



The pre-eminent training provider to the collision repair industry

WE CATCH UP WITH I-CAR AUSTRALIA'S "FOUNDING FATHERS", DAVID NEWTON-ROSS AND RICHARD PRATT TO REFLECT ON HOW IT ALL BEGAN, AND HEAR FROM CHAIRMAN STEVE BUBULJ AND DIRECTOR OEM AND INDUSTRY RELATIONS JASON TREWIN ABOUT THE PLANS FOR THE FUTURE.

In the beginning ...

David Newton-Ross' first exposure to the I-CAR industry training organisation was when he lived and worked in California from 1986 to 1990, at a time when training was – and still is – very much a way of life in the USA. "I saw first-hand how it worked and the obvious benefits to consumers, business owners and employees in the correct repair of motor vehicles. Virtually every trade show or conference I attended would feature a booth and/or speaker from I-CAR and, of course, in almost every body shop I visited, the I-CAR certificates and signage were proudly on display."

Once back and working in Australia, Newton-Ross always had in the back of his mind that I-CAR training would be good for the Australian industry, and whilst attending various NACE shows in the USA he got to know the I-CAR personnel very well, including their

then CEO, Tom McGee. They discussed the possibility of introducing I-CAR into Australia, due in no small way to the success of I-CAR in New Zealand since its introduction in 1985.

"I held a Collision Repair Specialists of Australia (CRSA) conference in Melbourne where Rex Crowther and Robert Renwick from I-CAR New Zealand were guest speakers to discuss I-CAR training. They were literally mobbed at the lunch break by many of the best body shop owners in Australia, all looking for more information on I-CAR. They wanted to know what I going to do about bringing I-CAR to Australia. This was the point when I finally made my mind up to talk to McGee in earnest."

Newton-Ross met McGee at NACE in 2005, where McGee gave him a letter of authority to find a suitable organisation in Australia with whom to launch I-CAR into the local market. "It was certainly the right time as both

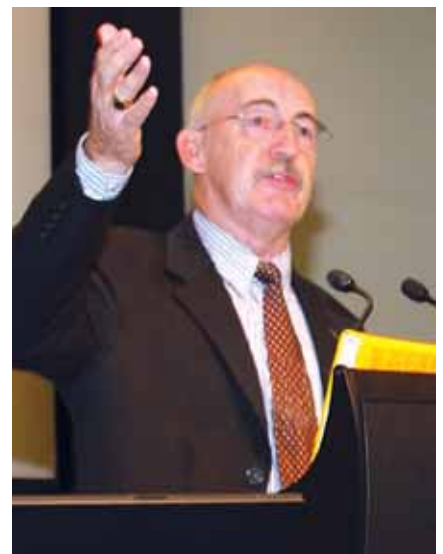
David Weatherall and Richard Pratt of MTAQ had been to an I-CAR course and could see the benefit and value of I-CAR in Australia. The rest, as they say, is history and by September 2006, we saw the launch and introduction of I-CAR into Australia at a phenomenally successful event in Brisbane."

The National Collision Repairer has always been, and continues to be, a great supporter of I-CAR Australia and, in fact, the very first issue featured a full page on I-CAR, which we have reproduced for this article. Since the launch of I-CAR Australia in 2006, I have seen a great change in the attitude to training in Australia and we have seen steady growth in participation levels. Now with the COVID-19 pandemic, I-CAR Australia's online training platform has really come into its own, which also augurs well for the future," added Newton-Ross.

The number and variety of courses available online continues to grow, and there are now over 100



The first I-Car board: Mark Brady, John Howes, David Newton-Ross, John Zulian, Dave Weatherall and Richard Pratt. (Insert) Richard Nathan.



David Newton-Ross.

available - check them out at: <http://i-car.com.au/course-catalogue/>. The I-CAR Australia team is dedicated, totally professional and continues to provide a great service to the industry.

Newton-Ross concluded: "As someone who has been around and involved with I-CAR since 2005, I must say that I am proud to still be actively involved as a board member. The other members of the board and the Industry Advisory Council (IAC) represent some of the best in the industry in their various business roles and the future of I-CAR Australia is indeed in good hands."

The formative years

Richard Pratt picks up the story at a time when he was the Commercial General Manager at MTAQ, where, in addition to the "political side" of the role, he also ran the conferences for the vehicle service and repair industry, including collision, so had an extensive active network. "I attended the roadshow events with Tom McGee on the east coast and gained an insight into what they were looking for from a recognised industry group that met their licence requirements. The MTAQ had a strong collision repair committee and at that time was the Secretariat for AMBRA, who asked us to examine opportunities - that's when the whirlwind started."

