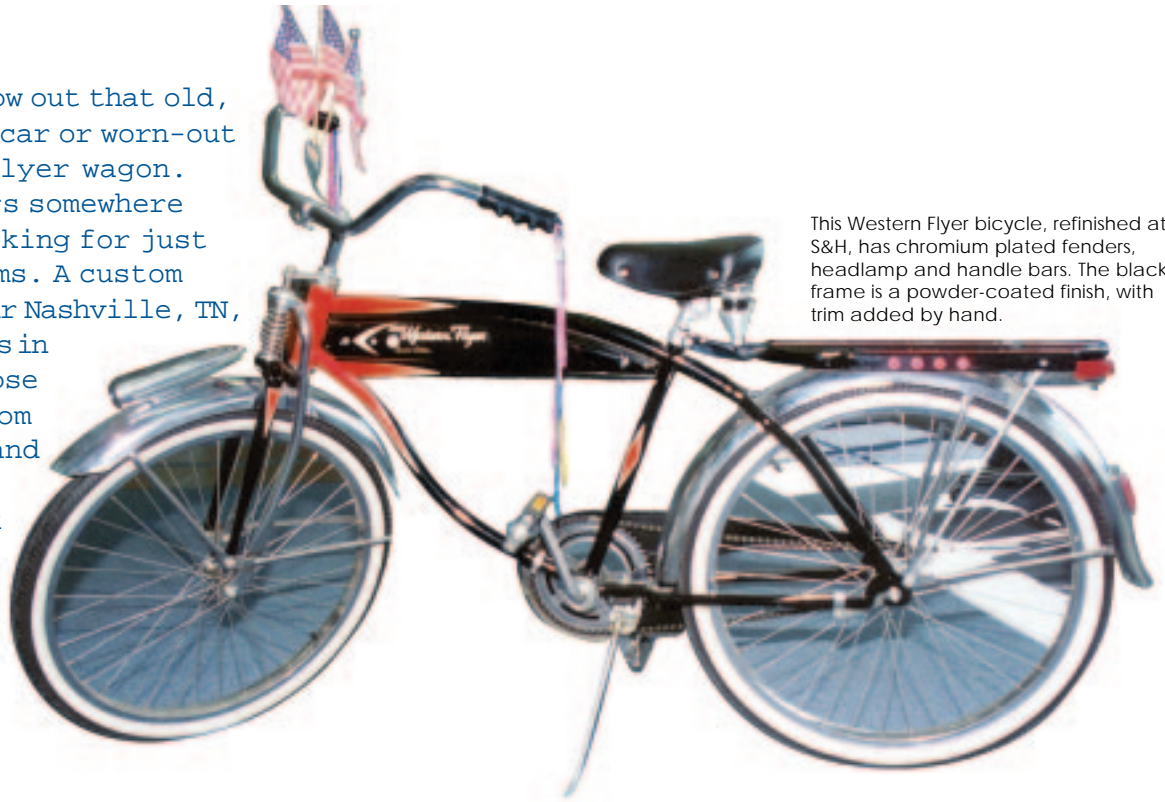


Nashville Jobshop Finds Booming Business In Refinishing 'Toys' for All Ages

Don't throw out that old, rusty toy car or worn-out Western Flyer wagon. Collectors somewhere may be looking for just those items. A custom plater near Nashville, TN, specializes in taking those "toys" from the past and making them look like new.



This Western Flyer bicycle, refinished at S&H, has chromium plated fenders, headlamp and handle bars. The black frame is a powder-coated finish, with trim added by hand.

Nearly 20 years ago, Sam Robinson started S&H Plating in Madison, TN. A few years later, his brother, Mike, joined the business.

From the start, S&H specialized in refinishing parts for antique automobiles, mostly in chromium. As the business progressed, however, Sam's interest in collecting memorabilia from the 1950s and '60s developed into a lucrative portion of the business. Today, a significant amount of work at the facility involves refinishing antique toys and other metal items that have become popular collectibles in recent years.

"People collect all kinds of things," says Mike

Robinson. "Sometimes it's a special toy that a parent had when he was growing up, and he wants it refinished for his child.

Mostly it's just people who have a special interest in certain items from the past. They want to own a piece of history or

something with a special meaning to them."

S&H Plating performs the complete job—cleaning, repairing, restoring, plating and powder coating.

Finding Fixer-uppers

Some of the restoration work is performed for people who bring in antiques, but S&H actually locates a large number of items. Sam's interest in antiques keeps him in touch with a network of suppliers, and he knows a good deal when he sees one. "Most of the items are in really bad shape when we get them," Sam says. "We completely dismantle them, replace parts, clean them up, repair the metal,



Painted surfaces on gas pumps, and the housing on some popular models of neon signs, receive a powder-coated finish.

and refinish them to look like new.” Some of the old gas pumps restored at the shop have sold for up to \$1,600.

Who wants restored gas pumps? “A lot of ‘rodders’ (old car collectors) want a gas pump at their house or shop to go with their cars,” said Mike. “We have sold others for display at restaurants with an ‘oldies’ theme, and to people who just want to own something unique.”

Old juke boxes are another popular item, according to Sam, who owns six of them. A good juke box is rare, and they bring top dollar from businesses and individuals. Other popular items include bicycles, pedal cars and neon clocks made in the 1950s.

It's Done by Hand

The shop operates all hand-rack plating lines, with cleaning, buffing and polishing also performed by hand. A stripping operation is used for removing old chromium finishes. Processes offered include gold, silver, copper, nickel, chromium, and brass. Tanks are large enough to plate parts up to 10-ft long.



The rusty gas pump in the photo at left will be restored to the same condition as the items shown in the photo at right.

Replacing Paint

It would not be possible to refinish many of the parts without the aid of a painting operation. S&H utilizes a powder coating system to provide a high-quality, long-lasting finish. The powder booth is 12 x 12 x 25 ft, with parts cured in an oven that is 10 x 10 x 27 ft. This method is used for processing both large parts and large lots.

Musical Connection

S&H finishes more than just antique metal items. Located in “Music City,” the shop also has customers that manufacture musical instruments.

“We plate and powder-coat some parts for a company here in Nashville that manufactures drums and brass instruments,” Mike said. “We finish musical cymbals and some other brass parts used for other instruments. We also plate the hardware for the drums, and put a powder coating on some of the drum parts.” Parts for a company that refurbishes old guitars are also processed by S&H.

What's that Old Toy Worth?

That depends on how rare it is, according to the brothers. “We’ve processed some items worth thousands,” says Mike. “Most old juke boxes are worth in the \$2,000 range, and are worth thousands more after they are refurbished.”

Some of those old metal toys are also hard to find, and many will bring hundreds of dollars from collectors. As time passes, the prices just keep going up, and the rewards of refinishing them just keep getting better. ○

