

Kids Get Hands-On Automotive Skills: Leo's Chop Shop

BOLD**RI****DE** By Craig Fitzgerald
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Last month, we featured a story on the [Fisher Body Craftsman's Guild](#), which helped encourage children to design and build their own model cars, as part of a scholarship program. This week, we learned about Leo Gallardo, Los Angeles Art Director at After-School All-Stars. He's running a program called Leo's Chop Shop, and it's providing exactly the kind of hands-on, confidence-building craftsmanship that the Fisher Body Craftsman's Guild did, at a local level.



Leo Gallardo received his formal training at the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California. The Art Center College of Design's Transportation Design program has launched the careers of world-famous automotive and motorcycle designers like Wayne Cherry, Chris Bangle, Larry Shinoda, Richard Teague and J Mays. He read about the Art Center of Design in *Motor Trend* when he was in the Navy in 1996. "It spotlighted the the cool designs and the really cool drawings of futuristic cars," Leo says. "In '99, I decided to apply to Art Center College of Design by producing a portfolio in two weeks. A week later, I got accepted."

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Leo ended up getting an internship with Ford Motor Company, working at the Living Legends Studio in Dearborn, Michigan. The Living Legends Studio is essentially a design skunkworks for Ford Motor Company that churned out amazing designs like the Forty-Nine, the 2001 Mustang Bullitt GT and the Ford GT.



After his time with Ford, Leo eventually moved back to California to work in his community. He started at After-School All-Stars as a Program Leader, and with the knowledge and skills he acquired

from his Art Center education, Leo began teaching a model car building class in 2004. "After a couple of years, I was going to different schools teaching this class since there was a high demand for it," he says.



The key that Leo identified was that while it's great to live in a technology-driven society, with all the information you could want at your fingertips, hands-on experience is sorely lacking. "There was a need to bring traditional craftsmanship to our students," says Leo. "I felt that our students should understand an art form that does not require the use of a computer or machine."

Students in Leo's Chop Shop divide into no more than two students per model kit. Depending upon their level and the school, some students may work alone on a kit. Students learn the basics about car construction and design, different car cultures around the world, color theory, and the use and maintenance of an airbrush. Along with all the hard skills, Leo calls out the most important learning process: "One skill in particular that students learn is the power of patience, this is required in order to complete your build."



So far, the program has been well-received locally, and has opened doors for students that may have remained locked without it. "A few years back, we had Ferrari open up their showroom and service center to our students to check out the cars," Leo says. Students auctioned their work to help support the program. "We also have a great collaboration with the Petersen Automotive Museum. They have been generous with us, providing space to showcase some of the students' best work."

Leo's students also went to the Toyota Grand Prix of Long Beach last year with another organization called Racers Who Care. "[They] had the opportunity to talk to professional racecar drivers and the crews about the concept of teamwork and working hard to achieve their goals," he says.



It seems like an idea that could roll out in schools across the country, but Leo is quick to point out the time required to do it right.