



Daimler Trucks Toowoomba

Where premium brands and premium service combine

IN A “TALKING SHOP” WITH A DIFFERENCE, WE VENTURE INTO THE COMMERCIAL VEHICLE SECTOR AND INTRODUCE CAMERON O’HARA, DEALER PRINCIPAL OF DAIMLER TRUCKS TOOWOOMBA, WHO GIVES US AN INSIGHT INTO HOW THINGS OPERATE IN THE “BIG END OF TOWN”.

To get the ball rolling, I asked Cameron to give us a bit of history about the business, which was formerly known as Westco Truck Sales. “The Westco name has a long, proud history and has been part of the Toowoomba community for over 80 years. Initially established to build and sell Leader Trucks, the business expanded into a multi-franchise operation. It has operated on the current site for the past 15 years and in June 2018, we bought the business and changed the name to Daimler Trucks Toowoomba and acquired the New Holland franchise later that year to service the agricultural sector.”

Cameron and his business partner, Aaron Crick, also own the

Mercedes Benz Sunshine Coast dealership, which is cars and vans, and they diversified into Daimler trucks in 2018. Aaron runs the dealership on the Sunshine Coast whilst Cameron runs Daimler Trucks in Toowoomba. “I have a long-standing business relationship with the Crick family, initially with Aaron’s father, Garry who sold his interests in the Mercedes Benz Sunshine Coast dealership to Aaron and so Aaron became my new business partner.”

Interestingly, Cameron started in the automotive industry in the mid-90s, initially with cars and light commercial vehicles, and about 12 years ago got involved with trucks. Cameron was running Daimler Trucks Sunshine Coast as well as the Mercedes Benz Sunshine Coast dealership, and when the opportunity came to buy the Toowoomba business,

he sold his interests in the Daimler Trucks Sunshine Coast dealership.

A little-known fact, even within the industry, is that the Daimler Group owns a variety of brands, including those that they have at Toowoomba, such as Mercedes Benz, Freightliner and Fuso. Whilst the business is multi-branded, the brand portfolio comes under the one central umbrella. The New Holland franchise covers both New Holland Agricultural and New Holland Construction.

With a foot in each camp, I asked Cameron to give us a feel for how the truck business compares to the car business. “The biggest single difference is the customers’ purchasing decision process. With trucks, it’s all business. They are a tool-of-the-trade on which the customer’s livelihood relies, and so reliability and operating efficiency are of paramount importance. A business owner only earns a living when the truck is on the road.”

Cameron went on to explain that with Mercedes-Benz cars, although it’s quite a different purchasing decision as it is a luxury vehicle, most customers are still looking for reliability and efficiency in addition to premium quality. “Although one is a business purchase and the other is a discretionary purchase, in both cases, emotion plays a significant part in the ownership experience. Across the two dealerships, it creates a good balance.”

Although it may have been self-evident, I asked if Daimler Trucks has a premium position in the truck



Cameron O’Hara



Inside the workshop.

segment, in the same way that Mercedes Benz has in the car segment. Cameron explained that Daimler Trucks is not quite recognised as ultra-premium in the same way the cars are, partially due to the Daimler Truck branding in Australia being relatively new, but they are certainly heading that way, particularly over the last five years. The similarities have become more obvious in relation to ergonomics, luxury, telematics and safety features, creating greater alignment between the cars and the trucks. He then went on to say that currently, Daimler is reconfiguring its truck portfolio, although they can still

supply anything from 3-tonne to 300-tonne from one of the brands under the Daimler portfolio.

“Going forward, Mercedes Benz will be the only a cab-over truck we will have in our portfolio, whereas Freightliner will only be a bonneted truck. In addition, we will see standardisation of the driveline within each brand and, of course, the use of a common range of safety systems across the range. This global transition is well underway.

We then discussed the various services that the business provides to the local community. “We represent world-class brands in Mercedes Benz,

Freightliner, Fuso and New Holland and are based in the truck hub area of south east Queensland, which is also an extensive active agricultural location, the Darling Downs and the Lockyer Valley. Our “territory” even extends as far west as Cameron’s Corner. In terms of geographic spread, this makes us the largest Daimler Truck dealer in Queensland. Not only do we sell these products, we also offer a full range of after-sales service, repair and parts distribution service. In addition, we support other makes and models of trucks, trailers and farm machinery through our parts mega-warehouse and our workshop and offer a 24/7 breakdown service.”



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TALKING TRUCKS

However, what makes them truly unique is that, in addition to their mechanical capabilities, they operate a full-size commercial vehicle collision repair facility that also does fabrication work. Daimler Trucks Toowoomba really is a one-stop shop for trucks and trailers. "We have a Spray N Bake booth from Spray Booths Australia, which is large enough to accommodate a coach, and we use DeBeer coatings from Valspar that give us a world class finish. In the business, we have several people with over of 10 years' service and some have been with the business for over 20 years. Our depth of knowledge and experience is second-to-none."

I asked Cameron how they manage repairing the ever-increasing complexity of the onboard technology. "As a dealer, we obviously have the capability to strip down, repair and rebuild a truck to the manufacturer's specifications, using, of course approved repair procedures and genuine parts. This is critical as Daimler offers guaranteed future value on their products and so it is in everyone's best interest that after an accident the truck is returned to pre-accident condition to preserve the future value. This, of course, applies to all the collision avoidance technology, including realignment and calibration. Everything we do enhances our reputation in the region."

Cameron also has a strong view on the key challenges within the heavy vehicle sector, particularly with the rapid advances in heavy vehicle technology, including collision avoidance technology. "The challenge is for the authorities to reassess the

regulations and legislation under which we are currently operating. We would like to see amendments that reflect the quality, safety systems and capabilities of the vehicles we are bringing to the market. If this is done correctly, it could actually lead to greater efficiencies and even less trucks on our roads."

Summing up our discussion, Cameron looks to the future. "Looking ahead, as we bring these 'hi-tech' trucks onto the market, they will be easier to drive, significantly more comfortable, much safer and the on-board technology will be far more attractive to the next generation. This, of course, flows on to the maintenance and both the mechanical and collision repair sectors who are also looking to attract the next generation of talent."

As we all know, this is a huge country and the movement of goods will continue to be reliant on the trucking industry. It's not too much of a stretch to suggest that we are likely to see more hubs such as we are seeing in Toowoomba, and the subsequent feeder network of smaller vehicles feeding the hub – the classic hub-and-spoke model.

Cameron concludes our discussion: "We now offer better products that we have ever had, and our range will continue to develop. The new vehicles will be more efficient, safer and more cost effective to run, all of which are particularly attractive to both the large fleets and owner operators. I am extremely passionate and very optimistic about the future of the industry."



Part of the New Holland range.