



INDEPENDENT DEALER SPOTLIGHT

BY JILL SUKOW, DIRECTOR OF MEMBERSHIP

RELIABLE AUTO:

A Family Legacy in the Heart of Sturgeon Bay



Some things never go out of style — like trust, respect, and a firm handshake. That's the kind of business Reliable Auto Sales has built in Sturgeon Bay since 1981. In a world filled with digital noise and impersonal transactions, Reliable has remained true to its roots: people first, always.

That's when Michael and Sue Shortall opened Reliable Auto Sales with a simple but powerful mission: treat people with respect, always stand behind your word, and make sure every customer walks away feeling confident and cared for. These weren't just business principles — they were the couple's way of life. Through 38 years of economic ups and downs, rising competition, and the emergence of online car buying, Michael and Sue stayed the course. And they did it while raising five children and never once lost sight of what mattered most: people.

"They ALWAYS did the right thing," says their son, Michael J. Shortall Jr., who officially became President of Reliable Auto on November 30th, 2018. "No matter the situation, they made sure every customer who spent their hard-earned money with us felt respected, valued, and satisfied."

Michael Jr. knows this dealership inside and out — quite literally. "Reliable has been a second home to me my entire life," he says. After graduating from Northwood University in Midland, Michigan, with a degree in Automotive Marketing and Business Management, he joined the dealership full-time in December 2001 and never looked back.

Now, alongside his wife Erin and daughter Madeline, Michael proudly continues the legacy that his parents built. "I cherish our customers, our reputation, and how hard we work to provide the absolute nicest and most proper pre-owned vehicles the market has to offer," he says.

At Reliable Auto, the experience speaks for itself. There's no fast talk, no pressure, and no games — just a team that listens, cares, and puts people first. Whether someone's buying their first car or simply coming in with questions, they're treated with patience, honesty, and kindness. That down-to-earth, customer-first approach isn't just good business — it's a reflection of the way the Shortall family believes things should be done.



Sturgeon Bay, WI, is a blend of maritime heritage and small-town charm — a place where shipbuilding and scenic waterfronts meet friendly neighbors and a strong sense of community. It's this unique spirit that Reliable Auto is proud to be part of, showing up to support youth sports, school programs, winter aid efforts, and local fundraisers year after year.

One of Reliable Auto's proudest milestones is reaching 44 years in business right here in Door County. Over those decades, many dealerships have come and gone, but Reliable has stood the test of time. That kind of longevity doesn't happen by accident — it comes from a deep understanding of this one-of-a-kind market. As Michael Jr. puts it, "We're surrounded by water, and you can't sell a Cadillac to the salmon!" What Reliable *can* sell is trust, backed by decades of service, strong community ties, and a relentless focus on doing right by every customer. That's why the dealership has maintained a 4.9-star Google Review rating — something that's extremely rare in the sophisticated world of pre-owned vehicles. "It's not easy," Michael says, "but we do it because we'll truly do whatever it takes to make sure everyone is happy with their purchase."

As Reliable Auto moves forward under its second generation of leadership, the foundation laid by Michael and Sue remains steady and strong. It's a legacy built not on trends or gimmicks, but on integrity, family values, and a genuine commitment to serving people — the same way they've done it for more than 40 years.

Reliable Auto Sales isn't just a dealership. It's a legacy — and it's Sturgeon Bay proud.

Our strong commitment to serving dealerships —

We help you navigate the business landscape and map out strategies that sustain business continuity and accelerate profitability.



Connect with us

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