

PROFESSIONAL *Car*washing

BabcoX

JULY 2024 / VOLUME 48 / NUMBER 7

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HONESTY, INTEGRITY AND DOING THE RIGHT THING

The Petit way of doing business has helped the company build a strong reputation in the carwash industry.

Petit Auto Wash Equipment Inc. has become a staple in carwashing. From building equipment for express tunnels and in-bay automatics to operating its own carwashes, the Petit name is synonymous with an outstanding reputation.

We recently spoke with the Petit Auto Wash Equipment team about how aviation influenced a passion for carwashes, the company's research-driven work and its good standing built on integrity.

PLANES, ELECTRONICS AND CARWASHES

Petit Auto Wash Equipment Founder Tom Petit was 8 years old when his father started a self-serve carwash in Barberton, Ohio. He told Tom to go to college, so Tom started pursuing an engineering degree.

Three quarters of the way through engineering school, Tom had a car accident that hospitalized him for a month. In his hospital bed, he realized

he didn't want to sit at a desk all day. So, he switched all his college credits into the aerospace program at Kent State University.

That led to a career as a professional pilot, flying around corporate executives of Northeast Ohio. During his travels, Tom would have a lot of downtime.

"I was easily bored [flying] for an hour [and sitting] for eight or 10 hours as a corporate pilot," Tom remembers. "So, I would go look at carwash equipment, as well as their operations."

Believe it or not, carwashes and aircrafts have some similar attributes and challenges. Tom draws from his aviation background when designing and engineering carwash equipment. "Airplanes are all hydraulics, pneumatics and microprocessors," Tom explains. "All of these components are in harsh and changing environments as well. Changing pressures, temperatures, dew points ... This is all very valuable information that aerospace engineers need to consider. Obviously, reliability

and corrosion are also at the forefront of everyone's mind when designing anything aircraft-related."

Tom explains, "Due to the extreme conditions both industries share and due to being involved in both industries, it was a natural fit for me to incorporate some of the methodologies that have been proven in aircraft design. The industries actually match up very well."

HIGH-QUALITY EQUIPMENT

While visiting carwashes on flight breaks, Tom began designing his own carwash equipment. He would visit component manufacturers. Tom states, "The goal was to design out the reliability issues that I noticed in other machines. There were also a lot of great ideas I observed from others. I enhanced and improved what I liked, and designed out what I didn't."

If Petit was busy flying, he also needed carwash equipment that was durable and simple to work on. "I needed the carwash to just keep running," he explains. "If it did break, I needed it to be simple and fast for one of my employees to fix. Simplifying the whole process wherever possible was very important to me."

This drove Tom to create the Accutrac® line of products for carwashes. Top-of-the-line parts are put into everything Petit builds, such as the company's best-selling Accutrac® 360-i in-bay automatic, as well as its Accutrac® 360-t and XR tunnel machine, which wash 180 cars per hour at 30 inches apart. The same quality equipment also goes into Petit's pump stations and reverse osmosis systems.

All of Petit Auto Wash Equipment's products are built in a 53,000-square-foot



facility in Norton, Ohio. Every Accutrac® machine is tested with its own specific site's control panel to guarantee proper quality before shipping. This allows Petit to ensure every piece of equipment meets a superior standard.

"Tom is research heavy, I guess you could say," comments Petit Auto Wash Equipment Consultant Jason Hayes. "He dives deep into the technology and methods."

BUILDING ON RESEARCH

Carwashes are a family business for Petit. Tom owns and operates five carwashes in addition to building equipment. His brother also owns and operates a dozen carwashes. These give Petit the perfect testing grounds to try out new equipment for carwashes. "They're all basically our research and development sites," Tom adds. "We also have the advantage of our tunnel machines being in extreme volume tunnels. We have clients washing over 400,000 cars a year with our 360-t. Due to all of the bridge and componentry being identical to our in-bay machine, this is one thing that sets us apart. We're able to test at 10x the volume of any other in-bay manufacturer out there at this time, and that's in real wash conditions."

Testing equipment in the field has been a huge help in generating success for Petit Auto Wash Equipment. "Some manufacturers are looking to save money; we're looking to build a better machine," says Jason. "If we can make the machine 5% better or 10% better, even just 1% better, then that's what we're going to do as long as it's within reason."

Tom adds, "We learned that the cost of being broken down is higher than most realize due to the long line of people who are waiting for a wash, and you've just disappointed them all tremendously. So, spending a little bit extra money on equipment to not disappoint your customers pays dividends in the long run."

TIME + SPACE = MONEY

Petit is at the forefront of quick and powerful carwashes. "People value their time, and they don't like to wait," explains Tom.

However, Hayes says this is a tough



idea for some in-bay operators to grasp.

The Accutrac® 360-i in-bay automatic owners regularly wash in two to three minutes due to its design that's packed with quadruple the cleaning power of other in-bay automatics. They can wash up to 29 cars per hour. Tom adds, "We have many clients washing volumes at 50% to 100% more than their previous capacity. We have clients with double short bays washing over 65,000 cars a year, and a triple washing over 100,000 cars per year. These are just a few of many examples."

"We found that when we put these in our own carwashes, the carwashes wash more cars [and] we made a lot more money," says Tom.

A bonus is the in-bays don't take up much space. They can fit into convenient spaces near shopping areas and neighborhoods, which can welcome new, regular customers looking to wash their cars quickly. Jason states, "When you can offer a model that washes the volumes our in-bays do, and a model that uses a fraction of the labor and lower upfront cost compared to tunnels, the whole industry starts to rethink some methods and strategies."

HONESTY IS THE BEST POLICY

Tom and Jason will be the first to tell you their equipment isn't cheap. As mentioned before, they both believe in making high-quality carwash products. Jason says, "We try to be really upfront and honest. However, due to the performance of the machine, sometimes it's hard for people to believe our reliability and wash volumes."

If you want to believe, look at Petit Auto Wash Equipment's online presence. You'll find it has a pristine reputation among its customers who own or have seen Petit's machines perform. For Petit, online reviews create a two-way street, providing honest feedback about their business on top of their honesty to customers. "People say what they're going to say, and when they talk about us, it's good," Jason explains.

The company's honesty is even seen in their consulting. There have been multiple instances where Petit has talked potential operators out of building carwashes due to location, financial implications and other metrics. This honesty helps save potential operators a fortune and sets Petit Auto Wash Equipment apart from the rest of the industry. Tom explains, "We want to grow with the same principles that got us here, and that's building relationships and communicating to the best of our ability with long-term interest in mind. We want our clients to be successful, and sometimes that means suggesting against a purchase if it doesn't make sense for the client. This pays off in different ways long term."

Tom continues, "We're not a perfect company by any means, but we definitely strive to continue to improve and be the best we can be."

Petit Auto Wash Equipment's growth — by providing excellent equipment developed by research, hard work and integrity — have been keys to the company's success, and Petit strives to continue growing by these principles. **PC&D**