

HoldenAustralia

An innovation and technology led rejuvenation

AS HOLDEN UNDERTAKES THE BIGGEST TRANSITION IN THE HISTORY OF THE COMPANY, DAMIAN CAHILL, COLLISION BUSINESS MANAGER, TALKS US THROUGH THE CHALLENGES OF THE PROCESS, LIFE AFTER MANUFACTURING AND THE EXCITING TECHNOLOGY IN THE HOLDEN PIPELINE.

NCR: Who is the real Damian Cahill?

DC: I started in the auto industry in 1989 as an apprentice diesel mechanic with the national bus company in Ireland. I carried out extra studies during my apprenticeship as I wanted to give myself every opportunity to be employable within the automotive industry. I also won a couple of awards: 1st in Ireland for Junior Apprentice exams and one of the finalists for the Apprentice of The Year competition in 1994. After my apprenticeship I worked as a mechanic and service advisor at an automotive dealership. I completed Advanced Automotive exams in 1997. Due to the high marks I achieved in these exams, I was interviewed by a panel of representatives from the Society of the Irish Motoring Industry (SIMI) and was awarded the Stanley Dawes award for that year. Stanley Dawes was President of the Institute of the Motor Industry during the fifties, where he worked tirelessly to increase the level of education within the motor industry.

NCR: What brought you to Australia and how did you get to be working with Holden?

DC: I always wanted to travel and see a different part of the world and having a trade was the perfect way to enable this, so in 1998 I moved to Australia. Australia is so different to Ireland, so my wife and I thought, why not? It really has been the lucky country for us. I initially worked as a technician in a luxury car dealership,



Damian Cahill

but in 2003 I joined Holden as a contractor in the Warranty department on a three-month stint, so I took a punt and left a full-time job at the dealership to gain some experience in the corporate world. I've been here ever since, working in a variety of roles including Warranty Dealer Support, Warranty Trainer & Systems Administrator, Warranty Manager and Aftersales Program Readiness Manager for some new models. Holden is a great company to work for and I now have a career that I don't think would have been open to me had I remained at a dealership, although having that experience has allowed me to apply a different mindset to my roles.

NCR: What are your primary responsibilities in your current role?

DC: I am the Collision Business Manager. Some of my responsibilities include working with the repair industry so that Holden customers can have their vehicles repaired using General Motors (GM) approved repair procedures and Genuine Holden Parts. I am lucky to be surrounded by great people; our engineers, parts, technical people and Jenny, who provides critical administration support. It is because of great teamwork that we can offer the support services that we do.

I'm currently working on a couple of major projects that will keep Holden at the forefront of the collision industry for many years to come. We're always working to identify ways that Holden can serve our customers better, building vehicles that prevent accidents from happening and offering the best support when they unfortunately do.

One example of serving our customers better occurred last year with our introduction of stamping original VINs onto replacement Colorado chassis. Stamping the original VIN removes the need for our customers to have a new second VIN recorded by their state Road Traffic Authority for their vehicle.

NCR: You mentioned support services to collision repairers. What does Holden offer?

DC: Holden works together with repairers when it comes to assisting with the repair of a customer's vehicle. We have a dedicated collision repair email for all collision repairers to send

their questions to. We refer to our database of previous queries to provide answers or, if the question is a tricky one, we get our parts and engineering experts to find an answer. We've also produced some "Holden's Got Your Back" videos based on questions that we have received, which is another resource for car repairers. And finally, we also run annual forums – open to anyone who wants to attend – around the country.

NCR: Holden finished building vehicles in Elizabeth in October last year. What steps has Holden taken to support the staff during the closure?

DC: Our number one priority is looking after our people. Holden understood from the outset the impact the end of manufacturing would have on its employees and their families and the wider auto industry. Soon after the announcement was made in 2013 to cease manufacturing in 2017 and close the plants, transition centres were opened in Elizabeth and Fisherman's Bend. The purpose of these centres was to help prepare people for their life after Holden, whether that be future employment, study or, for some, retirement.

