



WE MEET GEORGE TAOUIL, AUSTRALIAN BORN BUSINESS OWNER OF LEBANESE DESCENT WHO HAS CREATED HIS OWN PATH IN THE CUSTOM AUTOMOTIVE SECTOR AND WHO HAS TAKEN A LEAP OF FAITH WITH A NEW APPRENTICE FROM OUTSIDE OUR INDUSTRY.

Foundations

We kick off our discussion about George's background and he tells us that his dad, Assad, founded TCR Automotive Centre in the mid-70s, and George grew up in and around the business for as long as he can remember. From the early 90s, he initially spent time in spare parts, then switched to the paint side of the business to bring greater focus to this sector. In those days, TCR was a distributor of the Regal and later, Standox brands although they did diversify into other brands throughout the journey,

including House of Kolor, where George really found a connection to custom colours and special effect coatings. TCR is now also known as A1 Automotive Group and is still a family business, now run by George's brother. His dad continues to be involved in the business.

"In 2007 I rented this property and founded Innov8ive Customs, initially on a part time basis so that I could work on my own show cars, friends' cars and the 'odd' paying customer to help pay the bills. I am also a drag racer and so was also able to put the time, energy and passion into my own race cars. In 2011 we bought the property and went full time."

George is not a tradesperson; he is a businessman with a marketing degree. He runs the business

and understands the industry intimately, but when it comes to the tools, he employs the right people with the right training and the right qualifications to do the right job.

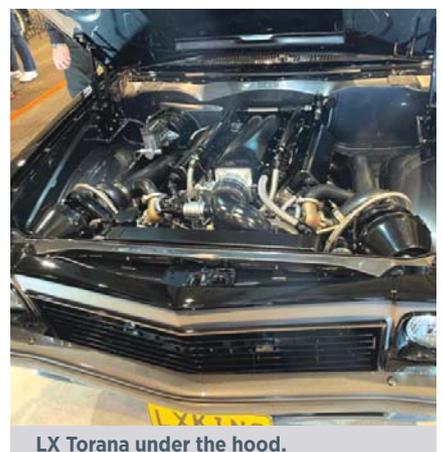
Where are they today?

Innov8ive Customs is solely George's baby but coming from an extended family that is intimately involved in the automotive sector, there is no shortage of support and advice on hand whenever he needs it - sometimes whether he likes it or not. He says the major challenge facing the business is selling the value proposition, by which he means helping the client understand why custom work is more expensive than "standard collision work" and that there is so much more to creating a one-of-a-kind vehicle of such high quality. "This is where my marketing background comes to the fore. We do full blown restorations or personalised custom work, depending on the clients' requirements - our aim is to make our clients dreams come true."

George believes they stand out from the competition based on their



George Taoui.



LX Torana under the hood.

high levels of customer service and their desire to ensure complete customer satisfaction. "We will spend as much time as is required to ensure the client is comfortable with us, with our processes and, of course, with the outcome." The facility is undergoing a complete renovation, which will include a fabrication shop, resulting in Innov8ive becoming a one-stop-shop.

A new beginning

And now to the twist. Earlier this year George reached out to Carl Tinsley at Campbelltown TAFE looking for a new apprentice, and he was introduced to Nikola Radulović, who came from the hospitality sector. Nikola was a casualty of the COVID-19 restrictions last year, so with an interest and passion for cars had decided to reinvent himself. George was looking for someone with a few miles on the clock, hardworking and respectful. Someone who wanted to be in the industry and be the best they could be.

So, the National Collision Repairer reached out to Nikola, who had spent his entire 28-year career in hospitality. When COVID-19 struck last year, the business with whom he had worked for the past 20 years was unable to keep him – and approximately 200 others – gainfully employed, so they were let go in mid-2020.

"I always had more than a passing interest in cars, and I was able to repair damaged cars as a hobby to generate additional income, although this all changed in 2011 with the introduction of the repairable write-off legislation.

That was the end of that." Nikola did some recent work on his brother's '69 Camaro, which helped him reconnect with cars, and in turn planted the seed for the next step in his career.

He took the opportunity to reinvent himself and reached out to TAFE and enrolled in a short course developed specifically to assist people in Nikola's situation. It was here that he met Carl Tinsley and floated the idea of a "mature age" apprenticeship. Another twist: Nikola is 49 years old. Since being laid off, he had been rejected for a whole variety of roles as a direct result of his age, but Carl – and, it turned out, George – saw things differently.

Both George and Nikola are very happy with the situation and expect to work together well into the future. Carl Tinsley, yet again has demonstrated his passion for the industry and his capacity to think outside the square, without which this connection may never have happened.

Where to from here?

Custom work is currently in high demand and so George has embarked upon a full renovation of their original site. "We are installing a state-of-the-art spray booth from CMC International, a selection made based on the quality of the system and the strength of my relationship with their local distributor." In a similar vein, Innov8ive Customs is a huge fan of House of Kolor coatings for all the custom work, again based on the quality of the finish and the relationships they established many years ago. They expect to have the new facility fully operational before the end of the year.

To find out more, visit:

www.facebook.com/innov8ivecustoms

Editor: Against a backdrop of tough, challenging conditions it's so great to bring you this inspirational story that really does illustrate that kindness and generosity is alive and well in our industry.



The key is always in the preparation.



Nikola Radulović with a current project, a 1974 Mazda RX-3.



Nicola's brother's recently-completed '69 Camaro.