



Specialised Collision Repair Centre

WE MEET DIRECTOR AND OWNER JASON CASE, WHO TELLS US ABOUT HIS JOURNEY, THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF BEING ON THE METROPOLITAN-REGIONAL FRINGE, AND HOW THEY WILL ADAPT TO THE EVER-CHANGING COLLISION REPAIR INDUSTRY.

Background

Jason began his apprenticeship as a panel beater in Mount Gambier in 1990, where he worked for two years before “the recession we had to have” hit hard. However, as it happens, he was offered a job in Victoria, so he jumped in the car and went on to complete his apprenticeship at John Batman TAFE in Coburg which, of course, was “absorbed” into what has become the Kangan Institute of TAFE.

“I originally worked at another smash repair business in Sunbury for about 10 years before the partnership dissolved and they went their separate ways. I moved on with one of the partners who established Specialised Collision Repair Centre (SCRC) here at our current site, and about nine years ago I bought into the business. In 2018, my partner retired, and I bought his share, making me the sole owner of the business.”

Since taking equity in the business and subsequently buying out his partner, Jason still has the desire to pick up the tools and keep things ticking over. Although the transition from the hands-on role has been challenging at times, he is all too aware of the importance of letting go and working on the business.

“In the initial years, my wife Bobbie-Lee was instrumental in making our venture a success, but over the years her involvement has reduced – but she still works one day per week, predominately on the accounts.”

The changing nature of the industry

Jason and Bobbie-Lee are all too aware of the ongoing trend of consolidation and can see the impact it’s having across the industry. So far, it has not directly affected them, but they are somewhat cautious. “The growing franchise model still allows you to be your own boss, but when the bigger groups come knocking, I believe

they have two different approaches. They acquire well-run businesses, and pay accordingly, or they acquire poorly-run businesses to fix them up – and pay accordingly. We’ll just keep doing what we do, monitor the situation and see what happens.”

The ever-changing involvement of the two big insurer groups continues to be of interest. As we all know, Suncorp was



Bobbie-Lee and Jason.

divesting its interest in Capital SMART as IAG was taking an equity position in Repairhub. It was not that long ago when things were going the other way. “Clearly, they run different models and I’m sure there are people in both camps who know what’s best for them and their stakeholders. It does have an effect on us as it can make the work a bit more variable than we would like, but being on the fringe of metro Melbourne, at this stage we are still okay. We get most of our work from Suncorp and Allianz, with some from IAG, mainly because we believe in having good working relationships with the work providers.”

Jason believes that the insurers have raised the bar and set standards that preferred repairers are required to meet, which in turn requires them to ensure they have all the right equipment which, of course, is great for the entire industry.

“We also see the growing influence of OEMs regarding authorised repair procedures and the use of genuine parts. We rely on the manufacturer, or a credible

independent such as Thatcham, for the correct procedures, but when it comes to parts, we are influenced by the insurer, who in turn reverts to the terms and conditions of the individual’s policy.”

SCRC endeavours to stay up to date with the technology in today’s vehicles, starting with diagnostic tools, and what they can’t rectify in-house they send out to the dealer, usually to Melbourne. Of course, there is some work that is mandated to go to the dealer, so that takes the decision out of their hands. This can impact cycle times, but in the main they have no choice. Ultimately, they take the view that if the manufacturer’s dealer does the work, then it is correct.

Back to the operation

Other than Bobbie-Lee, there are no other family members in the business, although there are several employees who have been in the business for well over a decade, including the key roles of the painting foreman and the mechanical assembler. “It’s the people

who are the foundation of the business and we are fortunate to have so many ‘long termers,’” said Jason. One of the major challenges, however, is the lack of good apprentices – which is, of course, an industry-wide issue – and one that Jason doesn’t see being resolved any time soon.

I was able to speak with some of the staff and the consensus is that SCRC is a great place to work and that Jason and Bobbie-Lee will do anything for their staff. With this endorsement, it’s no wonder the business continues to be successful under Jason’s leadership.

