



SPECIALTY EQUIPMENT MARKET ASSOCIATION

**Board of Directors Candidacy Questionnaire
2025 Election Year**

**Les Rudd
Bob Cook Sales**

NAME: Les Rudd	TITLE: President / CSO
COMPANY: Bob Cook Sales	ADDRESS: 4089 Webb Rd, Murfreesboro, TN 37128
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DATE: 12-30-24	EMAIL ADDRESS: lesrudd@bobcooksales.com

Please select nomination category:

- ☒ **XX** Chair-elect *****Must have previously served on SEMA Board of Directors to be eligible.***
- ☐ **Manufacturer**
- ☐ **Manufacturers Rep**

Part 1 – Personal/Professional History

1. Please provide a history of your professional background and education (including professional development). Feel free to attach your resume and/or Bio. Describe the specifics of your current job responsibilities:

Professional employment:

1991 to Present - Bob Cook Sales

- Representative 1991 till 2003
- 2004-2013 Partner/Principal
- 2014 to current - President

1985 to 1991 – TCI Automotive, National Sales Manager

1983 to 1985 - Bloomfield Auto Parts and Speed - Manager

Education / Certifications:

Arizona State University – Institute of Professional Advancement

CPMR – Certified Professional Manufacturers Rep through MRERF / MANA

Dale Carnegie

University of GA, Wildlife Biologist Major (no degree)

Central Macon High School, Macon, GA – class of 1982, Honors Graduate

Current Job Responsibilities:

My “day-to-day” activities range from the Business Management – Long Range Planning, Cash Flow Analysis , P&L Management, Contract Negotiations, Forecasting, CRM Implementation or Oversight, Insurance, Strategic Decisions, Consulting with Clients & Customers, Coaching & Leadership – to Sales Manager aspects – guiding the team, motivation, education, incentives, travel arrangements, etc.. – to a Manufacturers Rep – logistics, planning, sales training, sales, inventory management, report reviews, manufacturer collaboration. I am as comfortable in the board room of a billion-dollar retailer & the office of a major etailer, as I am in a one-man engine shop or family-owned truck accessory store.

2. Indicate your historic and/or current involvement with automotive industry initiatives specifically, as well as other professional and philanthropic associations, societies, and organizations you have been actively involved in. Please be specific about other boards (if any) on which you have served or are currently serving:

Outstanding career achievements & SEMA Involvement.

- SEMA Hall of Fame – Inducted 2024
- SEMA Board of Directors – Treasurer 2022-2023 Term
- SEMA Board of Directors – 2 terms – 2016 to 2022
- SEMA Manufacturers Rep Network Chair – 2014 - 2016
- SEMA Manufacturers Rep Council Chair – 2002–2004

- SEMA PAC Presidents Club
- Over 30 years of SEMA Council & Network Involvement (YEN, MRC, MRN, LTAA, PRO)
- CPMR – Certified Professional Manufacturers Rep
- Previous CAN (PWA) Board of Directors Liaison
- SEMA SDC Certified
- Multiple years as a SEMA PAC member
- CAN Person of the Year
- Member of Bob Cook Sales for 7 SEMA Rep of the Year Awards
- Multiple Rep of the Year awards from Manufacture Clients & Customers
- Keystone Automotive Legacy Honoree
- Goodguys Pros Pick 2007 & 2008
- Super Chevy Editor's Choice 2008 & Outstanding '55 Award 2008
- Numerous Committees, Task Force memberships and Industry Recognitions

Outside the Industry

- FLW Area President
- B.A.S.S. / TN Bass Federation Area President
- Christian Life Church – Discipleship Coach
- Christian Life Church – Director of Men's Ministry
- Experience Christian Church – Following Jesus Instructor
- Experience Christian Church – Men's Group Leader

3. Please highlight specific career accomplishments including, but not limited to, patents received, product innovations, awards and recognitions, publications, marketing or business programs, presentations to business and/or industry symposiums. Share any and all significant or notable accomplishments:

Please see the above-

4. Please mark each of the skill categories where you believe you possess a level of expertise:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Manufacturing	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Motor Sports/Racing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Distribution/Logistics	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Vehicle Shows/Auctions/Exhibitions
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Supply Chain	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Financial Planning/Management
<input type="checkbox"/> Engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> Accounting
<input type="checkbox"/> Vehicular/Product Design/Innovation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Human Resources Management
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Product Management	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Business Management/ Development
<input type="checkbox"/> OEM Design/Technology	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sales
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Brand Management	<input type="checkbox"/> Business Technology
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Advertising	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Data Management
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Marketing	<input type="checkbox"/> Internet Utilization
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Strategic Planning	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify):
<input type="checkbox"/> Public Relations	_____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Crisis Management	_____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Regulatory Compliance	_____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Legislative/Lobbying	_____

Part 2 – Personal/Professional Attributes

5. What are your specific areas of expertise? What unique skills or perspective do you think you could bring to the leadership of SEMA? What business or life experience do you have that prepares you to help shape the direction of the industry? What industry issues are you particularly passionate about?

