

From pre-law to automotive mechanic

Sarah 'Bogi' Lateiner and 180 Degrees Automotive

BY TYSON HUGIE



Left to right: Madison Ervin, Michelle Davis, Heather Herr, Bogi Lateiner, Barbie "Barbie the Welder" Parsons and Martha Tansy. Up front is Martha's daughter Ellie.

Fewer than two percent of auto mechanics are female. Plenty of women have an interest in getting into the industry, but many can't find work because they aren't qualified, and they can't build the skills to become qualified until they land that first job. It's a cycle that Sarah "Bogi" Lateiner has sought to break, while changing the way people think about women in automotive.

Lateiner started her love affair with cars when she was sixteen, buying an old VW Beetle. After multiple bad experiences with repair shops, she enrolled in her high school's auto shop so she could work on her own car. With the help of mentors and books, she did a complete restoration of her beloved Bug, building her confidence and her passion for working on cars in the process.

Pushed from an early age to go to college, Bogi attended Oberlin College with a double major in Women's Studies and Pre-Law and a minor in Politics, graduating Phi Beta Kappa in just three years. At first, she set her sights on Harvard Law School, but after thinking about what she really wanted to do with her life, she made an about-face—a 180—and moved to Phoenix to attend Universal Technical Institute to be a mechanic.

After graduating from UTI, Bogi had a difficult time finding someone to hire her, finally finding a home with BMW dealerships. She found working at the dealership frustrating in some ways, so after six years, she quit her job and started working on friends' cars in her driveway.

Within eighteen months, her reputation as a topnotch mechanic had grown to the point where she couldn't keep up with the workload. So at age twenty-nine, Lateiner took the huge step of leasing a building, hiring some employees and officially opening her own shop—180 Degrees Automotive.

The shop serves as an educational institution as much as a repair facility. In addition to performing a full range of automotive services, her team of women (and the occasional male) are joined by others from around the community—and around the country—who come to Bogi's to learn the trade. Many already have skills, while for some it may be the first time they've picked up a wrench.

The facility erases gender stereotypes, causing people to think twice about anyone's skills and abilities in automotive trades. Between Bogi's own career story, the new lives her trainees can pursue and the customer perceptions that are changed, the name 180 Degrees Automotive completely fits.

The magic happens inside an industrial building near W Camelback Road and N 7th Avenue that holds more than meets the eye. Sofas, chairs and fixtures create a comfortable atmosphere for customers. The lobby contains a quarterly art exhibit featuring local artists and the garage bays themselves are immaculately tidy and organized.



Lateiner's real name is Sarah, but she studied in Hungary for a year during high school, where "Sarah" sounds a bit like a curse word. Her friends instead called her Boglarka (buttercup), nicknamed Bogi, which is close to the word for beetle. Since her VW Beetle had started her down the automotive path, "it stuck for multiple reasons," she says. Bogi is in her fifth season co-hosting *All Girls Garage* on Velocity TV. The current main project for her team of women is a build called the Chevy Montage—a 1957 Chevy pickup truck (equipped with a BMW M5 engine) that will debut at the SEMA show in Las Vegas this November.

Bogi has done something all of us wish—she has kept that first VW Bug all this time. It is due for another complete restoration and thus is on the list of projects for her team of women professionals and hobbyists from across the country. ■

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