

Boatloads of Work By Cathie Beck



From fishing vessels to trains, the bigger the job the better for Larry Lawrence and Wrapped Graphics.

THOUGH LARRY LAWRENCE is an engineer by training, he is better-known in West Coast bass fishing circles as the go-to guy for one-stop, over-the-top boat graphics.

“Actually, we stumbled into the bass boat side of the business,” says Lawrence, owner and founder of Stockton, Calif.’s Wrapped Graphics. “A gentleman came in and had seen a wrapped boat somewhere. No one in Stockton did boats, so we said we’d do it. It was really taking off in L.A. and Arizona at the time, but not here.”

As is often the case with wraps, that happy first customer spurred a flurry of business.

“By word-of-mouth, we got three or four jobs,” he says. “A guy that owns Western Bass came by and we did a job for him, and then they posted an article about the boat. Things took off after that.”

Graphics that ride on the water can be tricky. But Lawrence knew that if he did them well, he’d have an in with the tight competitive fishing community.

“A boat’s more unique than a car—it can have failure points and if water gets underneath, you can lose the wrap,” he explains. “But, we did one (right) and that was it. Now, for example, when (a fisherman) is given

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Wrapped Graphics in California is a go-to shop for serious bass fishermen looking to wrap their boats.



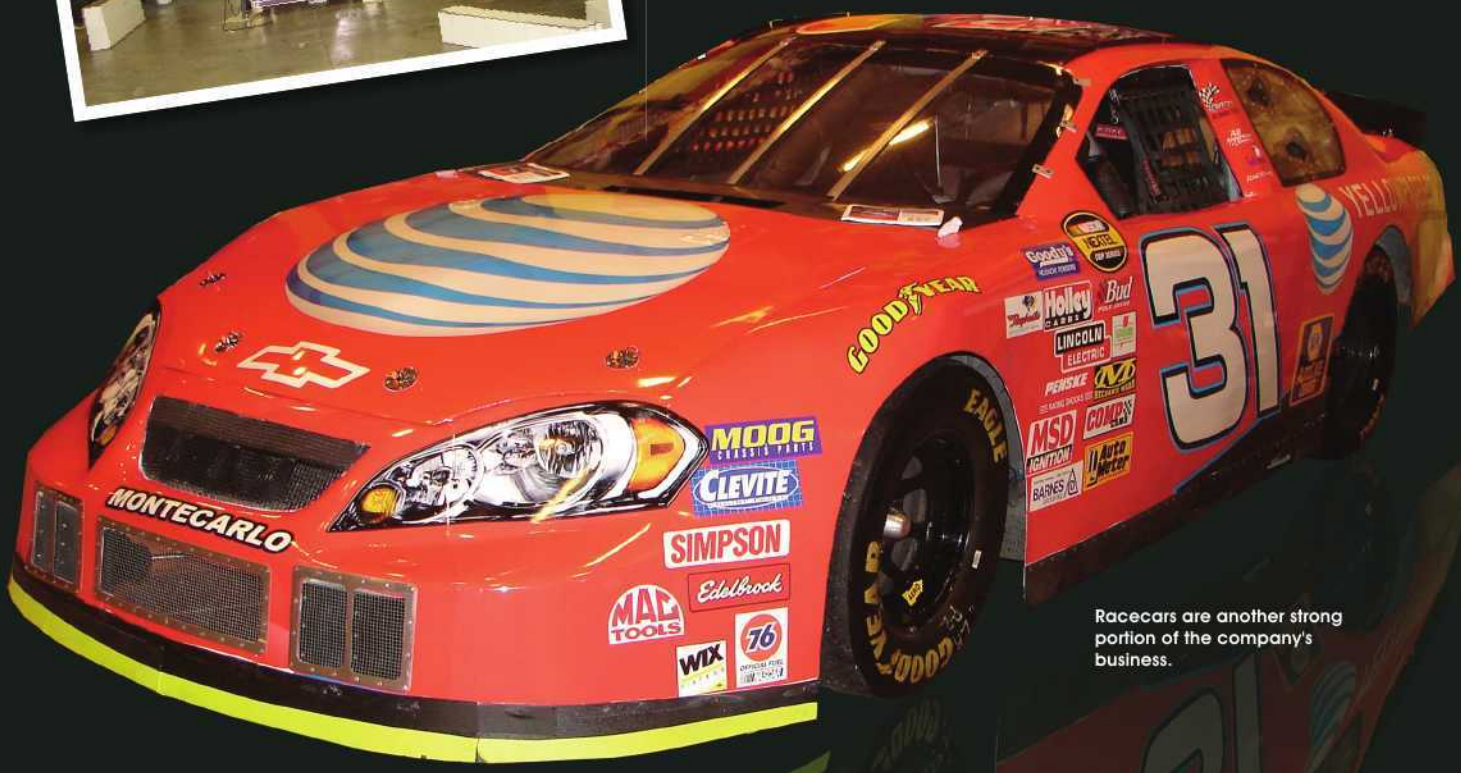
Wrapped Graphics takes on almost any wrap project.