Those that know me know that I prefer not to talk a lot about myself or attempt to “toot my own horn.” You see, I, by myself, achieve nothing. God’s grace, mercy and patience has propelled me through life; one single step at a time. The majority of my career has been based on bringing opposing parties together for the good & success of both.

Peers, clients, customers and friends have often noted to me that my unique skills include leadership, organization, ability to recognize the white elephant in the room, strategic thinking, comfortable in uncomfortable situations and not afraid to ask hard questions while in a meeting or oppose the entire group if I disagree.

I am fortunate to know a little about a lot of different things in business, life, and people. If I had to choose some “unique,” not expert, qualities of myself they would be – relationship management, simplifying the complex and instinctive resolution-based thinking.

My business & life experiences have ranged from executive boardrooms to small shops, deer stands to bass boats, NHRA to NASCAR to local dirt tracks, 1-on-1 mentorship to speaking to lots of different audiences about a lot of different things.

I have spent time in the presence of many of our industries’ most powerful people and handed out food to the needy in freezing rain. I have worked on a drag car on the muddy ground of a racetrack, assembled street cars on a lift in an air-conditioned shop and given out free oil changes in a parking lot for needy moms and the elderly. I have watched small shops struggle; inventors flourish and some of our largest manufacturers and distributors go away because they were not watching the

changes in our industry. I watched a father die from leukemia, watched a miracle baby be born, held the hand of a husband as his wife passed away, hugged a cocaine addict an entire night so tight it left bruises to keep them from clawing themselves and held my wife's hand as she walked out of a hospital where they said she would never leave but God had different plans. I am not sure if this qualifies for leadership or the Chair-Elect of SEMA – but I do hope it shows my heart, my dedication, my humility, and my integrity when I make a commitment – whether personal or professional.

6. What would you say is/are your most notable achievement(s) to this point in your career? What are you most proud of?

What I think is a “notable” achievement may differ to me than what this fork is asking. So, I will point out two things from 2024.

#1 – being inducted into the SEMA Hall of Fame – simply the most humbling event of my entire career. And, still to this day amazes me!

#2 – In 2024 I walked with two separate men, who had careers outside of our industry, but were deep enthusiasts, who had a passion and desire to “leave their offices” and become entrepreneurs in the aftermarket auto industry. I was not hired by them – just a friend & mentor. I made no monetary investment or support. Just simply advised, mentored, walked, and prayed with them through their efforts and dreams. Both outperformed their expectations. Both are loving life. To me – that is something to be proud of.

7. What do you consider to be the top opportunities or threats facing the specialty parts aftermarket over the next five years? Try to be specific to industry trends. You may comment on advancement of federal regulations and macroeconomic issues (inflation, unemployment, health care, etc.) but only if they are relevant to your perspective on industry issues.

For clarity, the question asked to be specific to “industry trends,” so, as I ponder the question, I must wonder is the question about Industry “opportunities & threats” or SEMA “opportunity & threats.” We, the association, often openly substitute “industry” and SEMA simultaneously as if they are the same. To me, this is not factual. SEMA is a large part of the industry, maybe even be considered the leading power of the industry, But SEMA is not the entire industry. If we were, we would not have thousands of businesses operating inside the INDUSTRY that are not SEMA members. We can always debate this at a later date. 😊

STATE REGULATORY ISSUES

As the last few weeks under the new Trump administration has shown, it appears, that the current trend will be to move more regulatory control to states, not only in automotive but in almost all sectors of life. As I am a believer that this is a “good thing” overall. I do see that this could force SEMA to have broader reach and touch at the state levels. This could very well mean an expansion of a DC office to having regional State oriented personnel. States have on the books, and can easily add to the books, meaningless laws & restrictions that

could have threats against individuals and businesses inside out industry.

Now, have no fear, I sincerely believe with Karen Bailey-Chapman at the helm. SEMA is in the best hands to manage any threats in this arena. She will likely need additional personnel and funding. It is also likely that the DC office will be (if not already) the key department for the near & far future.

