

# CARWASHING

& DETAILING®

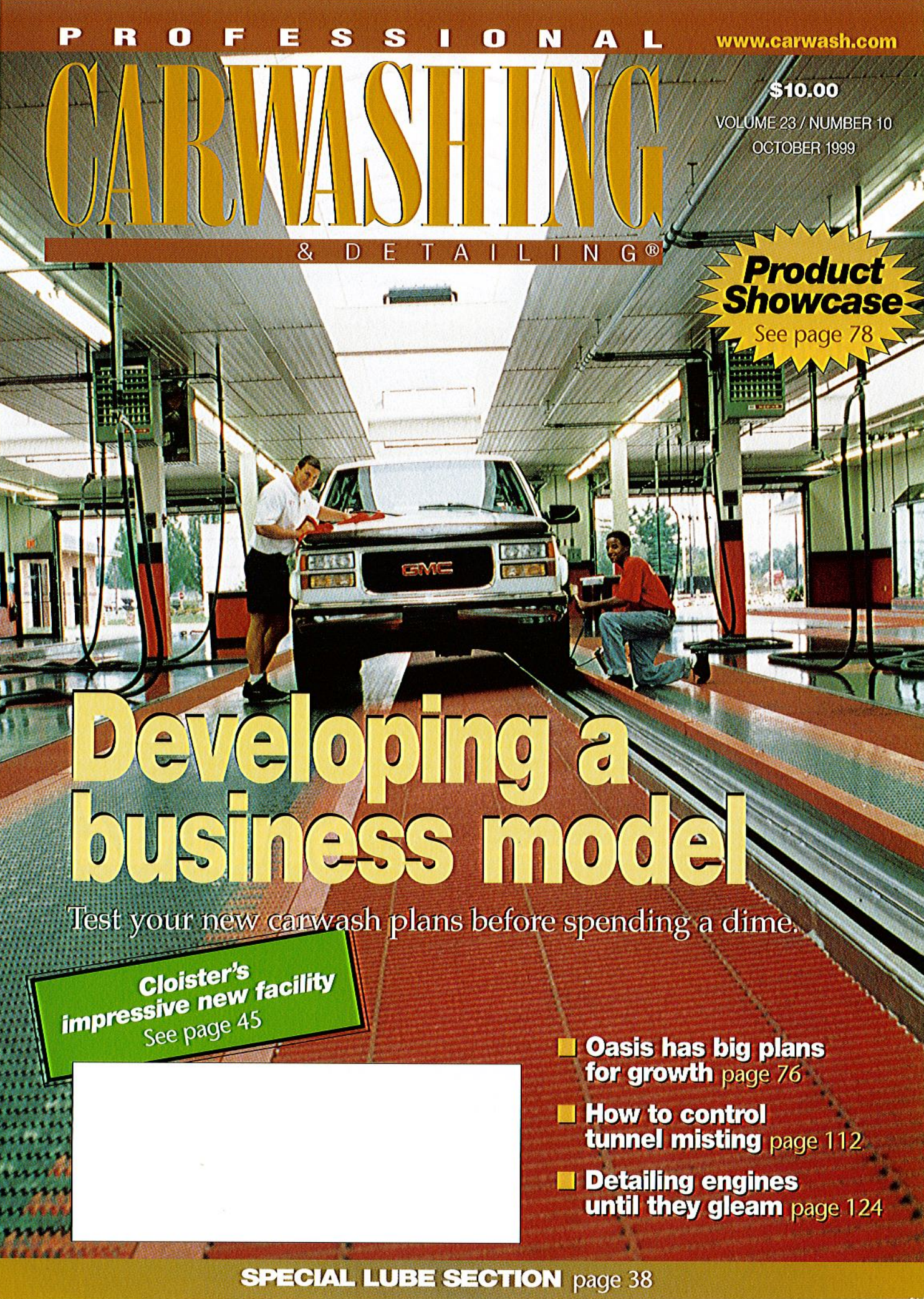
\$10.00

VOLUME 23 / NUMBER 10

OCTOBER 1999

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# The Cloister Is Truly a "Moving" Experience

This Pennsylvania powerhouse features five conveyors.

**M**ike Mountz already had a reputation as an innovative operator before he built his fourth location in Lancaster, PA. After unveiling the Cloister Car Wash and Lube, however, he just might retire the title.