“We were thrilled when SCRC was a finalist in the 2018 VACC Victorian Industry Awards, in the Best Body Repair Passenger Vehicle Large Business category, although it was bitter-sweet when we were a very close runner up.” With 12 or 13 staff on the payroll, and completing 25 to 30 cars per week, the efficiency of the operation is self-evident and the recognition at the 2018 awards was well deserved.

“Last year, we took the decision to focus on, and invest in, fulfilling the training requirements of the prestigious I-CAR Gold Class accreditation. Being part of the Suncorp approved repairer network, Gold Class status will become mandatory later this year, but we wanted to get ahead of the game. With the knowledge and skills gained from the process, we are sure that our customers will continue to receive the highest quality service and workmanship,” said Jason.

We turned our attention to the key supplier partners to the business and Jason is immediately proud to mention that they have been with PPG “forever”. “We are extremely happy with the quality and reliability of the Envirobase high performance paint system, which delivers ground-breaking waterborne performance characteristics, combining low VOC ‘green’ credentials with speed, productivity and user-friendliness. In addition, the PPG Roundtable discussions have been, and continue to be, invaluable.”

Jason also speaks fondly of their Snap-on diagnostic tool and their



Great street frontage.



Where it all happens.

5 Minutes with ...



Mitch Prentice
RepairHub

When did you join the industry?
January 2020

What was your first job in the industry?
Trailer fabrication

What do you do now?
Currently studying at RepairHub
Training Academy

What do you like about the industry?
I enjoy learning about the different ways
of doing things

What don't you like about the industry?
"High-school" gossip

What music do you like?
Rap/Rub and hardcore

Your Favourite Artist?
Kid Ink

Your favourite food?
Kebabs

Your favourite drink?
Iced coffee

Your hobbies?
Taekwondo and planting trees to
save the planet

**Who in the world would you most
like to meet?**
Well, there's this girl.....



TALKING SHOP

Autorobot measuring equipment, which in both cases is easy to use and makes their life so much easier. SCRC's two spray booths are the locally manufactured Seetal brand, Australia's oldest established manufacturer of Combination Convection Spray Booth Baking Ovens.

Interestingly, Jason takes pride in the fact that he manages the facility without the assistance of body shop management software, which he puts down to how close he keeps to what goes on in the business.

When we turn to what really differentiates the business, Jason is typically modest, somewhat reluctant to "talk himself up". However, when pressed he speaks about the quality of the finished repair and treating every vehicle with the same care and attention – irrespective of the age of the vehicle. The team goes the extra mile and delivers personalised service, which is not only typical of a regional business, but clearly inherent in Jason's nature. They really care about what they do.

As we kick off 2021, Jason reflects on the challenges of last year. "We reduced our operating hours, utilised staff leave and, of course, completed the I-CAR Training as previously mentioned. We firmly believed it was crucial to keep the doors open and the business ticking over, which we were able to do, and the really great thing was that we were able to retain all our staff, even during the most severe restrictions." Jason even bought an old Mini Moke as a project car to ensure he had something to do if things got really quiet; however, it's yet to be completed. "With the worst behind us – fingers crossed – we look forward to

a more productive and more profitable year ahead."

Where to from here?

Looking down the track, Jason, like all good businessmen, is considering the strategic direction of the business. "While growth is always an attractive option, it will need to be profitable growth as there are implications for the business. The current footprint is sufficient for today, but any increase in throughput will require further investment and/or relocation. Then, of course, there's the impact on your own personal work-life balance – how big do you want to be and at what cost?"

The other major opportunity is to ensure they stay ahead of the rapidly-changing technological landscape, which will become a necessity to survive and thrive in our industry – although the industry may already be at that point.

With a keen eye to the future, Jason sums it all up: "If we were able to attract a greater volume of cars on a consistent basis, we would seriously consider the best way to accommodate them – all options would be on the table. We've built a great business here in Sunbury and would look for the best way to continue to serve the local community."

Editor: Josephine and I got to know Jason in 2019 when both our cars were involved in minor collisions. We can attest first-hand to SCRC's professionalism, quality of workmanship and what I like to call "the care factor". Recently achieving I-CAR accreditation was the trigger for us to get to know what really makes the business tick.



Jason and the team with the I-CAR Gold Class Award.

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