



By Allan Heydorn

# Star-Seal Supreme Offers Top-level Price Point For Niche Sealcoating Customers

**M**arketing sealcoating to clients who always seem to take the lowest-priced bid can be frustrating, and competing on price with that low-ball contractor can damage a business.

But contractors who understand the various niches within their market, who can identify those niches, and who can rely on their sales skills to sell long-term benefits over short-term costs can overcome the price-sensitive customer by offering a premium-quality sealcoating material in their bid proposal.

That's the theory behind Star-Seal Supreme, a premium-grade refined coal tar sealer introduced by STAR Inc., Columbus, OH, in 1992. Star-Seal Supreme is the company's top-of-the-line sealcoating product, an addition to STAR's standard and standard-plus-additives sealers.

"It's more expensive but if people want to pay for it, it's a great product," says James Bewley, president, Monroe Sealers of Rochester, Rochester, NY. Bewley, who says he sealed his first driveway 30 years ago, says Monroe Sealers began offering sealcoating to customers in 1986. The 8-person company generates 90% of sales from commercial work and 10% from residential work — all in the basic maintenance areas of sealcoating, cracksealing, and patching.

"We use Star-Seal Supreme in the mix of what we offer our customers," Bewley says. "We don't push it too hard but we let them know it's available. Some people are willing to pay the extra money for the extra performance. It's tougher than a standard-grade sealer, it dries faster, it's nice and black, and it lasts twice as long. You'd be surprised how many people want the best



Scott Page (spraying) and Bert Heno, All Pro Services, apply Star Seal Supreme to the parking lot of condominium complex. Finished job below.

product for their parking lot."

### A niche product

Girish Dubey, STAR president, says that STAR identified a niche, which the company defines as "those discriminating jobs that demand outstanding performance year after year," and then developed a product to market to that niche.

"We always felt there was a need for a premier product for property owners who don't mind spending a

bit more if the performance of the product warrants it," Dubey says.

"And it gives our customers, the contractors, an opportunity to offer different price points to their customers and lets their customers make the choice of which sealer to use," Dubey says. "The contractor offering only one grade of sealer doesn't have that option."

He says most STAR customers buy both the standard and the premium level sealers, and many offer all three

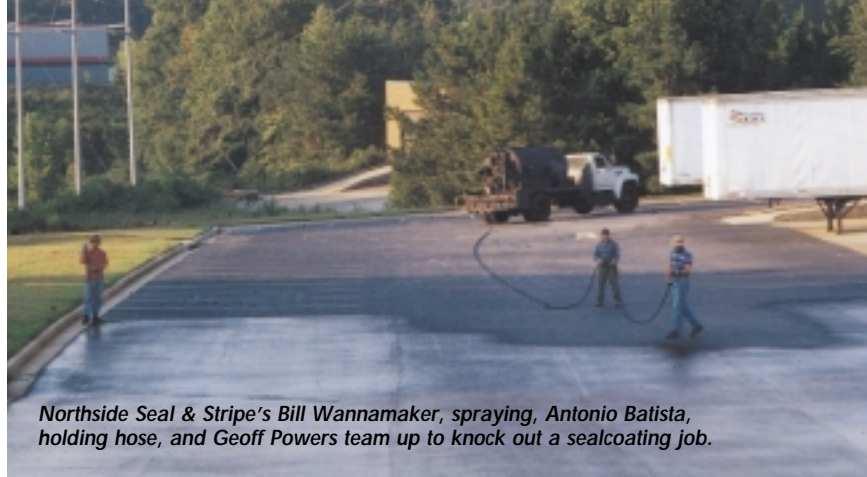


levels, which STAR encourages. Dubey says contractors who don't offer several grades of product limit themselves and restrict their growth and sales potential.

"With three grades they can offer 'good, better, and best' to their customers," Dubey says. "It gives the contractor confidence when he goes in with three products in his bag and it demonstrates to the client that this is a professional contractor."

#### Sealer features

While the recipe is proprietary, Star-Seal Supreme blends latex and additives during the high-speed batch manufacturing process to enhance sealer characteristics. According to STAR, the "hot blending of catalyzed rubber and select polymers" with the refined coal tar "enhances toughness, flexibility at all temperatures, and resistance to gasoline, oil, chemicals and deicing salts." STAR also claims



*Northside Seal & Stripe's Bill Wannamaker, spraying, Antonio Batista, holding hose, and Geoff Powers team up to knock out a sealcoating job.*

improved water repellency "is the result of a very special blend of surface active agents which change the surface physico-chemistry of the clays and make them hydrophobic."