Mountz configured the spacious four-acre site with four buildings and a total of five conveyors, three of which move employees as well as vehicles. The result is a sprawling, \$5.5 million car care complex that can handle high volumes of exterior and full-service washes along with fast lube services.

Mountz, who comes from a manufacturing background, modeled his system after automobile production assembly lines. "I wondered if they can build cars that way, why can't we wash cars that way?" he says.

The Cloister site includes a greeter house, an exterior carwash tunnel with twin conveyors, a separate building housing three conveyors for interior services, and a lube shop. Customers can select any combination of services as they navigate the lot.

The cars that move on from the exterior carwash and enter the full service



By Lisa Arnseth

building are loaded onto one of two conveyors devoted to vacuuming and cleaning windows in addition to other basic interior services. Employees are moved along with the cars on conveyor belts running along both sides of the vehicle tracks. On each line there's a 2-foot belt on the driver's side and a 4-foot belt on the passenger side, both driven by the same motor that powers the standard over-and-under. Workers and cars reach the exit end in about five minutes.

The third conveyor in the building handles express detailing services, which include 15-minute express waxes, shampoos and other services. It's not a conventional roller-on-demand model, rather it's a 12-foot wide belt—a bigger version of

the people-movers attached to the other conveyors in the building.

The two 180-foot exterior conveyors are lined with AVW equipment. Washes are priced from \$8 to \$22, depending on exterior only or full service. The average revenue per car so far has been around \$12.50. Since the facility opened in stages (the exterior wash and the lube shop opened in April while the full-service building opened in July), Mountz says





it is hard to tell how many cars have been going through in a day. However, he projects processing about 140,000 cars a year once the wash establishes itself.

"It's a high volume facility, and if it doesn't do high volume, it wasn't even worthwhile building it," he says.

Mountz calculates that an average of 50 percent of his customers want to use the full-service option, and he says the facility can handle this number very well. Each of his full-service conveyors can produce 70 cars an hour, and the express detailing conveyor can be changed over to full service with the "flick of a switch" if the need is there. About 10 percent of Cloister customers go for the \$44 express detailing option.

As far as the lube shop is concerned, Mountz says he is very pleased with the traffic. At the end of the summer, he saw an average of 55 cars a day taking advantage of the \$28 lube. Services performed in the Cloister Lube Shop include Pennzoil oil changes, transmission and antifreeze flushes, A/C charging and air filter changes. He anticipates the daily numbers rising in the future in this department as well.

#### A warm, inviting facility

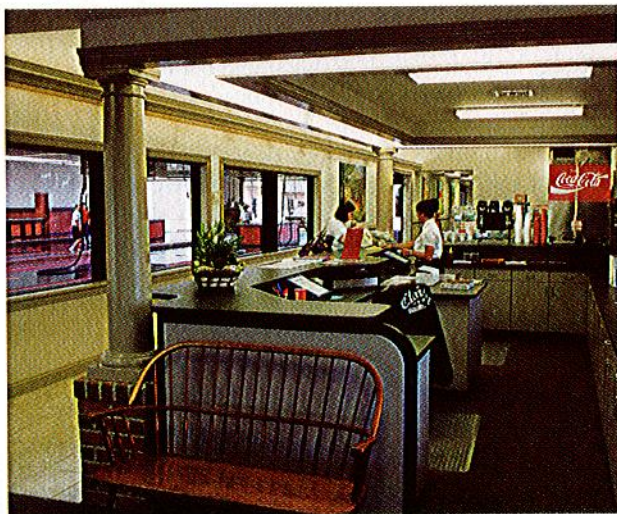
It's not just the sprawling acreage that draws attention to the Cloister—the entire facility radiates warmth and professionalism, which Mountz has worked hard to foster at all of his locations. The colors, general décor and even the columns out in front of the buildings are the same at his other washes, two full services and a self serve. The company slogan, "Feel Good: Drive a Cloister Clean Car," is punctuated by a smiling red face on the signage around the property, and there are signs that say "Relax" and simply, "Feeling Good." The buildings are neatly constructed of red brick with vinyl siding. They resemble the residential homes of the area and have what Mountz describes as a "colonial feel" to them. In the customer waiting areas, wooden rail benches and old-fashioned rocking chairs line the porches and lobby of the lube shop.

