



B&A Motor Body Repairs

Corporate structure – family values

I RECENTLY HAD THE PLEASURE OF INTERVIEWING BILL AND ALFREDO MAZZEO, THE FOUNDING FATHERS OF THIS 44- YEAR-OLD FAMILY BUSINESS, TOGETHER WITH THE SECOND GENERATION, THEIR SONS TONY AND DOMINIC, AS THEY SHARED THEIR STORY AND THEIR PLANS TO CONTINUE THE FAMILY DYNASTY.

The formative years

In 1967, not unlike many Italians, 18-year-old Bill Mazzeo packed his bags and headed to Australia looking for a better life. However, although he had already completed an apprenticeship, Bill found different cars, different ways of doing things and, of course, the language challenge in a new country.

After picking up work around the industry, Bill started an apprenticeship with Ford at New Oakleigh Motors, where he learned a great deal about the automotive industry in Australia, followed by time working in a couple of different service stations.

In 1970, Bill was joined by his brother Alfredo, a qualified panel beater who worked in the trade until the brothers decided to open their own business. B&A Motor Body Repairs was born on 1st April 1974, when Bill and Alfredo opened a service station in Clayton in Melbourne's southeast. In those days, the service station was a "one-stop shop", with fuel sales being supported by both mechanical and collision repairs, a tow truck licence, a licenced motor car trader and provider of roadworthy certificates. In fact, having a service station enhanced the repair business by 30 percent in the early years.

By the late 70s, the brothers had



moved to their current site, which has since undergone various expansions and renovations as the industry has grown and evolved. B&A was one of the first to import a Termomeccanica spray booth from Italy, and the brand has served them well ever since. With significant investment followed by a recession, the business faced considerable challenges through the 80s, but with hard work and commitment, Bill and Alfredo saw it through.

A critical component of this success was developing relationships with the local business community as B&A became the repairer of choice

due to their growing reputation as a business you could trust. Organisations such as Telstra, Dulux, Chesebrough-Ponds, Bosch, and Leyland all relied on B&A to look after their fleets.

They also did a lot of work with insurers, including repairing cars for the RACV from their theft recovery operation. In fact, B&A was one of the first RACV self-assessing shops in their network. In addition to the RACV, they also dealt with brands such as AAMI, GIO, CGU – effectively the bulk of the brands within the Suncorp and IAG organisations.

Passing the baton

As a late teenager, Dominic followed in his father’s footsteps as he undertook a panel beating apprenticeship in 1997 under Alfredo’s guidance and Uncle Bill’s mentorship. “As a young man it’s sometimes difficult to find your path, but I took to it like a duck to water. I couldn’t have asked for better teachers and mentors.”

Together they managed the challenges of generational change within a family business and at times Dominic was thrown in the deep end. “I remember the first time I was asked to quote on a customer’s vehicle when Uncle Bill wheeled me out from under a car to ensure we did not lose the customer.” Alfredo added: “Those were different times, as assessors would sit down and work with you to develop your capabilities. We always found that being open and honest was the best policy and we still believe this today.”

At B&A they firmly believe that their reputation is everything and they will all do whatever it takes to protect the family name as they have all worked too hard and too long to build their business. They see this as a critical factor in their success.

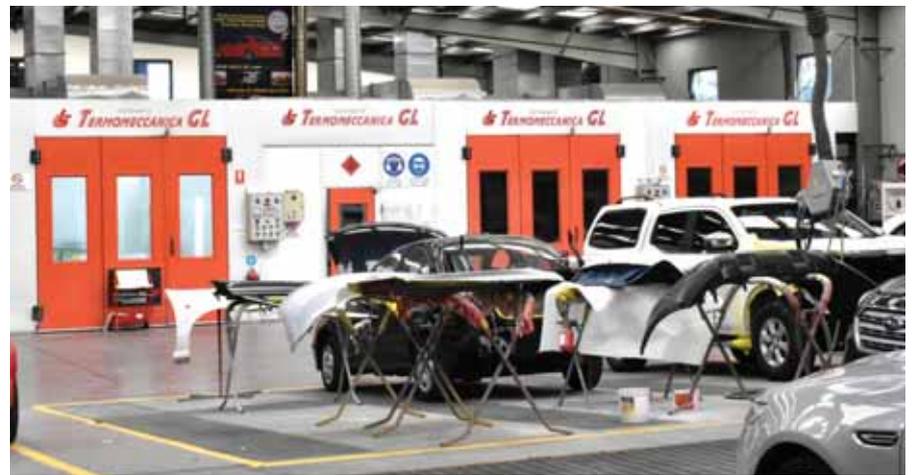
Bill’s son Tony has followed a different path, initially completing an accounting degree and working for a city accounting firm, followed by an engineering company. As a CPA, he joined the business as Financial Controller on 1st July 2000, which coincided with the introduction of GST. Of course, this added significant complexity to the family business.

