



Driven by **PERFECTION**

WHEN YOU FIRST MEET CARMINE DE MARIA OF C.A.D. CUSTOM ELITE BODY AND PAINT, YOU CAN'T HELP BUT GET CAUGHT UP IN HIS ENTHUSIASM AND PASSION FOR LIFE AND FOR WHAT HE DOES FOR A LIVING – CREATE AND DELIVER GREAT CUSTOM CARS.

The formative years

Carmine De Maria speaks fondly of his late father, Cobram Valiant-Chrysler Dealer, Joe De Maria, as he reflects on growing up in the car game. The dealership included a smash repair shop and was a key service provider to commercial vehicles in the Riverina. In his early years, Joe gave young Carmine a sage piece of advice that he still lives by today: if you want to succeed in life, think and plan for the long term and align yourself with the best people.

From his early days, Carmine was driven by achievement and, as an apprentice at Barry Dickson Paint and Panel in Cobram, he was awarded Apprentice of the Year in each of his three years at Wangaratta TAFE. By his mid-twenties, he was an accomplished body builder and was not satisfied until he won the Mr Australia Contest in 1998 – in everything he does, he strives to be the best.

It is the same with his automotive career. On completion of his spray-painting apprenticeship, De Maria worked for several different businesses, both in Melbourne and in regional Victoria, before setting up De Maria Smash Repairs in Cobram in 1993. However, he discovered that being a great spray painter did not necessarily mean he would be a great business owner and he closed down the business in 1999.

Notwithstanding his roots and his



Carmine De Maria.

obvious affection for his home town, De Maria headed to Melbourne to further develop his skills and knowledge where, once again, he worked in various businesses including Lemax with an old friend of the National Collision Repairer, Max Chanter. “Carmine was one of the best spray painters I ever worked with. It is no surprise that he has gone on to become one of the best in the country,” said Chanter.

Building the brand

However, De Maria was looking for an edge, and in 2009 he headed to the SEMA Show and discovered the custom car scene and was hooked – C.A.D. Custom was born! He was determined to make his mark on the industry and so he set out on his journey. Following his father’s advice, he set an objective to “win every show

in the country” – quite a challenge when you start out in a rented property and a second hand Lowbake spray booth. However, as he built his business and built his network, his reputation grew, and he has now fulfilled this goal with the various cars that he has built over the years.

Owen Webb, MotorActive said, “I first met Carmine when he was planning to open his custom shop and I immediately liked his attitude. I told him it would be a long road and you must turn out great work with a high service level – which he has done. It has been his investment back into his business and continual hard work that makes him one of Australia’s top custom shops.”

In 2014 C.A.D. Custom displayed no less than eight cars at MotorEx, including “Toxic Q”, the big block HQ Holden that featured on the cover of

Street Machine magazine. De Maria was getting noticed.

True to his father's mantra, he aligned himself with the best in the custom car scene, and in the US that meant people like Chip Foose and Charlie Hutton. In 2015, De Maria won a competition to have a car (an XB Falcon) painted by Hutton at the Sydney Hot Rod and Custom Show and was blown away when Hutton insisted that they paint the car together. De Maria still recalls that day and has stayed in touch ever since.

On his annual trips to SEMA, De Maria would drop in to Foose Design in Huntington Beach and began to build a relationship with Chip Foose and his team. However, it was in 2016, when he was selected by a panel of industry leaders to represent Australia in the 3M PPS World Cup at the 2017 Woodward Dream Cruise week, that he really cemented his relationship with Foose and the team at 3M. "The experience was unbelievable as all the contestants had the chance to learn from each other, using the very best of products – I can't thank 3M enough for the opportunity," he said.

Where are we now?

De Maria has since taken on an ambassadorial role for 3M PPS and has worked alongside the 3M team at several events in the past 12 months. "Carmine has been a great ambassador for the 3M brand and the Australian custom car scene. His excitable passion for cars is infectious, his workmanship is top class and we really enjoy working with him," said Andrew King, 3M Automotive Aftermarket & Marine Division Business Manager – Australia & New Zealand.