The entire property is well-lit with everything from fluorescent and recessed lighting in the cashier and waiting areas, to the traditional gas-lamp styled lamp posts sprinkled around the lot. The domed skylight in the full service building brings natural light to the work area and makes a big impression with customers. The domed windows were imported from Belgium after Mountz had taken a business trip to Europe and spotted them over two and a half years ago. He said he couldn't find such high-quality windows in the United States, and managed to have them sent over especially for this new location.

Another trademark of the Cloister washes is abun-

dant landscaping. Mountz is engaged in a friendly contest with Hoffman's Carwashes (in Albany, NY) to see who plants the most flowers in a year, so everything from *cornus florida pink* flowers to extensive greenery and shrubbery can be found around the properties. Thanks to his wife, Rhoda, and her "crew," Mountz says the year's count for flowers was somewhere over 30,000 plants at all his locations.

Mountz also credits members of the Hoffman family for helping him figure out key components in the washes themselves. "Tom Hoffman Jr. is a dear friend of mine, and



(Left) The full service building features three conveyors. A separate tunnel houses twin conveyors for exterior washes.

(Above, top) Employees move alongside cars on conveyors and all exit in about five minutes.

(Above, bottom) The spacious waiting area is both customer and employee friendly, a Cloister trademark.





*(Left) Natural lighting from overhead skylights showcases AVW equipment.*

*(Below) The Cloister Lube shop is averaging 55 cars per day.*

he was the brains behind powering the carwash equipment, lighting and everything," says Mountz. "It's unbelievable what he's done for me as a friend...it's like he has a computer brain."

Mountz has also received advice and input from Joe Enning, an operator from Germany who may have the one wash that Mountz considers almost comparable in size to his own. "I've been told by numerous sources that I have a huge facility," he says.

#### **A people-based business**

Washing cars wasn't always Mountz's main ambition. Before he opened his first wash in 1984, he worked with a large manufacturing business. He enjoyed the business of producing quality products in a timely manner, which he believes led him naturally to the carwashing industry. He says he enjoys the challenge of getting cars cleaned quickly and thoroughly, but more importantly he loves the human element that is involved.

Today he finds himself deeply immersed in what he does. "I'm addicted," he admits. "I think it's a very fascinating industry."

He is committed to the idea that a positive work environment for employees makes all the difference. His conveyorized-style of cleaning cars works to that end. "My employees are working in a dry environment with no noise," says Mountz. He notes that although an assembly-line-like process was often used in the past in other facilities, in those situations employees had to physically walk alongside the cars to get the jobs done before the cars headed into the tunnel. In the Cloister carwashes, employees do not have to walk sideways or get tangled up in hoses or equipment. His system, which he says "has never been done before," helps him to recruit and retain the best employees.

Mountz says his employees enjoy benefits such as nine paid holidays a year and vacation time, as well as insurance plans that are available for the employees and their families. Employee handbooks are given to all new employees to clearly detail all the standards and programs that are in place at the Cloister. Uniforms are necessary, as well as keeping hair neatly trimmed and groomed.

According to Mountz, employees can easily move through the ranks of the company by following a clear-cut promotions program, a

fact that helps his retention rate stay strong. From the conveyors to the vacation days the whole system has held up very well for Mountz: "The whole facility was laid out to do this," he says. "We just have a great group of people that work well together."

#### **Bullish on the future**

"I think the industry has a very bright future, and it's attracting some very good talent so it's going to get better and better," he says. As Mountz sees it, the higher car prices soar, the more conscious of car care the consuming public will be...and more discriminating when it comes to good service.

Mountz's advice to current operators is to continuously improve their systems. "I think we're going to have to be bright, sharp businesspeople and make for great working conditions for our employees. We can't sit back on our heels...we need to make it better," he says.

Although he has been approached by consolidators, Mountz says he cannot bring himself to sell his locations at this point. While he doesn't rule out the possibility of accepting an offer sometime in the future, right now he says, "I am having way too much fun."

Besides the amount of enjoyment he garners from his work, he also revels in the strong commitment that he shares with other carwashing professionals. "When I look around at the successful operators, they are truly, truly committed to the industry," he says. Mountz himself finds himself working seven days a week, sometimes over 80 hours. He suggests that new operators seriously consider the decision to enter the carwashing arena before they jump in, since the commitment is so large.

Although people visiting the wash may see a highly successful, bustling facility, they may not realize the reality of what happens on all those days when it isn't sunny out. "You go from one extreme right to the next extreme," he says. "No matter how good you are, remember that you cannot predict the weather!" □