MTAQ subsequently agreed to act as an interim manager of I-CAR, and Pratt would run I-CAR on a part-time basis in



Tom McGee and Richard Pratt .

addition to his existing responsibilities. MTAQ agreed to subsidise I-CAR Australia until they were up and running, following which the monies would be reimbursed. The licence agreement from I-CAR required the organisation to be run as a charity with non-profit status, so they started with a blank sheet of paper, one part-time employee, and no funds of their own.

"The business plan would start from scratch, covering legal, finance, systems and procedures, selection of venues, marketing and training delivery options. McGee attended MTAQ in April 2006 and AMBRA endorsed us to complete the licence agreement. There was no government

funding because post-trade training was not covered by the legislation that covered pre-trade qualifications. What we did have was lots of enthusiasm."

As a membership-based organisation, I-CAR was funded by the major industry players - insurers, product supply companies, trade associations, private member groups and individual repairers. It quickly became obvious that the momentum of I-CAR would not be properly managed under a part-time arrangement, so in August 2006, Pratt resigned from MTAQ and joined I-CAR Australia. "I became the first employee: manager, trainer, and basically jack-of-all-trades. As David said, we officially launched



COLLISION INDUSTRY NEWS, VIEWS & INFORMATION



I-CAR is coming to Australia

With I-CAR courses already conducted in Australia and the industry embracing the I-CAR training concept, the question has been asked, "where to from here?"

David Newton-Ross met with the I-CAR CEO, Tom McGee recently at NACE in Las Vegas and reports that at their International Board meeting held in Las Vegas approval was granted to pursue I-CAR entering the Australian market in early 2006. Industry stakeholders are applauding this news and moves are already underway to finalise the discussions and the negotiations to make this happen.

We expect to have more definite news on the I-CAR front in the February issue of The National Collision Repairer.

I-CAR Education Foundation Launches the Careers in Collision Repair for Kids Web Sites

The I-CAR Education Foundation has announced the launch of a series of Web sites designed to bolster the collision industry's recruitment effort by providing a single resource to help interest and inform students and their parents about the challenging careers available in the collision repair industry. The recruitment effort consists of two Web sites: collisioncareers.org and collisionkids.org.

The Web sites will provide students, their parents, school counsellors and the public at large with facts about the industry. The sites will explain the many rewarding careers available to people who choose to work in the industry.

While administered by the I-CAR Education Foundation, the Web sites are designed to be a truly industry-wide effort that will provide all the different segments and businesses in the collision industry with the ability to market themselves to young people in search of a challenging and rewarding career.

"The sites will demonstrate the depth and breadth of career opportunities across all industry segments," said Ron Play, executive director of the Foundation. "From repairers to insurers, suppliers and related service businesses, the collision industry offers a wide variety of challenging and rewarding career opportunities that await young people."

The high school level site, www.collisioncareers.org combines detailed information about both the collision repair process, training programs and facts and figures on employment with educational and entertaining content including games, downloadable wallpapers for computers and other content.

I-CAR Courses a big success once again

Two I-CAR training courses were conducted during the month of November in Brisbane, Sydney, Canberra, Adelaide and Melbourne. MTAQ arranged the courses with the assistance of the individual state associations and the instructor flown in especially from the US was Marcus Essic who has been working with I-CAR almost since it started in the US 25 years ago.

The reaction to the courses from the attendees, who included shop owners, employees and insurers, was very positive.

The courses conducted were Automotive Foam and Structural Aluminium Design and Repair Processes. These courses were the second ever to be presented in Australia following the very successful courses earlier this year held in Brisbane and Sydney.

I-CAR is expected to finalise arrangements in 2006 for entry into the Australian market.

Attending I-CAR courses for the second time has convinced me that this is exactly what we need in Australia. The second aluminium course was different from the first but equally as good. Marcus Essic was an excellent trainer.

Brett Leslight, Regatta MBR, Sydney



GROUP PICTURE OF FIRST I-CAR TRAINING COURSE CONDUCTED IN BRISBANE



LOCAL NEWS & INFORMATION



I-CAR Australia in September 2006 with over 250 guests at the Brisbane event.”

Pratt reflects that the first two or three years were tough, amazingly busy, and he was sometimes travelling interstate for two or three weeks at a time. In addition, there were the industry’s perennial sceptics who were reluctant to adapt to change. However, the team (by then they had employed an office administrator) soldiered on and the Board of Trustees provided great support throughout the entire gestation period.

“As well as training across Australia, I delivered courses (at that stage the delivery method was only live classroom) in Malaysia through the UniKL facility, where we had the support of some local equipment suppliers in making that work. This also led to delivering regular seminars in China, Singapore and the Philippines. We were fortunate to have several part-time contract trainers join us, taking time away from their own businesses to travel and deliver across Australia.”

The Australian market continued to grow, the OEMs were keeping regular contact, the insurers were coming on board, and the repairers were beginning to accept that I-CAR Australia really did know what they were talking about. Correct method of repair and proof of qualification became regular discussion topics, and as I-CAR staff numbers were increasing, they moved into a new

building in Brisbane, and opened a local office in Melbourne to service the growing opportunities with the OEMs.

