Serving a niche and beyond: PopShadow Decals and Wraps



Superbike racing is defined by qualities such as passion, presence, performance and purpose. These qualities also define PopShadow Decals and Wraps, a company led by the husband-and wife team of Steve and Tea Palella. The pair went into business together in 2010 to fill a niche in the motorcycle racing community. The company has since grown to do much, much more.



"We have jobs where we'll print a wrap in Florida, ship it to, say, Chicago, then fly in to do the installation."

Tea Palella, PopShadow Decals & Wraps

Passion: It started on the track

PopShadow's story starts in the same place as Steve and Tea's: on the racetrack. The two are accomplished motorcycle racers who met through the sport. They married in 2012.

It was during their early days together that the pair noticed a potential business opportunity. At the time, only one provider in the country was producing high-quality number plates for motorcycle racing — plates that look great whether a bike is screaming down the backstretch or parked in the paddock, and that can withstand a season (or longer) of wear and tear on the racing circuit.

So, with no printing background whatsoever, Steve and Tea invested in a digital printer and started producing and selling number plates. Based on a local vinyl distributor's recommendation for the "best of the best material," they printed those plates on Avery Dennison MPI 1105 EZRS digital wrapping film.

Even Tea admits the material selection might have been a bit of overkill. But their customers loved the plates, and the profits helped the pair fund their own racing exploits. PopShadow Decals and Wraps was officially born.

Presence: Lessons from a pro

At first, making number plates was just a side hustle. Living in Chicago, Steve worked full time as a carpenter and Tea as a software engineer. But a few years later, a friend asked them to wrap his commercial van. Rather than just wing it, they enrolled in an Avery Dennison Commercial Wrap Training class.

That class was taught by vehicle wrapping maestro Justin Pate. Aside from the technical skills, Tea recalls coming away with an important lesson about problem-solving.



She says, “At one point, Justin said something like, ‘Imagine you just flew 2,000 miles to do an installation only to find out that the wrap was cut for a different car. Well, that kind of thing happens. But you can't panic. You have to sit down, think it through, solve the problem and make it work.’”

“That philosophy of being present and composed was one of the most important things we learned that day,” says Tea.

It was a lesson they applied about a year later, and in a significant way. Steve suffered a serious brain-and-spinal injury in an on-track accident and had to retire from both carpentry and racing. So, recognizing a world of opportunity beyond their number-plate niche, the pair decided to turn vehicle wrapping and printed graphics into a full-time business.



Performance: Using the best materials available

More than a decade and a half later, PopShadow Decals and Wraps is thriving. Steve and Tea relocated from Chicago to Florida during the pandemic; today they operate out of a 1,500-square-foot space in the city of Odessa, near Tampa. Serving the motorcycle racing market remains a focus, with number plates, vinyl decals, grid position decals and banners as core offerings. The company also provides full commercial/fleet wraps, cut graphics, paint protection and color change vehicle wraps.

Tea notes that MPI 1105 EZRS continues to be their go-to choice. For vehicle wraps, they often pair the film with the DOL 1360 Max overlaminate. MPI 1106 is their preferred film for low-surface-energy applications (which are notoriously difficult to adhere to), along with Avery Dennison Supreme Wrapping Film™ for color change, MPI 2923 calendered vinyl for decal media and Supreme Defense™ Paint Protection Film.



Across the board, Avery Dennison materials provide the performance Steve and Tea need, including ease of installation, reliable adhesion and climate consistency.

“We have jobs where we’ll print a wrap in Florida, ship it to, say, Chicago, then fly in to do the installation,” says Tea. “And we know exactly how that Avery Dennison material is going to behave. Even if it’s going to be much colder in Chicago than in Florida, we know we can rely on that wrap to perform the way we expect it to.”

PopShadow’s shop is packed with equipment, including a Mutoh printer, Royal Sovereign and GFP laminators, and a Graphtec 8600 cutter. They’ve also recently added a 3D printer, though Tea admits she’s not yet sure exactly how the company will put it to use.

Steve and Tea have also doubled down on their training. In fact, they retook the commercial wrap class to sharpen their skills, and over the years have invested in color change (the Avery Dennison Supreme Wrapping Film course) and other training opportunities. Both are Avery Dennison Certified Wrap Installers. "We've taken a class every year, with the exception of when things were cut back due to COVID," says Tea. "We've always found so much value in them."

Purpose: Giving back

PopShadow's business success is underscored by Steve and Tea's sense of purpose and spirit of giving back. A self-described "sucker for charity," Tea notes that the company supports food pantries, cancer awareness campaigns, and has wrapped multiple trailers used by a chaplain who serves injured riders.

But one opportunity aligns beautifully with the company's niche in motorcycles: infant cranial helmets. These helmets are a critical part of therapy for infants born with cranial deformations. A doctor will prescribe a helmet to gently re-shape the head over the course of a few months.

It's a stressful situation for a family that can be lightened, if slightly, by the addition of a few colorful and fun decals. PopShadow will print, laminate and install high-quality decals, free of charge, based on families' custom design ideas. They typically use MPI 1106 for these requests, which is ideal for the low-surface-energy plastics from which the helmets are constructed.

Tea believes PopShadow has helped more than 100 families over the years.

"We just ask the family to email us a design, which can be as simple as a high-resolution image downloaded for free on the Internet," says Tea. "They can stop by our shop the next day for installation. They're all very, very happy and very grateful for that."

Final thoughts: Advice for those starting out

Steve and Tea have experienced a lot since they decided to expand beyond their niche and make graphic decals and vehicle wrapping a full-time business. When asked what advice they'd give to installers who are just starting out, they offered different, though complimentary, points of view.

"My opinion is that the most important thing to get right is the mock-up and the logistics of the print," says Steve. "You have to make sure the panels and everything else are printed properly. That makes for a quick and easy install."

"Use the best materials you can get," counters Tea. "You might think you're saving money by spending less on the cheaper material. But you're just going to end up spending a lot more money on the installation. So put your money into good materials that will shorten your installation time and make your life — and your nerves — healthier."

Visit **popshadow.com** to check out Steve and Tea's vehicle wraps and motorcycle racing graphics.

Learn more about Avery Dennison MPI 1105, DOL 1360 Max and MPI 1106 films at **graphics.averydennison.com**.



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