



Home

## Dania Beach auto restorer crafts horseless carriage for NYC



Jason Wenig inside his Dania Beach shop, The Creative Workshop, stands among the tape outlining what will become a horseless carriage. He is designing and building a \$450k prototype of a horseless carriage to replace the horse drawn carriages now used in Central Park in NYC. He has been hired by an animal advocacy group. He has 3-D designs of the new car, as well as markings on the floor for its frame. (Taimy Alvarez, Sun Sentinel)

By **Robert Nolin, Sun Sentinel**

8:19 p.m. EDT, May 11, 2013

More than a century ago, the rumbling, sputtering automobile put the horse and buggy out of business. Now, Jason Wenig wants to help history repeat itself.

The owner of a **Dania Beach** car restoration company, Wenig is on a unique mission: harness today's technology to yesterday's nostalgia and create a horseless carriage that will replace New York's iconic — and controversial — horse-drawn buggies.

"We're taking up the reins of what our car-building ancestors have done," he said amid the old-timey atmosphere of his well-ordered workshop. "What's old is new again."

Wenig, 41, has been hired to craft from scratch an electric car, based on a 1909 Pierce Arrow and Packard, as a prototype to gradually phase out the horse-drawn carriages that ferry tourists around **Central Park** and **Midtown Manhattan**. A nonprofit animal advocacy group — New Yorkers for Clean, Livable and Safe Streets — has contracted him for \$450,000, collected through donations large and small, to design and build the prototype, and possibly an entire fleet, to free the horses from dangerous city streets.

"After doing an exhaustive, nationwide search we settled on Jason," said Allie Feldman, NYCLASS' executive director. "We picked him because he has the artistic vision to bring this replica 1909 car to life."



An animal advocacy group hopes a new generation of horseless carriages will replace the horse drawn carriages on the streets of NYC. The Creative Workshop of Dania Beach will build the new electric horseless carriage.

NYCLASS, which claims 110,000 supporters, including celebrities, politicians and animal welfare organizations, is dedicated to banishing horse buggies from New York streets. The animals endure cruel work conditions, are killed and injured in accidents, inhale unhealthy car exhaust, cause traffic congestion and foul the roadway, Feldman said.

Her group is lobbying New York politicians — its already won over a majority of the City Council, she said — to pass a pilot program to replace the city's approximately 220 carriage horses with custom-built, electric antique replica cars.

"Most New Yorkers are ready to see this industry put out to pasture," Feldman said. "People are tired of seeing accidents happen to carriages in Midtown."

Horse and buggies clip-clop along the streets of West Palm Beach and St. Augustine, but hardly on the scale they do in Manhattan, and there has been little controversy over their trade.

Wenig, a Brooklyn native whose Creative Workshop restores classic cars for big-money collectors, plans to have his prototype ready by next spring. If it's approved to replace the horse buggies, he could produce up to 68 more cars in coming years, at a much reduced price compared to the prototype.

But for now Wenig's barn-like workshop, a converted 1932 granary, is the scene of inspiration coupled with innovation. He pores over 3-D computer renditions of the prototype, calibrates the angle of its pedals, and calculates the diameter of its steering wheel.

"This is an art form," said Wenig, who has been featured in the New York Daily News and Ocean Drive magazine. "It's a complete throwback to the dawn of motoring."

Parts rest on tables or the wooden floor, where a taped outline defines the frame of the 19-foot-long flivver. Besides being authentically antique, the car must comply with all modern safety requirements.

"It's an amazing undertaking, an antique vehicle with cutting-edge technology," he said. "There's thousands of details that have to jell together properly."

Wenig, a self-described "gearhead," brings a lifetime of automotive tinkering to the task. He was the kind of kid, he said, who if left alone would dismantle mom's washing machine motor to power a go cart. A decade ago he abandoned lucrative New York careers in marketing and financial planning to move to Florida and restore cars.

Wenig said it's inevitable that horseless carriages, not laboring horses, will eventually fulfill New York's need for nostalgia.

"There's going to be resistance, but there's an overwhelming amount of support," he said. "It's going to happen."

[rnolin@tribune.com](mailto:rnolin@tribune.com) or 954-356-4525