The company has a mechanical shop with 2,000 square feet, divided into two parts.



Larry Lawrence founded Wrapped Graphics two years ago, in part to help a friend in the sign business.



Racecars are another strong portion of the company's business.



Word of mouth is the company's best advertising.

a boat by a manufacturer such as Bass Cat, they bring it to us and we get all of the sponsors on it so it can be in a tournament. Usually there's a truck to go with the boat, and they want it to match. Fishermen are like that. It has to be perfect."

And, for those of you down South, know that the bass fishing is good in California, too.

"We're seeing a lot more of this kind of work," Lawrence says. "There are a lot of bass clubs here because of the bay area, and that's very good for me."

More than Boats

It was family life that brought Lawrence to the wrapping business.

"I worked for Kodak for 15 years," he says. "But then my kids didn't want me to travel anymore, so we decided to try this business on our own."

Two years ago, he and his wife, Danein, founded Wrapped Graphics, in part to assist a friend who was in the sign business.

"A friend of mine has a sign shop and

does banners and sticker-type signs," he says. "I thought maybe if I got into the graphics side, it would help him out."

Lawrence brought with him some design experience when he entered the market.

"Though I'd been on the engineering side at Kodak, I worked with graphics and computers there," he says. "It was always fun for me to create graphics and to design. Being around printers all my life, this industry comes naturally to me. After that experience helping my friend out, I went out and bought my own equipment and hit the streets."

Beyond boating, Wrapped Graphics takes on almost any wrap project it can find, understanding that most of its jobs come from vehicle wraps and graphics.

"We do everything from full-color vehicle wraps to window perforation on storefronts," he says. "Though the majority of our projects are on the marine side with bass boats and trucks, if someone came in and wanted floor decals, we can do that, too."

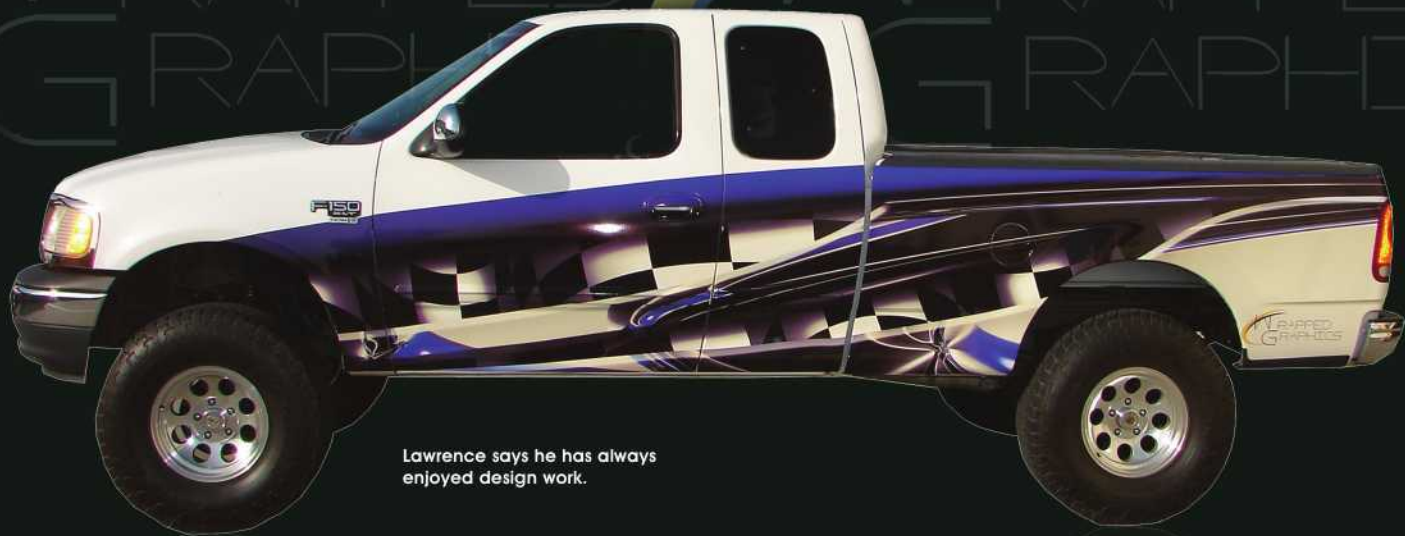
"We also do racecars," he continues. "My son races, and (other racers) see his car and everyone wants (a wrap). And entrepreneurs come in. For example, a company called Aqua Planet is one of our clients. The owner is retired already, but he came up with a vitamin water business and wanted some trucks wrapped. And we get commercial business, like electric companies. It really can be just about anyone."

