



Killen's Smash Repairs

Armidale, NSW



WE FIRST VISITED KILLEN'S SMASH REPAIRS IN 2009 BUT AS SO MUCH HAS HAPPENED IN THE INDUSTRY OVER THE LAST DECADE, WE THOUGHT WE WOULD RECONNECT AND SEE HOW THINGS HAVE PROGRESSED ON THE NORTHERN TABLELANDS OF NSW.

We caught up with Managing Director, Michael Killen who gave us the short history of the business, taking us back to where it all began 50 years ago. "The business started as a partnership in 1970 between Paul Killen - my father - and David Reid, who created

Killen and Reid Smash Repairs, which very quickly built a solid reputation and loyal customer base. In 1975 Paul and his wife Gwen decided to continue the business by themselves and purchased a site in the Armidale Industrial Area and renamed the

business Killen's Smash Repairs. The business has been on this Mann Street site ever since.

In the following years, Paul and Gwen continued to build and expand the operation and purchased an adjoining property. Then, in 1984 a young Michael Killen joined the business as an apprentice panel beater. 2004 saw the completion of major renovations and improvements, setting the business up for a prosperous future, although sadly, Paul Killen passed away in 2006 whilst still relatively young at 65 years old.

"I was thrown into the deep end as I took control of the business somewhat earlier than I expected. I now manage the business together with my wife Natalie, who manages the increasing complexity of automotive parts. We are also both so proud to have our sons Cameron, a panel beater and Patrick, an auto electrician, who are both part of the business." It is clear that Michael looks forward to the business continuing to grow as they move towards the third generation.

Staff retention and experience is a cornerstone of Killen's Smash Repairs' success, underpinned by several long-serving employees, such as Greg Yates in the paint shop and David Reddon, their workshop foreman, both with 17 years under their belt and Jesse Deiderick, their paint shop foreman has been with the business for 11 years. Killen's is also a strong believer in the development of future talent and currently has three apprentices in the



Michael and Natalie with the I-CAR Gold Class plaque.

business. They also maintain a commitment to their extensive Post Trade Training program through I-CAR, together with the support of paint supplier PPG and their OEM partners.

We turned our attention to the various changes within the industry and how they have impacted the business, although some of them have been ongoing for over a decade. "Consolidation has definitely changed the collision industry landscape more broadly, although at this stage it hasn't had the effect we thought it might have had in our region. The developing franchise model continues to gain momentum, which I believe will continue to be an attractive option for some shops. However, I believe that like-minded shops forming networks to optimise buying and marketing, amongst other things, can provide shops such as ours with the tools we need in a broader sense. I also think that Capricorn Society has the potential to become a much bigger player in the collision industry, as evidenced by their 2019 event, Futures Collide, and we are watching the Car Craft Group with some interest."

Michael's real passion comes through when we turn to the growing influence of insurers, particularly the two major groups. "My biggest concern with the insurer landscape is the push for fixed-price, or average-cost repairs, which I believe is most destructive for the industry as a whole. This approach creates a 'race to the bottom' in an industry that is ever-changing, growing in complexity with increasing demands related to safety, technology, quality expectations, extended warranties, including a lifetime warranty on paint – the list goes on. Repairers simply cannot provide safe and proper repairs whilst simultaneously focusing on a fixed price."

Michael also highlights that he does understand and appreciate the need to provide their insurance partners a cost effective, value for money service. However, he is adamant that the fixed price model is not the solution. "One other thing that is a perennial issue right across the industry is that we still have to deal with the

'funny time/funny money' scenarios that have evolved over the years – surely these times are behind us."

Michael said he was very proud to have been awarded the National Collision Repairer Lifetime Achievement Award in 2017, but did not expand on the recognition both he and his son Cameron have received, so I took it on myself to add the following:

During his Lifetime Achievement Award ceremony in 2017 it was noted that Michael has always been proactive in his business and active in the industry, joining many organisations such as the CRSA, AARN and Capricorn Society to ensure he stays abreast of industry trends and to network across the industry to improve both his business and the collision repair industry as a whole. He has served on various committees with MTA NSW, and on advisory committees with various insurers to

further develop the industry. Michael takes every opportunity to attend industry events, serves in several panels at workshops and forums and, as a member of I-CAR, firmly believes in training for both his team and the industry in general.

