

northeast carwasher



Newest Valet Auto Wash
Redefines Innovation





Newest Valet Auto Wash Lays Claim to Longest Carwash in the World

By Alan M. Petrillo

It's being called the "longest carwash in the world," and with a 245-foot tunnel there doesn't seem to be one that surpasses it. The carwash is the newest Valet Auto Wash in Lawrenceville, NJ, the brainchild of owner Chris Vernon. (The next longest conveyor is Rocket Express coming in at 240 feet in Boise, ID.)

And not only is Valet Auto Wash long, it also is vast, occupying 65,000 square feet of what was at one time a furniture store, and a trucking business.

The carwash has three canopied lanes with DRB gates leading into the tunnel, and once a vehicle exits the tunnel, it can take a left turn onto one of two 120-foot long interior cleaning belts where 40 employees can be working in five different cells, according to Vernon.

"All the equipment they need is hung from above and within arm's reach of the attendant," he said. "At the first cell, attendants remove everything from the trunk and inside the vehicle and put it into a bin that travels along the belt with the car."

Another cell on the belt cleans the vehicle's inside glass, followed by a cell that handles the dash and console, Vernon said. "Then come air guns for blowing out hard-to-reach areas, and finally, vacuuming, before the car is sent off the belt."

Vernon said that the interior belts are set up so the cus-

tomers never loses visual sight of their vehicle along the entire eight-minute process from exiting the vehicle at the entry to the belt, and getting back into it at the belt's end. Valet Auto Wash can do about 30 cars an hour on each belt, he added.

"About 25 percent of the business from the tunnel wash elects to go on the interior flat belt," Vernon noted.

Interior Vacs

Another feature of the carwash is a series of 24 interior vacuum stalls that face the tunnel wash through a glass wall, Vernon said. In addition, a vehicle can enter a 120-foot Brilliance wax polishing tunnel, that uses a Simoniz spray-on liquefied paste wax, followed by 100 feet of buffing cloth designed by Peco, and then a finishing curtain.

"Basically, it's a dry carwash tunnel," Vernon observes. "About 20 percent of our customers get that package, especially because it protects the car so well in the winter."

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The newest Valet Auto Wash in Lawrenceville, NJ, is their biggest and most intricate wash to date featuring a 245-foot conveyor and three moving belts. Some of the equipment suppliers include Vacutech, Peco, Simoniz and DRB Systems. The wash is bigger than a Walmart



The facility also has self-service bays, and a dozen vacuums outside. Packages for the tunnel carwash run from \$9, \$16, \$18 and \$24, to the \$38 Works package.

Vernon said he's always "been nuts about the carwash business, so my world is carwashing and real estate building. We looked at the German carwash model of everything under one roof, and did about 100 different site layouts before we finalized our facility."

Vernon started out in the real estate business, buying houses, fixing them up, and renting them out. He first bought a self-service carwash in the late 1980s near Fort Dix and said he "...did okay with it, and it taught me a lot about the business. Then a 450-foot long surface drive conveyor in Trenton came available and I bought it."

While still running the old Trenton carwash, Vernon built a new one next to it, and put a lube facility out front. In addition to Lawrenceville and Trenton, there are Valet Auto Wash locations in Princeton and Hamilton, N.J.

The Lawrenceville location, at 4 Litho Road, opened on Veteran's Day in 2016, Vernon said. "We washed 15,000 cars in the first two weeks, and gave all those washes away for free," he said.

Tom Hoffman Jr., chief executive officer of Hoffman Car Wash in Albany, NY, said he visited the Lawrenceville Valet Auto Wash after it opened and was impressed. "I thought it was one of the nicest looking remodels I've ever seen," Hoffman said. "He (Vernon) did an incredible job turning an old furniture store into this carwash facility. You can tell he likes to give his customers an above-and-beyond experience."

Hoffman noted that having a longer tunnel and conveyor "allows him to put more equipment in the facility, and run the conveyor faster to allow him to clean more cars per hour. I think Chris did a good job with the traffic flow."

Hoffman pointed out that Vernon "added a big tower feature to the building. It sits behind a Ford dealership on a very busy road," he said, "and I think he needed to create more of a destination besides being on a busy highway."

Another New Jersey carwash operator, Doug Rieck, owner



of Magic Wash in Manahawkin, was at the grand opening of the Valet Auto Wash. "Chris invited me to the grand opening and I brought my 12-year-old son with me," Rieck said. "I can't begin to tell you how much our jaws dropped when we got there and saw the place. It was the immensity that got to us."

Rieck noted that because of the size and the fact that everything is under one roof, Valet Auto Wash "has the ability to run 24/7/365 if they wanted. The scale and the vision of the place is immense, and you can see that Chris has a complete carwash center designed with maximum efficiency in mind."

While Vernon currently claims the record for the longest carwash in the world, he said he thinks a tunnel wash should be shorter than Lawrenceville's 245-feet.

"I believe a tunnel should have 100 feet of wash equipment and at least 50 feet of drying equipment, plus space for a buff and shine machine and extra drip space," he said. "So, I think the perfect length of a tunnel carwash is 180 feet, even though someone like Hoffman Car Wash can do magic in 150 feet."

Vernon observed, "We all strive to be the best that we can be. We are first out of the box to do everything under one roof in the United States," he said. "This is a future kind of facility with something for everyone." ■

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The indoor concept washing, modeled after the european concept, is a first in the US.