Dubey says that unlike a standard-grade sealer which requires addition of 30% to 35% of water by volume, Star-Seal Supreme needs only 15% to 20% of water. Despite the lower dilution rate, contractors say there is no difference in application techniques for Star-Seal Supreme. Whether applied with a squeegee machine or a spray unit, Star-Seal Supreme puts a

heavier film on the pavement surface.

A New Orleans contractor, Scott Page, says he switched from a standard grade sealer to Star-Seal Supreme because of its characteristics. His four-person company, All Pro Services (soon to be renamed Page Paving & Maintenance) started sealcoating in the New Orleans area eight years ago after 10 years in the pressure washing business.

"You put it down pretty much the same as any other sealer. You just change the mix ratios a little," says Page, who applies two coats to most

roadways and parking stalls and three coats (at 0.4 gal./sq. yd) to drive lanes, entrances, and exits because they endure heavier traffic. “We put it down as thick as we possibly can and we’ve had no problems with tracking or power steering marks.”

Page says having the latex added in the manufacturing process offers a couple of advantages.

“Because the latex is added in the manufacturing process it blends in better and the material lasts longer,” Page says. “The batch process also seems to bring out the latex characteristics much better than when adding latex at the site.”

And, because he doesn’t have to add latex on the jobsite, Page feels he gets a higher-quality finished product.

“I run a 1,500-gal. tank and it’s rare that I empty it out. So when we have to add more sealer to it, and we add more latex to the sealer, the latex can cause the sand to clump up,” Page says. “With the latex already incorporated into the production

process that’s no longer a problem.”

Dubey says that while contractors do not have to add additives because they are already blended into the sealer, they do have to add sand.

Tom Crowell, president of Northside Seal & Stripe, says he loads the sealer with 4 1/2 lbs. of sand per gallon of sealer.

“It holds a heavy sand loading like that very well,” says

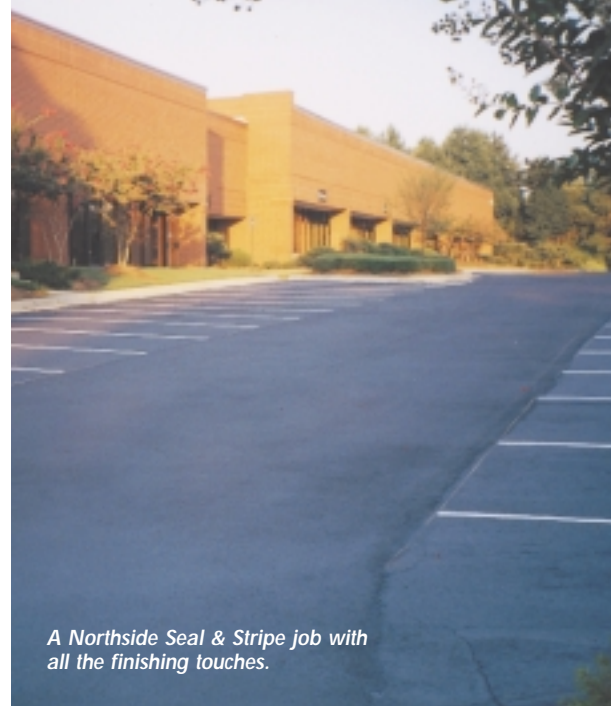
Crowell, whose company performs a variety of pavement maintenance services — including sealcoating, paving, striping, and concrete work.

#### **Cost and price**

Of course, being a premium product means Star-Seal Supreme is about 35%

more expensive than the company’s standard sealer. Dubey says that depending on their local sealcoating market, STAR’s users are currently able to charge anywhere from 75% to 100% more than they charge for standard sealer.

Bewley says a lot of Monroe Sealers’



*A Northside Seal & Stripe job with all the finishing touches.*

jobs are bid jobs, so they don't bid work using the more-expensive Supreme.

