

MICHAEL GREEN

Enhancing Form Without Sacrificing Function

story by **HILDA J. BRUCKER** | photo by **TIM MANTOANI**

Michael Green believes everything in life happens for a reason—including the fact he was so easily bored when he was younger that at different times he majored in law, physics, political science, philosophy, history and economics. He couldn't have foreseen then, he says, that he'd be using elements from all those subjects today to bring innovative and functional tire designs to the off-road market.

Green's grandfather, Ben Glassman, had founded Tire Mart, a giant national wholesaler that carries tires of all brands for all different applications. Toward the end of his career he'd asked Green—the only grandchild—to take over the family business in his place. Fresh out of law school, Green agreed, and within a year his characteristic restlessness led him to found Pit Bull Tires. "I wanted to do something different, to have our own brand—something I could take in a new direction," he says.

A PIT BULL IS BORN

Pit Bull's first product line was tractor-pulling tires. (Green's grandfather had developed a line of agricultural tires, so this was a natural starting point.) But Green often enjoyed off-roading in the country with his friends, who soon began urging him to design an off-road tire. Intrigued by the challenge, he began experimenting with different designs and rubber compounds, surrounding himself with "a lot of smart people" to give him guidance. "After 10 years of screwing around, the final piece fell into place and we decided it was time to take a chance and launch the tires," he says. Today, the line includes three different designs: Maddog, Growler and Rocker.

At 39, Green has an easy laugh and a sense of humor that shows in his patented tread designs, which some-

how seem light-hearted and graphical next to tires with more standard treads. His design philosophy is based on his belief that visual appeal is most likely to catch the customer's eye first. "Being the new guy on the block, we had to come out with something that was so unique and different that from a hundred yards away people would say, 'I've never seen that before!' But it's not just about looks, it's about function. Anyone can make a tire look good. Since we want our customers to be repeat buyers, we had to make an aesthetically appealing tire that actually worked, and that's a lot harder than it sounds. That's why it took 10 years."

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According to Green, Pit Bull's off-road tires offer several advantages, ranging from less road noise while running on the street to great traction in extreme applications, like rock crawling and mud bogging. They're also heat and cut resistant. "The way I look at it is this: if we bring new and innovative tire products that offer alternative, high-quality choices for consumers, those new choices stimulate product improvements across the

board. We're another choice, and having choices is good for everyone."

FROM THE GROUND UP

Green is a hands-on company president who says he has worked every position in the company, going back to the time he held a summer job in his grandfather's warehouse. When he first joined the company at his grandfather's request, there were 40 employees; today there are just 14. "We're lean and mean, and that's good," he laughs. Yet Green also says he never laid anyone off to make a profit—computers simply made it easier to get by with a smaller staff as long-time employees began to retire.

This particular brand of loyalty extends to customers and dealers as well as employees. "As an underdog, we tend to support other underdogs, be it dealers, competition teams or other smaller companies with varied off-road products. We're like alternative music before it became mainstream," he says. "My philosophy in life is, there are so many people out there that can do great things if you just give them a chance."

Ultimately, Green would like his products to be successful enough that his company would pull enough weight to help do some social good—whether by supporting off-roading, keeping park land open and available, or even helping dog breeders overcome the sometimes negative image that the pit bull breed carries. "What those things will be, I don't know. I guess they'll just reveal themselves as we go along." **ORB**

SOURCE

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