepower numbers. Of course, other adjustments must be made to make sure sufficient fuel is supplied to make a burnable blend with all that extra air.

Arguably, the tuning phenomenon is fairly recent, only coming to a frenetic boil in the last five years or so. American muscle was what tuning was all about in its previous horsepower heydays of the '60s and '70s. But today imports rule, thanks in large part in the formative years to Honda and, later, Nissan and Toyota. The industry got its next power boost when Subaru introduced the WRX to the U.S. market in 2001 along with international rallying (the World Rally Championship). Another whole level of interest came along with the movie *The Fast and the Furious* in 2001, which shortly thereafter brought the relatively new motorsport from Japan called "drifting."

### Put Me In, Coach!

Subaru offers a full array of performance parts from cat-back exhaust systems to rugged clutches, and from short-throw shifters to suspension spring and shock kits through their SPT (Subaru Performance Tuning) program. Depending upon the part, it may have a limited warranty the same as any other Subaru part; or a special warranty for select performance parts, which also can only lawfully be installed by the end user; and parts that are sold "as is" because they are intended for "Off Highway" use.



## Wanna be a Subatuner?

*Right: This shop uses a wheel-type dyno for tuning ...*



*Left: ... and analyzes the results of mods with sophisticated software.*



Looking at one of the most popular cars from Subaru, the 2005 Impreza WRX, this means that out of the 78 part numbers listed, 34 (nearly 44%) of the parts offered are covered under the normal limited genuine Subaru replacement parts and accessories warranty and can legally be installed by a repair facility. Not bad. “Yeah,” you might interject, “but I bet the money to be made off those parts is not all that great when compared to the ‘hard’ performance parts.”

If you said that you would be sorely mistaken. When added together the 78 performance parts numbers available for the 2005 Impreza WRX amount to \$29,955.44. The 34 parts that anyone can install add up to \$14,133.03, or 56.6% of the whole. There are a lot of popular items in those 34 part numbers, and many of them are high-ticket.

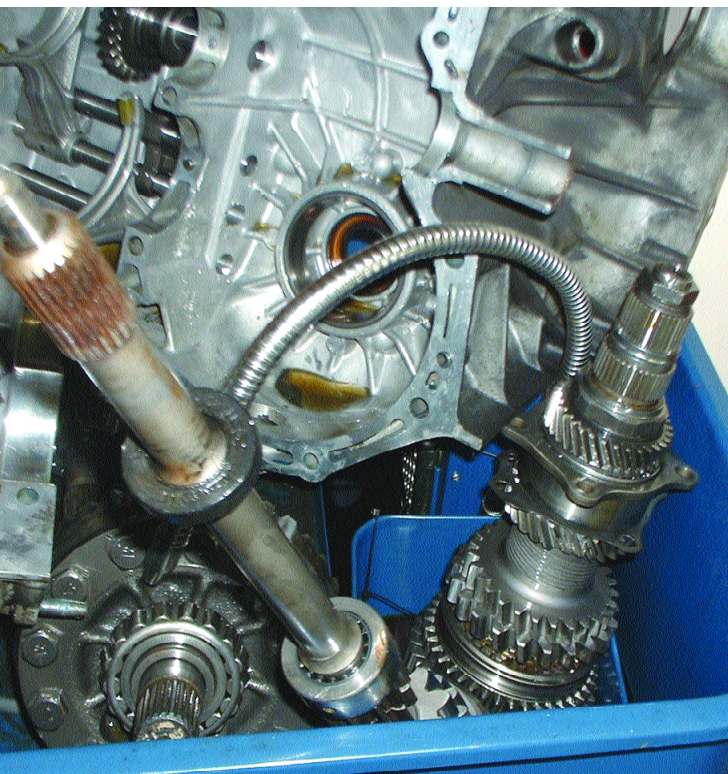
The Subaru SPT website ([www.spt.subaru.com](http://www.spt.subaru.com)) is chockfull of information including part numbers by model along with detailed instructions for how to install the part on the vehicle. Talk about “one stop shopping.” Included are not only SPT branded performance parts, but also quite an extensive list of the highly-sought-after STI items.

The performance market has found another heyday and even with rising gas prices there seems to be nothing but strong growth ahead. Like any business venture, it's important to do extensive upfront research to make sure you are aware of federal and state laws. But even in the most restrictive states opportunity abounds; Subaru and its performance products offer, perhaps, the best opportunity out there for a chance to catch the wave of this ever-growing segment.