"But in the right situation we'll market it to them to let people know it's available and we let them know we think it's worth the extra money," he says. "We try to sell it for 50% more than our regular sealer, but



*For Monroe Sealers of Rochester, Oscar Leon, holding hose, and Shawn Shales get the first coat of sealer down.*

prices are pretty competitive in this market," Bewley says. "We manage to sell it on about 10% of the commercial jobs we do, but we're just getting into pushing it more. In fact, we're putting together a special program to market it for next year."

Crowell says that despite the price-conscious nature of the Atlanta sealcoating market, Northside Seal

& Stripe insists on using only Star-Seal Supreme, even though it costs more than the standard grade sealers on the market.

“We’re able to get away with charging higher prices because of the quality of our work. We do what we say we’re going to do and we’ve built up our clientele that way.”

Crowell says. “We do quality work, we use quality material, and we’re a professional operation. That’s how we get the work.

“Don’t get me wrong, we still have to compete,” he says. “We’ve got to be competitive with our pricing, but we have good credibility and that helps. And we have good credibility



*On a cracksealed parking lot, Nick and Joe Axtell and Steve Lines, Axtell's Sealcoating, Olyphant, PA, are ready to spray with dual hoses.*

partly because we use a top-quality product with great characteristics.”

Page, however, doesn’t charge more for the premium material. Instead, All Pro Services absorbs the increased cost — partly because of the price the New Orleans market will bear but primarily because Page feels Star-Seal Supreme makes All Pro Services more productive.

“We keep using it because it gets

us in and out faster. It makes us much more productive,” Page says.

#### **A time-saving material**

And productivity is important on every job. Contractors say using this premium-grade sealer saves the crew time at the jobsite, first, because they don’t have to take the time to add the latex.

“Otherwise you’ve got to have a

guy up on top of the tank, you have to mix the latex with equal parts water on the ground, and you have to carry it up and pour it in really slowly," Page says. "That takes time and that means we're longer at each job."

Bewley says the fast-drying characteristics of the sealer help get his crews in and out of jobs more quickly, which makes customers — such as McDonald's — happy.

"This product goes down and sets up fast and tough and we can get off the site and they can get it opened up as soon as possible," Bewley says.

Crowell says his company works extensively on industrial sites and heavily trafficked sites where it is not realistic to expect them to close for a day or two.

"We deal in the 'real world' here and this sealer enables me to improve our production. It gets us in and out faster," Crowell says. "I can turn a job a lot quicker — probably two days

quicker — than when using a standard-grade product."

Crowell terms Star-Seal Supreme a "forgiving" product that enables the contractor to take liberties with it — without any adverse effects.

"You can actually open the pavement up 30 minutes after it's down and get cars on it," he says. "We don't like to do that. We like to wait the appropriate time, but in some cases

## Some Specs

**Description:** Star-Seal Supreme premium-grade refined coal tar asphalt pavement sealer.

**Application Method:** Mechanical or spray applicators, brush or squeegee.

**Coverage Rates:** Two-coats at 0.18 to 0.20 gal./sq. yd. of concentrated sealer.

**Dilution:** Maximum 20% by volume on the volume of the concentrated Star-Seal Supreme with clean, potable water.

**Recommended Uses:** Industrial and commercial driveways and parking lots; airfields, taxiways and shoulders; service stations and truck terminals; fast-food restaurants and hotels.

we just can't. In the real world some of these properties need to be re-opened right away and Supreme is so forgiving it allows us to do that."

He says the sealer dries fast enough that a crew can put down two coats without leaving the jobsite.

"We just put down the first coat, wait 35 or 40 minutes and spray on the second coat. Then, if I have the striping contract, we can wait another half hour and stripe it and then be gone. And there won't be much flashing on the paint at all. It sets up real nice and doesn't turn green or brown at all. And it saves me several trips back and forth and reduces our labor costs," Crowell says. "So even though you're paying a little more money for the material, your production is going to be so much faster that you're going to save money — or make more money."

Dubey says Star-Seal Supreme lasts 50% longer than standard sealers so property owners don't have to shut down their lot and seal it every year or every other year.

"I've gotten some very, very happy customers, but I'm kind of putting myself out of business because I don't have to go back very often," Page says.

And Monroe Sealers is so confident in the product that it doubles its one-year guarantee when using Star-Seal Supreme. "It's great for use in those situations where people are willing to pay for it. It stands out and it's tough," Bewley says. ■

*For more information on Star-Seal Supreme indicate 67 on inquiry card.*