In 2015 Pratt resigned from I-CAR Australia, but retained his role as a Trustee, handing over the reins to Mark Czvitkovits, who led the organisation until the corporate restructure earlier this year.

Further development

Director OEM and Industry Relations, Jason Trewin, who has been involved with I-CAR Australia since 2007, brings us up to the present day, having witnessed first-hand the exponential growth of the organisation in the first decade.

“The training offer now includes live classroom sessions, virtual classrooms, hands-on skills development programs, online training and OEM certifications. As individuals, we all learn differently and expanding the way the training is delivered has allowed students to choose the platform that best suits their needs.”

As more segments of the industry understand the importance of ongoing training, the expansion of I-CAR Australia is assured. Customers now include collision repairers, insurance assessors, refinish companies, MSOs, TAFE colleges and OEMs, and the market has now grown to include OEM students from Japan, South Korea, and various countries across Southeast Asia.

The students of 2020 and beyond are, and will continue to be, vastly different to those that Pratt trained in

those early years, as they now expect things to be better, faster and easier to access. “They have an expectation that training results are instantly available, and our response is that completing and submitting a post-training test will become digital and can be carried out on a mobile device whilst in the training session, providing instant results. This is just the first step in several incremental operational changes that will be implemented to improve the customer experience and to improve our internal efficiency.”

Trewin reflects that in 2006 vehicles were made of steel, were welded, and panel beaters and spray painters performed the repairs. Now, there is ADAS technology, materials such as aluminium and carbon fibre reinforce polymer, bonding by rivets and adhesives, and body shop personnel who include autobody repair and refinish technicians, workshop controllers and even more specialised roles. During this period of rapid change, it is important that training continues to stay in front of these technologies.

“As we move into 2021, I-CAR Australia is strongly positioned to best provide the collision repair sector with the programs to meet these training requirements. I agree with David that the IAC, which offers strategic direction to the management team, includes some of the industry’s smartest minds. Diverse representation continues to be a focus when looking for representation on



Mark Czvitkovits.



Jason Trewin.



Steve Bubulj.

the IAC and currently we have refinish companies, I-CAR Gold Class shops, manufacturers, insurance companies and repairer groups, that all provide critical feedback on what best meets the market's requirements."

It is self-evident that the members of the IAC are passionate about education and committed to continuous improvement as they provide a crucial conduit between the I-CAR Australia Executive and the stakeholders. "I-CAR Australia has a critical role to play in supporting and guiding our industry through the next stage of its development by providing the best post-trade training available. With the assistance of the board, the IAC and our staff, I am eminently confident in saying that we are best placed to do this."

We are yet to see what our industry will look like post-pandemic; however, one thing is certain: I-CAR Australia will have more programs, different ways to learn and increased engagement with its partners and members, ensuring it delivers the best training and the best way for the body shops to maximise their return on investment.

Creating a sustainable future

"As the business continued to expand, the status of non-profit and charity endorsement changed with the revamp of the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission and the connection to Australian Securities and Investments Commission meant that, as a Top Tier Charity, the system under

which I-CAR Australia operated needed to change and adapt to the new set of rules," explained Newton-Ross.

"I-CAR Australia has become a Company Limited by Guarantee, and underwent massive changes in reporting responsibilities, and in the development of the policies that are a prerequisite of compliance. The board of directors cannot play an active role in managing the business but sits one step removed to oversee the legislative reporting requirements and establish the direction of the organisation. The corporate restructure has provided greater clarity for the future, and despite the effects of COVID-19, I-CAR Australia is well placed to retain its position as the pre-eminent training body in the collision repair industry."

Newton-Ross concludes: "The I-CAR Australia team is absolutely committed to the I-CAR vision: that every person in the collision repair industry has the information, knowledge and skills required to perform complete and safe and quality repairs for the ultimate benefit of the consumer."

Appropriately, we leave the final word to Chairman, Steve Bubulj: "I-CAR

Australia has provided the foundations and led new-age training, knowledge, and industry autobody high-performance since its inception in 2006. As vehicles evolve, I-CAR Australia remains the leader in delivering the future skills and competencies required to repair modern motor vehicles, year after year. The team at I-CAR Australia is incredibly committed to serving their customers with the guidance and support of a talented and passionate Industry Advisory Council. There is no doubt I-CAR Australia is at the forefront of setting the standard for the autobody industry, now and into the future. I am fortunate to have been involved with I-CAR Australia for just over a decade, and it is a privilege and a pleasure to serve with my fellow directors who share the same passion for training, development and safety of repairs."

Editor: It is with great pride that we at the National Collision Repairer continue our relationship with I-CAR Australia, which began back in 2006. As a member of I-CAR Australia, we have every confidence that it will continue to thrive in the years ahead.

