

Investing in the future

Hugh Prescott has been around the industry for a long time and he is now working with GM Dealer, Mike Claridge in Adelaide at Claridge Crash, which has re-located to a brand new facility. David Newton-Ross caught up with Hugh recently to talk about his time in the industry and this new venture.



NCR: When did this new facility actually open for business?

HP: We opened on 5th February this year, so we are coming up to three months. There are still some minor additions and changes to make, but in about another week everything will be in place. The car park paving has just been completed and we are almost ready with our non-drive facility which is in a separate building on the property.

NCR: If we take a step back from your new venture ... I have known you for a long time, but what is your background in the industry? I know that you used to have a couple of shops in Adelaide, one, in fact, in the CBD when you were a member of CRSA.

HP: I did have two shops in the city and one in Bordertown at one stage in the early days. I began owning body shops in 1991. I actually came out of the car and farm machinery dealership industry to get



HUGH PRESCOTT

involved in body shop ownership. I jumped out of corporate life with Toyota in South Australia and straight into the crash repair industry. I bought two shops and subsequently bought another in the city. I then took on some semi contractual arrangements with insurers and sold my Bordertown facility, consolidated the two

shops in the city into one.

NCR: Now, your shop in the city really was in the city, wasn't it?

HP: Yes, it was 400 meters from the GPO! It was 5000 square meters of land, so it was really a valuable asset. I ended up selling the property and was looking to get out of the industry and began calling my suppliers and work providers to let them know my plans. One of the insurers met with me and out of those discussions began contract arrangements with AAMI. I moved out of the city having sold the property and within four working days the whole property was demolished!

NCR: What is on the site now?

HP: It is a six storey student accommodation facility, the first of large scale university student housing facilities to go up in the city and houses around 400 students. It was expensive real estate!

I then moved to Holden Hill where AAMI wanted to commence a contract repair



shop and we eventually built that up, repairing around 80 cars a week. Then Capital Smart came along and bought the facility and asked me to join them in the first Capital Smart shop in Adelaide, which I did in 2010 and we actually opened for business in early 2011.

NCR: You then left the industry.

HP: Yes, I had a break for a couple of years.

NCR: What did you do – retire?

HP: No, I actually moved to Brisbane for 13 months managing a bath manufacturing plant with 90 staff and Australia-wide distribution! It was owned by a friend of mine who was very ill, so

I came in to help out. We managed to achieve a lot in that time and then came back to Adelaide expecting to retire. My son was in a Crash Repair business here in Adelaide and owned shops, so I got involved with him and eventually ended up with three shops again! I then sold my shares in two of those to one of the business partners and began working with Mike Claridge, who I have known for more than 30 years.

NCR: Before moving to this new facility, did Mike have a body shop elsewhere?

HP: Yes. It was actually at the Holden dealership four kilometres from the GPO.

It was a separate building on the opposite side of the road to the dealership in a high visibility area. A decision was made to move the crash repair facility to the new site and open up the old site as a high visibility used car facility. That has now been running very successfully for five weeks.

NCR: Was this site originally a crash repair facility?

HP: No, it was previously a metal fabrication business, so it was dirty & dingy



talkingShop

PROFILE OF THE
PROFESSIONAL SHOP
OWNER



NCR: You have been able to use the existing buildings?

HP: Yes, we have modified them and added one extra building, which is the wash bay and also the compressor room. The car wash area especially is set up for future expansion. The building layout otherwise is as it was.

NCR: What size is the facility?

HP: It is 8100 square meters with 2000 square meters of workshop in the main building and 620 square meters in our non-drive building. We feel that there is an expanding market in the non-drive repair area and have equipped that building with two modern Car-O-Liner benches and Electronic measuring plus a Super Rotax Globaljig and other welding equipment etc., and we have access to the information and training necessary for the repair of today's hi-tech vehicles. A 4-wheel aligning hoist & laser alignment

setup is on its way, so we will do all suspension work on-site.

NCR: Where do you source your work?

HP: Obviously we get a lot of work through repeat business through our dealership and connections, but a large percentage is also insurer work. We do not have any contractual arrangements with insurers but we work all Insurers.

NCR: How many do you have on the team?

HP: We currently have 21 and we are steadily, gently, growing with three more joining us next month.

NCR: You are not managing the facility – who is in that role?

HP: Our General Manager, David Webber, has come from the Insurer industry, & has brought pure management skills into the business and is now teaching those skills to our key people. His knowledge of the needs & working of insurers is also very valuable. David has a corporate marketing

knowledge which will be of great benefit to us. His skill sets are different to mine so it is good to have him onboard.

NCR: So, after all this time your future is still in the industry!

HP: Yes, it is.

NCR: Are you enjoying being back in the industry?

HP: Yes. It is an industry where there is a lot to think about every day and there are a lot of disciplines we need to apply and it keeps my brain very active, which I enjoy.

NCR: What do you enjoy doing outside of the industry?

HP: I still have a real interest in motor car racing and other than that I enjoy the wine and food in Adelaide! **NCR**

Editor: I have known Hugh for many years and he has always been actively involved in attending seminars, conferences and trade shows to stay abreast of the latest technology and information. It is good to see that he is not lost to the industry and is relishing this new challenge – I wish him well.