In 2019, Cameron was recognised as a Future Leader of the Industry and during his presentation he spoke of following in the footsteps of his father and his grandfather: "My grandfather passed away while I was quite young, but his influence lives through dad. I am so proud to continue the legacy as we view the company not as a business but our brand. By completing a Leadership and Management Diploma the University of New England I feel it will really enhance my contribution to the family business." Cameron's presentation took place at the 2019 Lifetime Achievement Awards ceremony in the presence of



Great street appeal.



The Killen's Team.

5 Minutes with ...



Paul Zielinski
Capricorn Society

When did you join the industry?
1999

What was your first job in the industry?
Light Vehicle Motor Mechanic

What do you do now?
Area Manager for Capricorn

What do you like about the industry?
It's a tight community that has a hands-on culture

What don't you like about the industry?
Nothing really, I've learned so much

What music do you like?
All types, but mostly Aussie artists

Your Favourite Artist?
Mumford and Sons

Your favourite food?
Can't go past a good chicken schnitzel

Your favourite drink?
Whiskey - neat.

Your hobbies?
I like to escape civilisation and head away 4WDing and camping as much as possible

Who in the world would you most like to meet?
Hmmm, I would've like to have met Robin Williams

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TALKING SHOP

150 key stakeholders and doyens of the industry.

Looking at the business today, Killen's Smash Repairs employs 15 people and repairs, on average, 25 vehicles per week, and as is common with regional repairers, the average repair is typically larger than in the metropolitan centres. "One of our major supplier partners is PPG and together with their distributor, Kensells in Tamworth, we have received brilliant service over the last 15 years. Our paint shop is one of the best equipped in the North West as our booth supplier, PAN Spraybooths, has provided wonderful service for all their equipment. We have also installed some of the best equipment from around the globe in our workshop, including a Car-O-Liner alignment bench with 4WD chassis capacity, Pro Spot inverter welders and a variety of automotive service equipment from Bosch, just to name a few."

With such a strong reputation, not just in the local community but in the Australian collision repair industry, I asked Michael what really makes the difference at Killen's Smash Repairs. "We have a full capability and still strive to be a 'one-stop-shop' for all forms of collision repairs. We have full structural capacity with electronic measuring, 4WD chassis and jig technology, rivet and bonding capability and in the coming months will have installed a dedicated aluminium work area. We offer our own mechanical and auto electrical services and anticipate that ADAS calibration will be part of the service in the next 12 months."

Killen's Smash Repairs is also a Subaru Certified Collision Repairer and a GM Certified Collision Repairer,

which Michael says are very important to their business, and they expect to reveal some new OEM certifications in the near future. In addition, they are I-CAR Gold Class Collision Certified and have Green Stamp Environmental Accreditation. It is self-evident that Killen's Smash Repairs' reputation is well-founded indeed.

As we are in the midst of a COVID-19-induced business interruption, Michael says it has presented a few challenges, although the impact is not as severe in the regional areas. "We have been able to maintain a consistent workflow with the only real impact on the staff being the loss of overtime and some reduced hours. Otherwise, we have been able to continue with a 38-hour week and in the slow periods, with the help of JobKeeper, we have been able to work on business improvements and preventative maintenance that will allow us to come back stronger than ever."

Although the coronavirus is an ongoing concern, Michael is confident in the future and believes that they are in a strong position to continue to move forward. "I think the state and federal governments have done a good job of managing things and hopefully we can avoid a major shutdown!"

Michael looks back with great pride on what the family has achieved, especially the work and dedication that his parents showed in building the business, which is now New England's longest serving smash repairer. "This is my 36th year in the business and I look forward to working with the next generation, taking up the challenges and leveraging the opportunities that still exist in this great industry in which I am truly proud to be involved."



Cameron doing what he does best.