

Member Profile

A Talk And Drink With Shane Benson

by Melissa Forbes

I was fortunate enough to sit down and have a beer (okay, several...) recently with Shane Benson, owner of AIM Tuning (local Mazda/Porsche specialty shop and Miata Club hangout). I was interested in hearing about how he got into Miatas, how he got his shop started, and how he got into Spec Miata racing. This is what I found out.

Shane has always loved cars, and when he got a chance to test a Miata shortly after they first came out, it was love at first drive. "I've owned a wide variety of sports cars, and have been an RX-7 guy for a long time. However, I had never owned a car that handles like a Miata, or responds like a Miata does." He started working at Duke Gold's Speedway Mazda in the service department as a Service Advisor in 1996. He bought his first Miata, a 1991 red, in the same year. Since then, he has owned seven Miatas!

In 1999, Shane decided to break away from Speedway Mazda to open a Mazda specialty shop with his friend Paul. The original shop was located in an old gas station at 30th & Georgetown and opened in June. Their main focus was RX-7s, but they would work on anything they could get their hands on. By December, Shane was working full time at the shop, and the shop was moved to its current location on Gasoline Alley.

The shop has grown in the past four years and now supports two full-time technicians, as well as several part-time mechanics that help out here and there with special projects. They specialize in Miata and RX-7, and have recently added Porsche to the lineup of cars they cater to. We'll do just about anything but body work," says Shane.

For the Miata, AIM offers a full range of services including scheduled maintenance and oil changes, power enhancements, roll bars and suspension upgrades, wheel alignment and balancing, and tire mounting, to name a few. The specialized nature of the shop has also led to some other interesting projects as well, including an Aston Martin DB7, a Ferrari F355, and a Dodge Viper.

Not all of the jobs have been pretty, though, and there are tough lessons to be learned. "Part of my job is trying to help the customer clearly define what they are wanting out of their car, and the best way to go about accomplishing their objectives. I recall we had a customer with a Mitsubishi that wanted some crazy fast car for his daily driver."

"He came to me with a bunch of mis-matched parts that I knew wouldn't work well together, and yet he insisted that we install them. Well, he was a good customer, so we decided to go ahead and do it for him. To make a long story short, the job ended up being a disaster, nothing worked as intended and he spent a lot of time and money trying to make everything work together. It was very frustrating."

"That taught me a valuable business lesson. I let him down because I didn't stick to my guns and decline the job, even though we went into it with the best intentions. It really reinforced to me how important it is for us to help our customers make the right decisions, and recognize these potentially problematic scenarios before they have a chance to develop."

When I asked Shane what his real passion in life is, he didn't say it was working on cars. He enjoys this, but it is a means to allow him to do what he *is* really passionate about: racing. He added, "many times I've found myself stuck in a job that I didn't like, which makes it difficult to



Shane and the two loves of his life, wife Sara and a Miata.

be enthusiastic about it. If you can do something you truly enjoy, it makes it easy to really pour yourself into it and give it 100%."

Four years ago a national racing league of "Spec Miatas" was started. This group spread to the Midwest two years ago. Shane got involved, and got his Miata, lovingly named "Frances" all decked out to race. Shane did well in his first year of Spec racing, finishing first place in the CenDiv Championship. Here are several modifications that are made to a Miata to get it ready to race. A racing suspension is added, much of the interior (including the air conditioner) is taken out to rid of excess weight, power steering is removed, a full roll cage is put in, racing tires and a hard top are put on, and a few other minor changes. It is also possible to rent a Spec Miata, and AIM can provide track side assistance for those interested in racing or running a lapping event. For more information on what AIM can do for your Miata, see their website at <http://www.aimtuning.com>.

"I consider myself fortunate to be doing something I really love and actually make an honest living at it. The work is hard; running a business is actually the most difficult thing I've done because you have to wear so many different hats. At the same time, it's also the most gratifying thing I've done. Cars and people are two things that I've always been good with, so I'm doubly blessed to be working with an outstanding car in the Miata and the great people who share my passion for them."