ADAS

I am aware that SEMA and the Industry are both ingrained in this area. I feel our sister inside the Industry, AAPEX, may be addressing this at levels most needed; at the installer / shop. SEMA has the SEMA garages, has seminars, has education - BUT – we have missed, a key point to me, and that is HOW DO OUR JOBBER, DEALER, INSTALLERS, grasp this technology, abide by the regulations – and most importantly to them – make money with ADAS!

I am in shops every month. Many play the ostrich and hope it will pass them by, some are aware and a select few have figured out means of how to profit – however, the key question when the topic arises is – I do not know how to get involved and make money in this sector.

If the industry does not figure this out, then ADAS will be the DEF Delete issue of the future.

SMALL BUSINESS DETORINATION

The foundation of the specialty industry is small independent businesses. Without them, I am not secure of the future. Every month I see more closures than new business openings. Rural America is experiencing this at a greater rate than the suburbs and cities. I have no answer to recommendations on how to solve the issue. Will dealerships be the key? Do we figure a way to cultivate traditional auto shops to jump into the specialty industry? I do not know. But what I do know is that without this sector the industry will see a decline.

8. Of the issues you identify above, which ONE concerns you the most as to how it will impact the industry's future? What would you do to initiate change to either expedite a positive outcome or prevent a potential disaster?

Some 30+ years ago, shortly after joining Bob Cook Sales, Bob Cook, and I attended a presentation of a "futurist" at SEMA. In short, this man informed the audience that the specialty industry was dying a slow death.

I will not review the entire memory of the presentation but in the end, he asked questions or comments. I, in turn, offered this comment, "Until the federal government, totally outlaws the ability for each of us to have our own personal transportation devices, there will always be a specialty industry for each of us to individualize our personal transportation device."

I still believe this today. The largest threat is our government, at all levels – followed closely

by the second, and maybe the most feared threat, which is ourselves.

I slightly alluded to an initiative above that could have major impact on the Regulatory Side of our industry and that is regional contact.

We/SEMA, as an association, need a deeper or more profound regional presence. I would love to see regional offices for SEMA that allowed first-hand, face-to-face, contact with all current & potential members so all benefits available at SEMA could be fully utilized by all businesses in our industry. This would grow membership – it would grow dues – it would grow impact and would repair the foundation of our association. I have discussed this before with Mike Spagnola. However, I, with all due respect, would prefer not to go any deeper into this vision. Trust me by saying, I have a vision, I sincerely feel it is needed, and if elected as Chair Elect it will be fully presented – but I do not wish for my vision to become someone else's proclamation.

Part 4 – Association Specific Observations

9. Given the 9 [Strategic Priorities](#) that the SEMA board and the association are focused on, which 2 do you think are the most critical and what can you do to contribute to the success of these initiatives?

Choosing from these 9, I must list #2. Regulatory Issues (non-emissions) and #3. Trade Shows as the 2 most critical.

#2 controls the future of many aspects of our Industry - #3 controls the key revenue and outreach that the association needs to survive.

Many of my contributions to these initiatives have been witnessed and experienced as I was on the Board when these were set. However, I will add these comments.

Regulatory Issues

In short, this needs 2 key items to success – Knowledgeable People in place & Funding!

I would like to see additional staff added to this sector. Greater outreach, more touches, more presence in regions, states, major cities, and events.

Those that know me and served with me on the board know that stewardship of our funds is key to me. I do believe there are ineffective programs that need to be reviewed and addressed or eliminated, allowing funds to be open to provide a larger budget to our regulatory division.

Trade Shows

I will in no way try to mislead you that I am a “show expert.” But, I will say I have attended 38 SEMA Shows and every PRI Show – so maybe I am a professional “show attendee”.

These shows are key to the success of the industry and the association.

For years we have seen and heard some of the same complaints and issues arise at the show. Sometimes I feel the association has addressed them (or attempted to) and other times they ignore them like they are not real & do not exist. Last year's shows had many major brands absent, I have already heard of some notable brands not attending 1 or both shows this year. The association does a decent job of masking this – the association does not report this – but – we fool ourselves if we believe it is not noticed.

At the same time, I believe the association has some of the best talent available in this sector.

So, what is the answer? – My view – truly know & identify your customer – listen to your members, you know, the ones that pay the dues. Suggest that all folks in the Show Department, all Executive staff and the entire Board of Directors read – “HOW THE MIGHTY FALL – and why some companies never give in” - by Jim Collins.

Even the greatest can fail!

10. If elected to the SEMA board of directors what unique qualities, experiences, connections, or characteristics are you able to activate during your 3-year term?

As we all know, the Chair Elect position is a 6-year commitment; seen in three, 2-year terms, with each having its unique definition and needed attributes.