Tony brought a degree of structure and process to B&A as the business had outgrown the initial manual systems. He computerised the accounting procedures and introduced robust automated work practices that have since become the backbone of the business.

This was also the time when QA was introduced and became a requirement of many corporate relationships. Instrumental in those early years was Robin Taylor (in his Dulux days) and B&A built complementary processes, which was critical to achieving their first enduring OE certification in 2004 with Subaru.



Dominic, Alfredo, Bill and Tony.



The original booths.



Holden Certified.

Initially working with Ezi Quote (the predecessor to PPG’s Business Manager), which worked well for several years, they have since converted to iBodyshop through DNS Technology and in turn moved everything to the cloud.

Where are they now?

Today, Dominic has progressed to the point where he is now Operations Manager and whilst the workforce is stable, they are always looking for apprentices and have even approached the local schools and TAFE in their



Alfredo and Bill with Chip Foose.



Collezione Speciale.

search. It's the industry-wide challenge as there is so much competition for young talent, especially from the construction sector.

B&A has turned its attention internally and invested heavily in further developing the skillset of 17 technicians in the existing team, through Chisholm TAFE together with the support of I-CAR, the car manufacturers and key suppliers such as PPG and 3M. "With the rapidly advancing technology within the cars of today and tomorrow, we see the need to bring on the younger generation as they are more connected to the technology than previous generations," said Dominic.

The business has evolved, and the service station was closed last year, but they retained their tow truck licences and their LMCT registration. OEM approvals are also a key part of the business as they have added Lexus (and Toyota), Holden and Tesla in the past 12 months.

In Italy there is a saying: la famiglia e tutto - "family is everything". This is how they run their business at B&A, and whilst there are now eight family members in the business, all the employees and suppliers are treated as an extended family and all are working or providing support in the best interests of the business.

Where to from here?

The immediate reaction to this question was that both Bill and Alfredo are planning to semi-retire and leave the business in the hands of their sons. However, the emphasis was on "semi", as they will still play a guiding and

mentoring role in the coming years.

The Mazzeo cousins are quite clear on their direction, which is an even stronger alignment with global OEMs. They believe that the shop of the future will be quite different to today as the cars get smarter and the complexity increases exponentially.

There was even some thought that there may be a time when they will be 3-D printing their own parts - the technology is available today.

"We see a very different future where every OEM has different compliance requirements and we intend to be at the forefront of development," said Dominic.

"We are working with other manufacturers to further develop our certified network as more and more of these relationships are becoming critical to the business," added Tony.

On the question of growth, the founding fathers had the foresight to invest in the business, and this has afforded the business the luxury of being able to expand as they attract

more and more manufacturers. "Every five years we have done something significant to the business - we have reinvested to build for the future," said Alfredo, and Bill added, "We draw a salary and leave the bulk of the funds in the business to fuel the growth."

And finally, in this world of aggressive consolidation, the family is crystal clear on their direction. "We have bold plans and are fully committed to the business. B&A Motor Body Repairs is more than a body shop, it's the base of the broader family business," said Tony. Dominic really sums it up: "We will be 'forever independent'."

Editor: It's so refreshing to see the commitment to both business success and family values in such challenging times. The optimism of both generations is infectious, as is the willingness to predict and adapt to the changes in the industry. When Bill and Alfredo finally do retire, I have no doubt their legacy will be as strong as ever.

Damian Cahill Collision Business Manager, Holden Ltd said: "B&A's motto, 'corporate structure, family values' is self-evident from the moment you step through the front door and this has been reinforced by several B&A customers during my time in this role. They have pulled out all the stops to secure their future in the Australian collision repair industry and invested in the key components required for a business to operate; their premises, equipment, training and their staff."

B&A won a major national award in 2017 but continued to invest. "Even when we launched the criteria to build the Holden Certified Collision Repair Network, the team at B&A still had some work to do, but they accepted what was required to meet the criteria and got on with the job of getting it done. I believe it's this can-do positive attitude that will see them having a long-lasting relationship with Holden and Holden customers for many years to come," added Cahill.