There is no doubt that Carmine De Maria is now a major force in the custom car scene in Australia and this was never more evident than at Meguiar's MotorEx in Melbourne in May this year, where he had three of his creations on display. The '32 Ford (Chooda), the '57 Chev Bel-Air and the HK Monaro all picked up awards in their categories. Interestingly, although De Maria runs the business and manages a great team, he does all the painting himself. "This is what my customers expect, it's my area of



Open day at C.A.D. Custom.



CHOODA ... a standout at any show.



Award winning HK Monaro.

expertise and I love it."

In addition to becoming one of the pre-eminent custom car builders in Australia, C.A.D. Customs has been appointed the Australian distributor for NotchHead Fasteners and Sockets and is yet another example of De

Maria aligning himself with the best in the business.

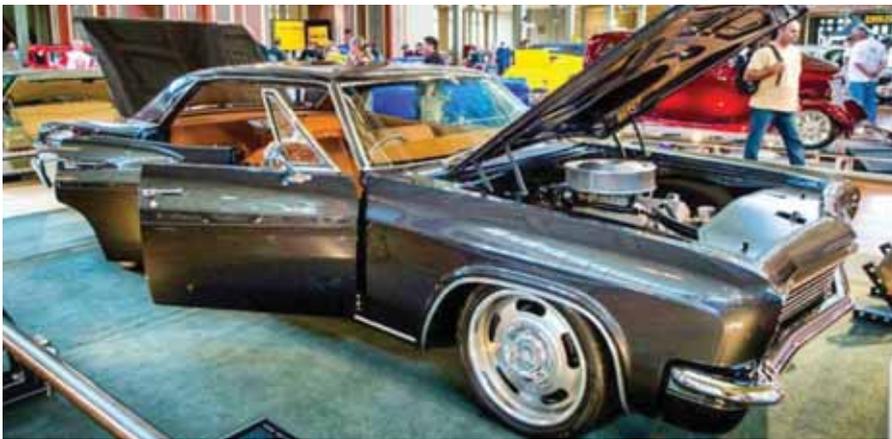
As I stood on the shop floor in his Tullamarine facility, I watched his team at work and it's clear they too have a passion for what they do. I was stunned to see none other than Tom Peach,



Carmine with Chip Foose and Andrew King.



Peter Lamb, Carmine and Norm Stewart.



SUPERNATURAL.

whenever I'm recruiting. Trying to get a great fit at the beginning improves my likelihood of success. With access to people like Tom Peach, it only enhances our ability to recruit and retain the best staff."

I just had to ask what his favourite creation has been over the years, and without hesitation he said, "The '65 Chevy Impala, 'Supernatural', because it greatly exceeded the customer's expectations. This is why I do what I do."

Where to from here?

Asking this question, I expected an answer more in line with "who knows what the future holds". However, De Maria is a very focused individual and he works on up to eight projects at any one time. A typical build is a two-year project, and he has another eight in the queue already. He shares with me that when he began his "custom career", one of his dreams was to build a car to a standard that was worthy of entering the Ridler Award. It was no surprise to hear that he has now been commissioned to do just that, and I was privileged to see the early progress on this confidential project. Look out for the finished car at the SEMA Show in 2020.

As I leave the facility, I reflect on the advice Joe De Maria passed on to a young up-and-coming Carmine: "think and plan for the long term and align yourself with the best people". It is clear that Joe's advice has been well and truly put into practice.



Tom Peach sharing the knowledge.

renowned master of metal shaping, imparting his knowledge to young Adam Vella as he rebuilds the '28 Ford Coupe. "It's just so great to have someone of Tom's experience come into the shop - he is a great supporter

of what we do," said De Maria.

Not unlike collision repairers, attracting and retaining experienced custom builders is a perennial challenge. "I look to recruit on character, charisma and competency