

# Best of L.A. 2001

as featured in

OCTOBER 12-18, 2001 • laweekly.com • VOL. 23 NO.47

## LA WEEKLY

### A & G AUTO

#### Taking care of the car that you are

In Los Angeles, you are your car. A more obvious barometer of social status doesn't exist here. Our neighborhoods are a patchwork quilt of good blocks and bad ones, so where you live means bubkes. And clothes mean zip as well; as often as not, the most chi'chi wealthy wear what appear to be raggedy-as threads off the back of a hobo. But a car you don't fake. A car is your armor, your shield, your real home in L.A., not to mention the most accurate and easy-to-read public representation of your true self. The model just starting out drives a nifty Jetta. Soccer moms range from early 90's minivans to big-assed Mercedeses. The newer the Beemer or Jag, the better the parts the driver is getting; the spiffier the SUV, the higher the record is on the charts; the dooper the muscle/classic car, the rougher you (think you) are. And without one, temporarily or permanently, you're basically a free-floating microbe. All apologies to those who dream of light rail and long for better buses, but a fact is a fact.

Therefore, the cultivation of an honest, reliable mechanic and his counterparts, the body-and-fender man and car dealer, is as critical here to peace of mind as having a good doctor, dentist or personal trainer. In a place where life is as limited without wheels as it is with poor health, ugly choppers or underdeveloped musculature, finding the men and women you can trust with your chrome horses is imperative.

After a dozen or so years in California, I found the one-two punch that has kept my highway maintenance, 32-year-old Chevy in trim and has kept me from singin' the bus rider's blues. Not a mile separates A&G Auto at 4553 Santa Monica Boulevard from Rick's Auto Body, where Fountain Avenue becomes Hyperion Avenue; hands down, they are the best in the business in the care and maintenance of the sacred ride. Since 1987, mechanic Charlie Jaber has been taking them in at A&G and sending them out as well, and despite the transient nature of Southern Californians, Jaber

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estimates that he has had the same client base since around 1989. "Some people call me from wherever they're moving from and tell me they've been referred to me before they even get here," he says. Recently, Jaber has branched out into the buying and selling of used cars, which run the gamut from classic monsters like a prized 1966 Lincoln to newer Beemer convertibles and a 'Vette. Each priced to fit his Eastside clientele, and checked out top to bottom and actually used as a personal car by Jaber himself! Bob Aldrich at Rick's has a similar story. "I walked into this shop in 1978 and have been here ever since," Aldrich says. "I was never really

going to make it my livelihood, but somehow it has become that!"

Because the main problem with the independent L.A. mechanic is that you never know how is a fly-by-nighter, this is important info to have. "Guys will set up shop and try to make as much quick money as possible," says Jaber. "I never had that attitude, sure making money is important, but satisfied customers are much more so—they bring in a lot more business, and they are gratifying to know, as friends, kind of." Aldrich agrees. "My principal," he says, "is to restore the original integrity of the car... I used to say, 'Within, reason' but not now." Aldrich is like an artist at times; watching him suss out a car from all angles is somewhat akin to seeing a director decide on a camera angle—which figures, as the body maestro is studying film at LACC. "That's my real dream," he says.

What's more, in a city where an estimate can read like a death warrant, both Aldrich and Jaber have actually brought repairs in under the estimate—winning the lottery is the only describable parallel. Whether your beast is prone to little breakdowns from time to time, or a collision or blown head has delivered it to death's door, these two dudes are a godsend.

—Johnny Angel

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