

-Greg McConiga, Executive Technical Editor

WANDERING FULMINATIONS ON HIGH-PERFORMANCE ABSOLUTES

There are absolutes in life. This was (in the days before political correctness run amuck) understood by nearly every man, woman, and child in this great nation. As individuals and as a country we understood that there are things that are absolutely wrong and things that are absolutely right and that to be considered successful by any measure of the word we should avoid the things that are wrong and embrace those things that are right.

We all knew that cause and effect were permanently linked and could not be unlinked without causing a cascading series of unintended consequences that are far more destructive than simply acknowledging the linkage between actions and results at the start. To me, life was simpler then. We were focused more on discovery and innovation than on continuously overcooking the grits in an effort to guarantee a perfect outcome for every person in every situation, as though that's even possible. I have to admit, at times it seems to me that this nation suffers from mass paranoia when it comes to making sure that no one is harmed in the making of whatever it is that we make these days — that is, whatever it is we haven't exported the manufacturing of to lands east. I'm not sure that the loss of manufacturing prowess and the adaptive thinking it drives is worth the price we will eventually pay.

It's my frustration with the vagaries of human interaction in this land of hyper-

sensitivity and self-worth writ large that cause me to withdraw more and more from any activity outside the world that's firmly in my control. I no longer engage in conversations about political doings or even things relating to my industry because I've become painfully aware that no one really wants to know the truth about anything anymore. What people want is a sanitized version of the truth that validates what they already think or believe and makes them feel good about themselves; and this is the very antithesis of an absolute — or truth. Questions are only asked until the answer arrived at coincides with the questioners preconceived notion and then no more questions are asked, as though not asking the question makes an incomplete answer complete. My refuge from this mild form of insanity is in the absolutes found in the precision and repetition of engine building and the mechanical arts.

I've never been sure if the work makes the man or if the man is attracted to the work, but I know that I like precision, even when I can't attain it; it's the act of striving for it that brings satisfaction. I like the vertical learning curve of performance work, I like the people involved in it, I like the smell of racing oil and gas, the thunder and clatter of the engines, and I like the control that I have over the finished product. It's absolute, and every project is one more chance to attain a perfect result as measured by absolute

standards. Every measurement taken, every machining operation, every mock-up and test and trial can be recorded, checked, tested, and evaluated and the result measured and quantified by lap speed, mile per hour, elapsed time or a dynamometer.

As each project evolves and one reviews the after-build results, you can immerse yourself in data, verify failures, near failures or shortened life cycles, go back through the catalogs and websites and review what new products are out there, what improvements can be applied and what gains can be had given the constraints of sanctioning rules, time, and money. Lessons learned from one engine are adapted and applied to the next and your process, and hopefully your percentage of successful outcomes increases as your skill and knowledge improves.

While the challenges might seem never-ending, if you enjoy the manual arts, learning, engineering challenges, problem solving, and physical labor, then the mechanical trades might just be your career of choice. I'm not sure that I can recommend it from the financial perspective because we still undervalue the output of working people in my opinion, but it is certainly a profession where you can find a great deal of satisfaction in the work itself. Best of all, it's the kind of work that lends itself to quiet and solitary moments away from the maddening influence of people driven crazy by the stridency of a 24/7 news cycle and the quest for an ideal life where all outcomes are perfect. It's an environment where perfection is actually attainable, one engine at a time. ■