On the Right Track

The company's wrapping success has prompted Lawrence to think big. Really big.

Wrapped Graphics recently landed its biggest job yet: wrapping train cars, some dozens of feet long. Even Lawrence says that work at that size is a challenge—one he, his wife and work colleagues relish.

"Right now we're working on the Ace Train, a full-size commuter train from Stockton to San Jose," he says. "Let me just say that it's huge. We're doing a 10-year anniversary wrap for them and it is



Lawrence says he has always enjoyed design work.



AquaPlanet is one of Wrapped Graphics' corporate clients.

getting printed now and will be laid out the last week of September."

Needless to say, it's the biggest job the company has ever tackled.

The train engine, "is 82-foot long and 15-foot tall, and we'll do the cars, too," he says. "There are five cars on each train and the cars are 97-foot long. That job alone will take one-and-a-half months."

Lawrence says that, again, it's with a bit of luck that the San Joaquin Regional Rail Commission came to Wrapped Graphics for the project.

"I have a friend that works for the rail line, and they wanted decals for windows on their trucks," he says. "They came to the shop and saw that we were working on a 42-foot horse trailer and they said, 'Hey, can you wrap a train?' and I said, 'Hey, we sure can try.'"

If the project goes well, it's likely more will follow.

"Now we're in negotiations to do another train for Children's Hospital," adds Lawrence. "The trains are, by far, our biggest project yet. The other piece



to that project is that it will get a lot of media coverage. The rail lines have gotten bigger and bigger on commuter trains here."

Shop Layout

It takes a unique shop layout to accommodate the unusual projects Wrapped Graphics tackles. Lawrence goes so far as to credit his long and open work space as one of the main reasons the company gets the jobs it does.



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Wraps Profile

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“We don’t have a showroom, per se,” he says. “We have a mechanical shop of about 2,000 square feet with two parts. We have a front part, which would normally serve as office space, but that’s where we keep our printer because it’s environmentally controlled there.”

The second part, of course, is the bay.

“When we began looking for shops, we knew that we wanted to be able to pull vehicles in,” says Lawrence. “Most sign shops here are mom-and-pops, and they don’t have a garage. I can put a boat and truck in here at the same time, which is very unusual.”

It seems that with a wraps business,

Once people see the company’s work, they understand it and want their own wrap.



the more space you have, the better.

"We also have two 18-foot tables, so we can lay out all of our materials before applying," he says. "We worked hard and hunted for what we needed and wanted. We found this and the rent's good. We're also across the street from the highway patrol, so it's very safe here."

The Wrapped Graphics equipment arsenal allows it to handle those larger projects.

"Out in the shop area, we have a plotter/cutter and a laminator," says Lawrence. "We also use an HP 9000 printer, a GBC 1065 laminator printer, and we have a Graphtec FC 7000-160 cutter. Our software includes Photoshop CS3 and Illustrator CS3, and all of it works very well together."

The company uses a variety of materials including Avery MPI 1005 EZR vinyl for vehicle wraps and boat wraps, and DOL 1030 for the overlam.

Talented Team

The four-person staff at Wrapped Graphics also works very well together. Lawrence says word-of-mouth recommendations allowed him to build a strong, talented, dependable team.

"My designer is a friend of a friend, and another guy is a friend of the family. Getting good employees has not been a struggle for us."

Neither has finding customers. Along with referral business, the company has an Internet presence as well.

"We do have a Web site (www.wrappedgraphics.com)," he says. "We started advertising on the Internet through several Web sites and we did a radio spot, but it wasn't effective. Ninety-nine percent of our business comes to us by word-of-mouth. Once people see (our work), they realize what it is and everyone wants it."

Our pricing reflects our ability to do everything and to do it in a superior fashion.

With the good life Wrapped Graphics is enjoying, even pricing jobs has gone smoothly.

"It's a lot of cold-calling to get a sense of (where prices are regionally),"

he says. "But, we've found that there's a real difference between us and the mom-and-pops that can't do everything in one stop. Some can do graphics but can't apply. Some can apply but can't do graphics. Our pricing reflects our ability to do everything and to do it in a superior fashion."

Just as it started with that first bass boat, a job well done will breed more business.

"That's what separates us," he concludes. "Application is key. If you can't put it on right, it won't stick and you have upset customers. We put it on right and it looks incredible." ☺

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