As Chair-elect, the first position should be sure & confident as being the best #2 person possible. If the chair-elect is not aligned with the Chair, then division occurs & the continuity of the entire board suffers. The Chair Elect must be humble to the position, support the Chair and aid in the facilitation of the meetings while welcoming alternative views.

For unique qualities, I have been told I am able to simplify the complex, that I have a keen ability known as common sense, that I can be quick in mind to evaluate issues, and to be truthful even when it hurts. I am well versed in Robert's Rules of Order and, although I am no David Goch, I am fairly schooled on Parliamentary Procedure, as well. My passion for people reigns high on my resume. I try to operate under the fact that people do not care what you know till they know that you care.

For experiences, I have 35+ years as a volunteer at SEMA, I came up through the Council & Network ranks. I have served as a Chair of a Council as well as a Network. I spent 6 years on the Board and a little over 1 year as Treasurer. The only facets of the industry that I have not worked in are those in marketing and an association. I have worked for a Jobber, a WD, a manufacturer & as a representative. The last 33 years of my career have been made up of every day trying to get two opposing groups to agree on the common good. In short, I am in the people pleasing business – and, if they are not pleased, well – I do not get paid!

For connections, well, I am blessed to know a little about a lot in our industry. But I am no

expert in anything – but I am blessed to know a lot of experts in a lot of things – so, I can get the answers needed – if I do not know them! I know a guy that knows most everything, and I talk to him every day.

For characteristics. I really hate to talk about myself much more than I already have. I am guessing many of you reading this paper know me, so, you know how I can be & where I can fall short – I will let me reputation stand on that.

My Dad told me years ago – you do not get a reputation by the things you say you are going to do – your reputation comes from what you have done – and it follows you everywhere you go.

11. What industry trends or opportunities is SEMA as an association and the SEMA Show missing out on currently?

As for SEMA, the association, I believe Staff has a good grip on the current trends and opportunities. Our Council & Networks have a proliferation of innovative, leading minds. So, to keep from “missing” something, the association needs to listen better, say “yes” often, test things, fail early, and get up – then try something new again, BUT – a level of small impact of failure. The association must remember our Mission Statement. We must not forget our members – they mad ethe association and they can also destroy it!

As for SEMA, the Show, again, I believe the grip is fairly good on trends, but I personally believe at times we miss the guidance for opportunities on a balanced scale. Some use the saying =- “build it and they will come.” I lean towards build something people want & ask for – and they will come in the masses!

I will add that on the “show side,” I personally see that the short, precise, outside venues seem to be the ones that are capturing the consumer & the enthusiast. I will use the Triple Crown of Rodding as a perfect example. Birthed by a need & desire. And, in 2 years, it has catapulted to one of the Top 3 shows in the nation in the eyes of many enthusiasts. Nothing fancy – just basic desires & wishes of the folks that attend. It is not perfect – but it is growing – and likely will turn away vendors this year – AND – by the way, if has an established “competitive” event going on the same weekend that is less than 2 hours way!

12. If you get elected to the SEMA board of directors, what topics or issues will you spend your time focusing on and how will you gain support?

This question has one meaning if you are a first-time candidate, another if you are an

incumbent and lasty, a more different one if you are seeking the Chair-Elect position.

I mentioned earlier the quality to be the strongest #2 in the room. We do not need a divided agenda between the Chair & Chair-elect, especially in these pivotal times. I have experienced this in the past and it only evolves into a divided room. So, in short, I will gladly be Melanie's wingman. This does not mean I will not share my opinions – I think most people that know me also know I have no problem sharing. 😊

However, there are glaring issues & topics on the short road ahead that will set the stage for years and maybe decades. For me, I see the next 4 to 6 years as possibly to the most pivotal for the future of SEMA. Now you are asking – what could those be?

Before I expand, please allow me to digress.

I suspect that when Tim Martin was answering this question he did not mention that he was preparing for a year when we would have no SEMA Show. I also will assume that James Lawrence did not mention that he was preparing for the time that Chris Kersting would resign and how he, the Board & Staff would be challenged through that time. But, today, we have a little of an advantage, we do know what the largest issue ahead of us is – the naming of a New CEO/President for SEMA.

Admittedly so, I am not and have not been in the “need to know” position for SEMA on this topic. I do know that while I was on the Board there was a timeline and plan established which appears to have been modified. However, I cannot see how the next term of Chair passes without this being, obviously, the most critical issue ahead of the Board & Staff.

I suspect this will take an exceptional amount of additional time for Melanie and the executive committee. Again, the more need to be sure the right #2 person is in place.

My 2nd key issue and topic - UNITY. It is my opinion that we are fragmented in our members as well as in our staff.

