

# The SAPE Group

## Building a dynasty

WITH THE RECENT UNVEILING OF THEIR NEW TRAINING CENTRE, THE SAPE GROUP'S DIRECTOR, PAUL MCMARTIN, WALKED US THROUGH THE FACILITY AND EXPLAINED THE RATIONALE BEHIND THE INVESTMENT AS THEY CONTINUE TO DEVELOP THEIR BUSINESS MODEL.

### Brief background

In the early seventies, Ray McMartin was running the automotive division of a small distributor in Marrickville and, in 1976, he bought the division, thus establishing the foundations of the SAPE Group. Through several acquisitions, most notably Prestige Paints and Equipment Supplies and Automotive Colour and Equipment, the business expanded to other states, and their reputation grew. Over the years, SAPE has developed long-standing partnerships with global coatings companies BASF and Axalta and several global equipment suppliers. In 2009, the group relocated to their current, purpose-built, Condell Park Head Office and now employs 88 staff nationwide.

Although Ray has built a reputation as a wily investor, it is his most recent commitment to the development of a national training facility that has caught the industry's attention. "The SAPE Automotive Training Academy was opened because there is definitely a need in the industry. We have spoken with a number of stakeholders across the industry who really wanted a training facility, but the investment was just too great for the size of our market. Therefore, we built a facility that can be used by multiple brands and it allows each brand access to a state-of-the-art facility at minimal cost," said Paul.

### The Interactive Studio

The new facility is built with two distinctly different capabilities. The Interactive Studio, with a ten-seat classroom, has been used several



Paul, Warren and Ray McMartin.

times, but SAPE was being asked to quote on fitting out training centres for some of their clients. The Interactive Studio is designed for "small-equipment" training, show-and-tell type of training - it's tech-focused, well-lit, airconditioned and very comfortable for a combination of information-sharing and hands-on work. Audi Australia has utilised the facility for both mixed material training and the introduction to the new Audi A8, including CFRP certification.

The key equipment brands on which they focus are Celette and GYS, who are both bringing the most innovative products to the market and doing it quickly. Of course, there is still great support for their other key partners in Wielander+Schill, IRT and ProWoTech. The focus is on the equipment side of the business as this is where the gap has been. The coatings manufacturers have long

since provided excellent applications training, so there was no need for SAPE to replicate this. "We are not shifting our focus away from the paint side of our business, we're simply filling a need in the market," said Paul.

Although the fundamental source of body training should be with the OEMs - after all, they build the cars and write the repair procedures - the investment required would simply be prohibitive and that's where the SAPE Group comes in. They are already working with Audi Australia in the Interactive Studio with mixed material training held earlier in the year and have had strong interest from several other OEMs, although these are works-in-progress.

One of the key benefits is that it exposes the technicians to the ease of use, the accuracy and the speed of the Celette equipment - it's the combination of the speed of measuring



**The Interactive Studio.**



**Audi A8 in the Structural Wing.**

and jiggling that is the big differentiator. With the front jig sitting there, you can instantly see the results and the repair process is so much more efficient.

Paul makes the point: "It's important to note that we, The SAPE Group, are not trying to do the training - we are providing the facility for the OEM and for organisations such as I-CAR to do what they do best. For us, it's about ensuring that the technicians know how to use the equipment and know how to repair today's cars correctly in an environment that is much more conducive than a working body shop."

**The structural wing**

Covering an area of approximately 750m2, the structural wing is the real jewel in the crown of the Training Academy.

This is their structural repair base where they can change a rail, change a quarter panel, or even the whole side of a car. It includes a measuring area, multiple MiG welding bays and a mixed materials bay where they can do riveting and bonding training, as well as plastic repair. "Essentially, we have the equipment to do every type of training required to repair a vehicle, in a controlled environment." There is an ever-increasing demand for aluminium repair training, for which they are also particularly well set up.

"The challenge was that everyone wanted to do structural body training, but no one had the capacity to invest. Outside of the TAFE system we believe this is undoubtedly the most comprehensive facility in the country. The very fact that we are attracting great interest from the OEMs is testament to our capabilities." Only

**Condell Park HQ.**



recently, SAPE hosted the all-new Audi A8 introduction, including carbon fibre reinforced polymer certification, which included using all the specialist tools and equipment.

This is their real point of difference in the industry. With the increasing complexity of today's cars and the increasing demands on the technicians, the team at SAPE wanted to provide the best service available. "Our focus is more and more on value, rather than competing on price - this is what the industry really wants."

"With all the equipment we offer, we have quality tools and equipment, we hold the stock, we train technicians on the use of the equipment and we offer the capacity to service the equipment. We cover our clients through the full lifecycle of the product - we really do offer 'after-sales service' - and in a world where down-time is so expensive and disruptive, we will be there. We have qualified technicians, including an electrical engineer, on staff - not just here but across the country."

**Summary**

Returning to Ray: He continues to ensure he is at the forefront industry development and spends a great deal of his time understanding the challenges and opportunities that are upon us through the advent of advanced driver-assistance systems and the need for correct realignment and calibration. In his own inimitable style, he is not afraid to express his concerns about the calibration capabilities across the industry.

The SAPE Group has been committed to the growth and development of this industry for over 40 years and Ray's contribution was recognised with a National Collision Repairer Lifetime Achievement Award in 2013.

With a long and distinguished history, it comes as no surprise that Ray and sons Warren and Paul have an eye to the future, and the investment in their new facility is yet another reflection of this commitment.