



Mikayla the Mechanic: “You Can Do It”

by Dalton Brown, News Reporter
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EDWARDSVILLE - Mikayla Spano is a performance mechanic who works at Turbo Connection Racing in Edwardsville and was invited to last year's SEMA Show in Las Vegas for her work in the automotive industry. Spano said she hopes her success in a male-dominated career can inspire other women to do anything they set their minds to.

Spano said her interest in mechanics began long before she could drive - or even reach the pedals.

“I started literally from the time I could walk. My Dad and Grandpa are mechanics and they're my best friends, so growing up, I was in the garage with them. I wanted to know what they were doing and how they were doing it,” Spano said. “So I basically learned from them and then took what I learned from them and progressed to what I know now.”

While Spano took some automotive classes in high school and even received a few scholarships, rather than going to college, Spano said she went “straight into the performance world.” One day, while working as a delivery driver for AutoZone in Edwardsville, she made a delivery and got an unexpected job offer in return.

“It's actually kind of a funny story ... the shop that I work at now, I was delivering to them - and I do have a background with dirt track racing and everything - so whenever my current boss learned about it, he basically offered me a job,” Spano said. “I took it and ever since then, I've been there with them.”

The shop Spano works at is Turbo Connection Racing in Edwardsville. As a performance mechanic, she said she specializes in “turning your everyday V8 into a drag car.” The typical customer will come in wanting their car to have a little more horsepower - Spano's job is to install the performance parts necessary to get their car's horsepower to the level they want.

Last year, Spano said her boss invited her to go with him and his wife to the SEMA Show in Las Vegas - an annual event only open to qualified automotive industry members. She said her boss invited her not only as a good work experience, but also to keep her passion for cars alive - a goal which seems to have been achieved.

“It was honestly a blast - it was so much fun, I didn’t want to come home,” Spano said. “The best part for me is being able to look at all of the cars and see other people’s work and builds.”

Spano got the chance to do much more than just look at cars at the SEMA Show - she also got to show her skills behind the wheel of a Lamborghini.

“I did end up getting to race a Lamborghini ... I ended up getting it up to 145 miles per hour, and the guy that was with me, he was pretty shocked,” Spano said. “He said the way that I handled the car and drove it, he was honestly surprised I did that well for my first time being in a Lamborghini and he told me I need to be sponsored by them.”

With the automotive industry being so male-dominated, Spano said her time as a mechanic hasn’t been without criticism from others, but she’s grateful for the loyal clientele she’s built a reputation with.

“I’ve had lots of people over the years doubt me and say rude things like, ‘Cowgirls don’t belong in garages,’” Spano said. “But the customers that have not lost their faith in me and trust me with their cars, words can’t describe how much I truly appreciate them.”

In addition to satisfying her customers, Spano also hopes to inspire others like her to believe in themselves and their ability to do anything.

“One of my biggest goals with being a mechanic is that I do want to inspire other females, no matter any age, and let them know that they can do it,” Spano said. “No matter what anybody says, if you really put your mind to it and really want it, you can achieve such greatness in any kind of male-dominated job, not even just a mechanic’s job.

“You’re going to have your ups and downs no matter what, but if you keep at it, stick with it and keep it in your head that ‘This is what I want to do,’ you can do it,” Spano said.

Despite the ups and downs, Spano said the reward of hearing her hard work come to life is always well worth it.

“That first startup, you hear that car - and no matter how many times I do it, that feeling of accomplishment never gets old for me,” Spano said. “I live for that feeling.”