

# TIRE BUSINESS

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## These passions fit sales manager to a T

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### SCOTTSDALE, Ariz.

After spending much of his career working for tire manufacturers in all parts of the U.S. and traveling abroad extensively, the present is much more structured for Rico Austin.

In fact, his life can be distilled into three Ts: Tires, tequila and typing.

Each is equally important these days to Austin, a regional sales manager for CMA L.L.C., the North American subsidiary of China's Double Coin Holdings Ltd.

Austin, who formerly worked with Group Michelin, Continental Tire the Americas and Rema Tip Top North America Inc., spends his work days selling CMA/Double Coin's portfolio of commercial truck/bus tires in his region: Alaska, Arizona, California; Hawaii; Nevada; New Mexico; and El Paso, Texas.

That alone is enough to keep one person occupied.

Austin, however, uses evenings and weekends for his other two passions: Tequila and writing.

When he's not promoting and marketing and tweaking his latest venture, Bajarriba Tequila, the product made by his company, Tres Cabo Amigos Ltd., he's typing on his laptop. The award-winning author has had

10 books published (all available on Amazon), including *My Bad Tequila*, a novel, released in 2010, described as "one man's epic journey across two continents and four countries with 50 years of adventure."

He is working on three other books currently, including a sequel to *My Bad Tequila*.

Television's *Six Million Dollar Man* (Steve Austin) has nothing on this Austin.

"People starting calling me the 'tequila guy,'" Austin said.

He kicked his passion for the beverage up a few proof levels after he graduated with a "master's degree" from a class conducted by restaurateur and renowned tequila expert Julio Bermejo, who operates family-owned Tommy's Mexican Restaurant in San Francisco's Richmond District.

Candidates must taste 35 different kinds of tequila to graduate. Austin said it took him four years to earn his status.

It was because of Austin's love of tequila that he befriended Miguel (Mike) Hill and Jay Nance in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico. Hill and Nance operated bars in Cabo and eventually all three men landed in Arizona.

The trio formed Tres Cabo Amigos with the intent to produce a high-end tequila. It was released for distribution last December.

Tequila is a distilled beverage made from the blue agave plant that grows primarily in an area surrounding the city of Tequila, Mexico. The red soil in the region, they say, is perfect for the blue agave. Tequila is the prime ingredient in a margarita.

The three Cabo amigos call their tequila Bajarriba, which Austin said is a rough combination of bottom/ground floor (baja) and arriba (arrive).

In other words: Bottom's up. Hill came up with the idea of selling the tequila in a glass bottle shaped like the Baja California peninsula of Mexico. Austin's wife Connie, a graphic designer by trade, designed the bottle, which was named the bottle of the year recently by *Tequila Aficionado* magazine.

The tequila is distilled in Atotonilco El Alto, a town with a 7,000-foot elevation in the Mexican state of Jalisco, 60 miles east of Guadalajara. The entire process is done there including the distillation, corking and boxing.

The company makes two types of tequila — blanco, when the agave is taken from the field, cooked in clay ovens and distilled and bottled immediately; and reposado, which by Mexican law is required to be aged between two to 13 months. It plans to make a third type — anejo, which is aged in white oak whiskey barrels for between a year and three years. The tequila is made additive free.

The tequila is available in Arizona, California and Las Vegas. The suggested retail price is \$119 per bottle of reposado and \$109 for a bottle of blanco.

"It is intended to be sipped and savored," Austin said.

Sales during the tequila's December release set records for some distributors, according to Austin. Nearly 200 bottles were sold that month.

Demand slowed down during the first three months of this year, he said, but it's starting to pick up as the summer season

## TEQUILA AFICIONADO

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Rico Austin (center) and his partners grace the cover of *Tequila Aficionado*.



Rico Austin

are in.

And it seems to be working: Austin said that of four recent distributors he and his partners visited, three agreed to take the product on, and the fourth gave them a strong maybe.

Austin, originally from Marsing, Idaho, south of Boise, said the folks at CMA support his passions beyond tires, knowing it doesn't interfere with his day job.

"During the day, I sell tires; during the night I write or sell tequila," he said. "Everyone has a hobby, and ... mine is writing and tequila."

Austin said he has leaned on his experiences in the tire business to guide him in both endeavors.

"I feel fortunate to be in the tire industry," he said. "I've met a lot of great people and a lot of them congratulated me on doing this. They like to see a tire guy do something different once in a while and make it — enjoy themselves. CMA has been great in supporting me and knows it's not affecting my job."

"I feel like I'm at the pinnacle of the world."

