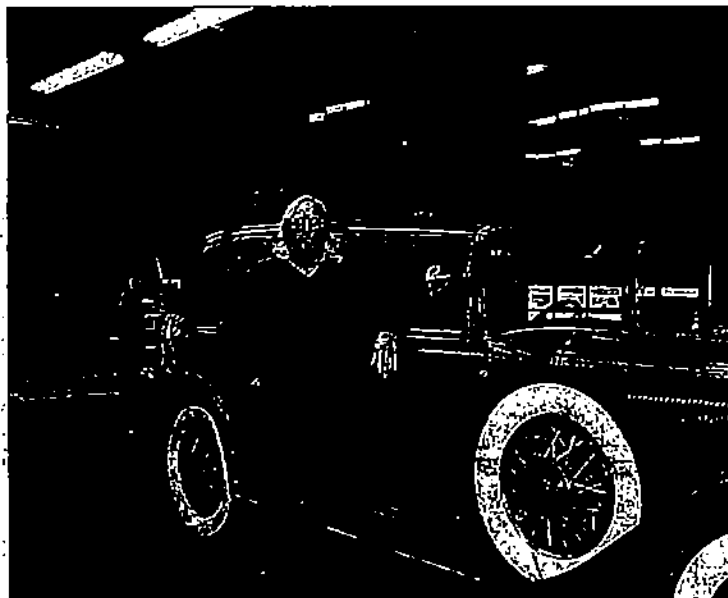


KENT MAN STARTS ANEW



Diane Smith/Record-Courier

Dale Adams shows off a car he restored for a friend in Kent. Adams, who used to restore automobiles as a business, was sued by a client for problems with a car. Adams countersued and won \$2.5 million for defamation and \$400,000 for business interference.

Restoring a life

\$2.9 million won't undo damage

By Diane Smith
Record-Courier staff writer

Dale Adams restored an historic building in Kent so he could do what he loves most — restore vintage automobiles.

But for the past four years, since closing the restoration end of his business after the fallout of a sour relationship with a client, the only vehicles Adams has been restoring are those of his friends. And despite a court ruling awarding him \$2.9 million for defamation and business interference, he's not sure if he can ever get back into his chosen field again.

"It took me 20 years to build this crew to where it was," he said. "I'm only one person, and these jobs are huge. I had to train a whole crew myself, and it took me 20 years. It's not so easy to hang out the shingle again."

Adams won a lawsuit against B. Scott Isquick of Pepper Pike, who had filed, then dropped, a suit blaming Adams for alleged problems with a car Adams and his staff spent months essentially rebuilding from scratch.

Adams then countersued in Summit County Common Pleas Court, claiming Isquick told lies that damaged his rela-

tionship with his clients and forced him to get out of the automobile restoration business he had been in for half his life. A jury awarded Adams \$2.5 million for defamation and \$400,000 for business interference.

Isquick, who could not be reached for comment, told the Akron Beacon Journal that he planned to appeal the ruling.

Isquick hired Adams to restore two 1911 Mercedes cars that were pricey even in the era they were first built. One such car originally would have sold for \$18,000, the same price as

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four luxury homes in Shaker Heights in that era.

The first car had been destroyed in a fire and was rebuilt by Adams in 1989. The second, the subject of the eventual complaints, had only its wheels, chassis and part of the engine when it made its way to Adams' shop in 1992.

"They were both very, very difficult projects," Adams said. "I'm one of the only restorers in the country who could have done it."

Since the car had no body, Isquick asked Adams to fabricate a handmade wooden coach body like the French carriage maker, Henri Labourdette, might have made in 1911. Adams bought a rare book about Labourdette and had it translated from French to aid in the task.

The restoration of the car required more than 13,000 man hours, which would have been a 6 1/2 year long job had it been done in regular work days. But because Isquick wanted to show the car in upcoming car shows, along with the other Mercedes

Adams had restored and a third one restored at another shop, the job was done in 20 months, with employees working up to 45 hours of overtime a week in the last two months.

"We were killing ourselves on this, just to make this man happy," he said.

The cars were entered in several car shows and won acclaim around the world, including a first class award at Meadowbrook, a second place award at Pebble Beach and Best Professional Restoration of the Year at the Hershey Meet, where the car competed against 1,900 other cars.

But despite the awards, Isquick wasn't happy. He began to complain about a variety of things, Adams said, including the heaviness of the front seat, the amount of air in the tires and the style of the front suspension bolts. Some of the alleged problems were inherent to the nature of the car, Adams said.

The \$500,000 repair bill was another source of complaints.

"Isquick is a collector who is never satisfied and has a history of disputes with those who work on his vehicles," stated an affidavit filed by Adams in Summit County Municipal Court.

"Eventually, I began to believe that Isquick was poisoning my other customers by complaining to them about me."

Adams said other customers were pulling their cars out of the shop, and he gave away tens of thousands in free repair work to make the customers happy.

"In this business, my clients are very wealthy," Adams said. "Very wealthy people don't know who to trust because everybody is trying to get something from them. I had been working for 20 years to build that trust. He destroyed the trust relationship between me and my clients."

Adams said he finally had enough and told Isquick to find another automobile restorer.

Shortly thereafter, the affidavit states, two other men also began to issue complaints similar to Isquick's, and Adams began to suspect Isquick had been talking to them. Adams then hired a private investigator, who posed as a car collector in search of a restorer, and asked Isquick for advice in finding a reputable shop.

The affidavit said Isquick told the private investigator Adams was "crazy," inflated the price of

a part purchased for his car, and claimed Adams had lost parts to the car. In the affidavit, Adams said that statement is particularly damaging because most parts to collector vehicles cannot be bought and must be manufactured from scratch if they are lost.

In 1997, Adams finally closed the restoration end of his business, and turned his attention to other divisions of his company. Dale Adams Enterprises also manufactures parts used in steering systems and makes a mechanic's creeper known as the "bone."

Melinda Smith, an attorney with the Akron law firm Scanlon and Gerringer, assisted in handling the Adams case. She said Isquick damaged Adams' reputation by telling lies to "faceless crowds at car shows," where Adams clients came from. The suit also alleged that Isquick interfered with business relationships Adams had with other clients.

"I think the jury sent a message," she said. "Obviously, they had a difficult time placing a price on a man's reputation."