In my position, I deal with family-owned businesses to the C-level positions of our resellers & manufacturers. There is an obvious undercurrent to me at most every level of member. Our industry has been through a lot. It is a time for healing but also a time for correcting while we reinforce the foundations of our association. I do believe from my past life experiences and my industry experiences that I can be very instrumental in this task.

I have watched and heard numerous times over my volunteerism two messages that were and are often used.

- From Leadership to staff & from staff to members – “this is the Boards decision – they have set this path.”
- From Board to members – “staff has taken upon themselves to do it this way” – “We aren’t sure why Staff does it that way.”

We are ONE TEAM – ONE ASSOCIATION with ONE MISSION - **to help our members' businesses succeed and prosper!**

13. Where do you the association and show having an advantage over and edge over competitors in a similar space

Do we really have any competitors?

From the association side – Is it AAPEX(AutoCare) who we share revenue – or – is it RVIA which I seem to get more “news” of current issues than I do from SEMA or is AAIA, or MEMA or NADA?.

These may overlap our space but are they competitors?

Or for the show? – Is it the Keystone Big Show, where some manufacturers feel they see “everyone they need to see”? or is it AAM? Or is it HPX? Again, are they really in our space?

Oxford dictionary states, a competitor is “an organization engaged in commercial or economic competition with others.”

With that, yes, we most definitely have organizations that are battling for the same economic revenue that we look at each day. The oddity with SEMA is that some “competitors” we covet, some we aid & share revenue with, others we let sit on our board, while others we maliciously attack behind closed doors, and lastly, in my opinion, we ignore the obvious threats.

Our last “obvious” threat was PRI. But we bought them. However, we must remember why PRI came about. I do not think Steve Lewis has anything against SEMA and woke up one morning to decide he would be a competitor. NO – we (SEMA) opted through change and not paying attention to ALL members alienated a group. That group sought a New Home – so, Steve built what someone wanted, and they came – and then, they came in droves!!

To me, another great historical item we should be reminded of was the departure of ALL major tire brands from SEMA. There was a time that the booths of BFGoodrich, Firestone, Goodyear, etc. were only matched by the booths of the OE’s – and then one day, they were gone. So, what happened?

I do not know personally as I have never spoken to the executives that made the decision. But what is obvious is that they decided that they could get a better ROI with their dealers directly and at other venues other than SEMA.

What happens when the Holley Group or RealTruck decides to leave SEMA – rent the Mandalay Bay Convention Center the same week as SEMA & invite their dealers to that

event? How will that affect SEMA the Show?

So, who are the competitors?

The 1960's comic book, POGO, stated – **We have met the enemy, and they are us.**

Part 5 – About You

14. Questionnaires can be limiting. In the space below, share with us anything we didn't ask that you believe will help the Nominating Committee develop a better understanding of you as a candidate:

This questionnaire did not ask what my expertise is, and I am glad, as I have none. I am an expert in nothing, but I am blessed to know a little bit about a lot of things. And, in some cases, maybe even I know a fair amount about certain things.

For the Chair Elect position, I will say, I believe there is no one that has more SEMA experience. I feel I know staff, I know Council & Networks, I know the Budget process, I know how most all key facets of our industry work – (except marketing but I'm not sure any one does but marketers) – I know the Board, I know the By-Laws, I know lots of the history, I know where we have suffered, I know where we have failed, I know where we have succeeded, I know we need change, and I have many, many friends who deserve an advocate that can represent many facets of the industry at the same time. Maybe that is me.

15. Why do you want to volunteer to be a SEMA board member?

I wish I had been asked this 30+ years ago – I might have saved myself a lot of time - 😊

I love bringing people together for a common cause.

Everyone needs an advocate at times in their life and their careers.

And, maybe just maybe, I can make a difference for someone today and for the future.

*"I ask not for a **lighter** burden. But for **broad**er shoulders"*

16. Understanding how our board candidates work significantly improves the selection process. Please provide us the names and contact information for three people we can speak to in order to gain perspective about you.

Name: David Goch

Company: Webster, Chamberlain & Bean L.L.P.

Relationship to you: The only person that has been in every board meeting I have ever attended.

eMail: dgoch@wc-b.com

Phone: 202 785 9500

Name: Zach Simms

Company: RS Restorations

Relationship to you: I walked the path with Zach to leave his “desk job career” to open his own shop. We also attend church together.

eMail: zach@rsrbuils.com

Phone: 615 406 1722

Name: Jeff Bates

Company: retired Bob Cook Sales

Relationship to you: ex-business partner, mentor, ex-SEMA BoD member – he has seen me at my worst & my best

eMail: batesrep1@att.net

Phone: 803 370 0652