Every Holden worker leaving the business has access to an array of individually-tailored transition services such as resume writing, interview preparation, job hunting, career counselling, computer training, as well as up to \$3000 in approved training. The centres are open to employees, contractors and supplier employees as well as their families. In Adelaide, where the bulk of the people left the organisation, the centre will stay open for an additional two years. Because of Holden's world-class transition support, 83 percent of people who have left the business have successfully transitioned.

NCR: Looking ahead, what changes do you see taking place in the industry, say over the next five years?

DC: From my experience in the collision industry, repairers benefit so much by increasing their skillset. I am on the I-CAR Australia Board of Directors and it's disappointing to see that so few repair shops have reached Gold Class status in Australia. However, I think that changes will be

introduced in the next few years that will have repair shops thinking differently and seeking out further information and training.

Today's vehicles are already complex. The ones coming at us in the future will be even more so. The collision industry needs to stay abreast with reading about and, more importantly, understanding manufacturers' repair procedures and position statements. You don't want to be in a position where you've tried to shortcut a procedure and then can't have that repair authorised – it's critical to be informed on the right way to repair a vehicle.

One of the changes I'd like to see is that we, the auto industry, do a better job of attracting more young people to the industry. Our industry is far more diverse than the public realises and there's a great deal of opportunity. There are post-apprenticeship career paths available, especially for those who put in the extra effort to obtain additional skills. Had my mentors told me 29 years ago what I'd be doing as a job today, I'd never have believed them.

From a Holden perspective, there is technology in our cars today that just a few years ago was the domain of the luxury brands. It's important for repairers to understand that Holden products are advancing rapidly.

NCR: What can you tell us about the technology that Holden will introduce to the Australian market?

DC: I'm not an expert on technology, but what I can say is that Holden will be at the forefront of how personal mobility evolves, and technology is a key part of that. We are introducing OnStar to the Australian market, which takes vehicle connectivity to a whole new level – this is life-changing technology. Safety is our top priority. If you look at something like the 2018 Commodore, it is packed with technology to keep the driver, their passengers and everyone on the road safer. I think you just must look at features we have available today to imagine what the future will bring. Our Astra, for example, will stop itself with AEB, will park itself with Advanced Park Assist, will keep you between the

white lines on the road with Lane Departure Warning and Lane Keep Assist and stop you tail-gating or warn if the vehicle in front is slowing down at a greater rate than you are with Forward Collision Alert. When I started in the industry 29 years ago we were still setting the gaps on points!

NCR: So, you believe Holden and the dealer network are well positioned for a strong future in Australia?

DC: I certainly do. We're establishing ourselves as a sales, engineering, design and technology company and there's lots of exciting things ahead. We have a strong commitment from General Motors and showrooms full of great product including our new SUV, the Equinox, and the all-new Commodore, as well as Colorado, Astra and Trax – to name just a few! We're focused on providing great cars and exceptional customer service. We have the second largest dealer network in Australia and it's our dealers who are critical to the success of Holden.

Starting in 2018, Holden and dealers are rolling out a three-year project that represents a joint investment of \$150 million. It's called Dealership of the Future and will completely transform our dealerships, both externally, in terms of physical appearance, and internally with new technology, fit-out and approach to customer service. Think more airport lounge, less traditional showroom.

The other key feature Holden has is our top-secret proving ground at Lang Lang, on Phillip Island. Every vehicle wearing a Holden badge in Australia has been tuned and tested at Lang Lang for its handling in Australian conditions. These cars have the fingerprints of our Holden Australian engineers all over them.

From a collision side of the business, one of the long-term projects I'm currently working on will see Holden work even closer with collision repairers for the best customer outcome.

Editor: *With so much going on inside the organisation it's great to see that Holden recognises the impact on the collision repair industry. In Damian Cahill they have clearly put these challenging programs in good hands.*