It's interesting to note that even hybrids are being tuned by some of their owners to get more performance from them for additional gas mileage without sacrificing performance. And already we have seen applications where electric motors are being used to provide low-end performance with tuned gasoline engines giving stellar 0-60 mph times. The shade-tree mechanic is alive and well, but more than likely hunched over a laptop writing code and hacking into on-board computers to explore, perhaps, a different definition of performance.

“Where there's a will there's way,” and it seems there will always be a strong desire among “gear heads” to eke





***Left:** ... Too fast and too furious? The owner of the Subaru this transaxle belongs to went overboard on the horsepower without beefing the transaxle. Take a look at that cluster.*

more performance out of their vehicles, and that is conspicuously the case with Subaru owners. The tuner market is back (well, it never *really* left) and its opportunities are just now being explored.

Suppose — just suppose — you could stop doing ordinary service and maintenance work and switch to the glamorous world of high-performance modifications and customization? To a solidly-experienced and successful general automotive shop owner or technician, this might be just a day dream. Maybe you wouldn't want to give up the challenges of modern diagnostics and excellence in repair altogether, anyway — you should rightfully be proud of the skills you've developed. On the other hand, who says you have to plunge in all the way? ■





# Sites, Forums and Subaru Passion

**S**till sitting on the fence where taking the plunge into performance parts and tuning is concerned? Not sure if there's a market in your area? Then perhaps it's time you went surfing ... with a mouse, not a board.

Here's a partial list of the many, MANY sites on the Internet devoted to Subaru vehicles and high performance. Believe it or not, a Google advanced search for "Subaru performance tuning" turned up 1,100,000 hits! Even when we asked for the exact phrase, we still got 5,500. This is big.

Let's take a look at one of the more popular sites in the U.S., the North American Subaru Impreza Owners Club (NASIOC) to help get a sense of the interest in Subaru performance.

The NASIOC site is divided into nine major categories in which there are subsets. The following chart will give you a glimpse of how active the Subaru performance community is and really hits home when you learn that this snapshot was taken at 9:00 AM on a Wednesday morning.

As you take a moment to digest these numbers please keep in mind one important thing -- this is just one site. At 9:00 AM on a Wednesday morning there are 1,276 people signed into the NASIOC site. They are looking at and/or participating in 714,239 conversational threads, which since the site's inception have accumulated to 9,766,067 posts.

Category	Sub-Categories	Current Viewers	Threads	Posts
General	9	258	99,457	1,335,744
Technical	12	218	142,477	1,355,686
Classifieds	6	114	77,450	649,505
Reviews	3	8	2,919	35,817
Chapters	13	242	176,873	2,365,434
Regional Areas	3	73	50,972	666,48
Subaru Models	7	59	33,764	348,875
Miscellaneous	1	264	109,839	2,779,366
Archives	1	40	20,488	229,192

These are staggering statistics to be sure, but what's even more impressive is the dialog these people are having. Sign on to the site and look for yourself. This community of people is a society unto itself with its own police force and rules and regulations. It is chock full of information on what parts are hot and those that are not, whom to go to for assistance in any

global geographic area, how to install a part and reviews of its overall performance benefits, and whom to use for installation when one's personal mechanical limits have been exceeded (that would be you). And more ... much more.

- SPT.Subaru.com
- ESXmotorsports.com
- Subaru.com
- DrivePerformanceSubaru.com
- Rally.Subaru.com
- North American Subaru Impreza Owners Club
- ClubWRX.net
- B9XClub

Go ahead and visit other Subaru-related sites and check out what they have to say. Just for fun, also check out edmunds.com and look at the forums, especially the one for Subaru fanatics. Recently, a member of the editorial team at edmunds.com was asked which of the manufacturer's forums was most active and his reply was, "Are you kidding? The Subaru forum is the most active by far, outdistancing any other forum on our site. There is the Subaru forum and the rest are a very distant second."

Maybe it's the psychographic profile of Subaru buyers that makes them so passionate about their cars. Or, maybe it's just that the Subaru buyer is technologically-inclined. Whatever the reason, he or she is definitely an informed buyer and an active owner who wants the best performance from what is already an incredible and very reliable car. When it comes to high performance, their passion is at an even higher intensity, and their brand loyalty is almost rabid. ■

