

## FROM THE PUBLISHER

BY JOHN GOODMAN, AERA PRESIDENT

# Imagination, Ingenuity, Resiliency and Flexibility — four cornerstones of a custom engine rebuilder

It is a little difficult these days to ignore what is going on in the world and specifically, with our country. Some of us a bit long in the tooth remember events similar to current economic problems. We would have to go back a long way in time to find anything exactly like what we are experiencing but we as a nation have faced some very difficult times in the past. So much doom and gloom surrounds events like the ones we read about in the news or hear about from friends and family. It is so easy to get caught up in it all. No question sacrifices will have to be made before things improve in our economy but improve they will. Resiliency is one of the special qualities of our economy and having the flexibility to move in new directions, even if it is painful to do so, almost always paves the way for better times.

No other place in our industry have lessons of resiliency and flexibility been more prominent than for those of a custom engine machine shop (CER). Long before we heard of sub-prime mortgages, CERs were forced out of bread and butter transportation engine rebuilding. Sure, there was and still remain feelings of loss for that business and

the relatively simple issues those passenger car engines represented to shops. But resiliency and flexibility reside at the core of each shop owner. CERs began to look at replacement work and found lucrative niche markets to develop. Some found high performance or marine, others heavy duty and still others look to restoration as generators of new profitability. CERs do not go down without a fight and rather than pack up and leave, they put their imagination and ingenuity to work. I am thrilled to see just how imaginative shops are when it comes to re-inventing themselves. In some cases, this reinvention creates a whole new business that prospers in excess of the old one. Some shops that restructured their customer base found different ways to market and sell their engines. Internet stores on eBay motors have helped shops who do this kind of merchandising and sell well beyond their local boundaries. The point is, CERs for the most part, have stopped doing what was expected and began doing the unexpected. Instead of clinging to what was familiar, they changed when markets changed. This is a very healthy sign and positions engine shops well for whatever rebound we see in our economy.

In hard times, people fix things rather than replace them with new. I suppose that is what our part of the aftermarket will experience now that Detroit is manufacturing 10 million vehicles per year, down seven million from their normal 17 million annually. This is a huge swing in production for a one year period and means people are going to keep their vehicles longer and fix them when they break. If true, engine rebuilding and custom specialty work should show improved signs of health over the next several quarters of 2009. ■



Prior to becoming president of AERA, John Goodman was director of the Advanced Technology Center (ATC) for Micromatic-Textron. The ATC focused on manufacturing honing solutions and studies for OEM engine manufacturers. Testing of traditional and unique honing abrasive systems, coolants, fixtures, tools and software were primary responsibilities of the ATC lab.