

# bodyshop

August 2018

bodyshopmag.com



## IN THIS ISSUE

### **SIMPLY THE BEST**

The Best of Belron

### **RADER**

Growth on the horizon

### **TECHNICIAN AWARDS 2018**

The unsung heroes of the industry



**3M**

industry interviews, reports, news, vehicle tech, plus much more



## BODYSHOPPROFILE

# DIVERSITY IN THE MODERN AGE

**Automotive Repair Systems understands the principle of not placing all your eggs in one basket. Diversity is the name of the game for this thriving business in Orpington, on the outskirts of south east London, which has evolved from a one-man band carrying out PDR in 1997 to the largest independent smart repairer in the UK, boasting sales in June of just shy of £1m.**

It hasn't achieved this phenomenal growth, however, by being a one-trick pony. In fact, ARS is essentially three business rolled into one.

Apart from being a smart repairer of repute, it also operates a diamond cut alloy wheel refurbishment centre next door to its workshop and in June opened the doors to a fully-equipped training centre that will be used by both its own employees and the wider industry.

### Training

The speed at which the training centre has gone from conception to operation exemplifies ARS as a whole; one

day Phil Howlett, operations manager, was discussing the need for such a facility, and the next day Andy Patterson, managing director started the process and purchased the land upon which it would be built.

He said, 'The training centre was a new idea. In December last year we bought the land next door. The reason we did that is because we've got 135 technicians. There are always new systems, new paints. We thought our guys needed better facilities to learn it all – the workshop wasn't the right environment.' This training centre is now IMI and ATA accredited adding to the extra value they bring.

Dave Horrocks, paint process manager, who assisted with the plans and equipment requirements for the new facility, said, 'This will make his tasks easier as he can now ensure that his team are trained and have the time needed to ensure they deliver the best they can to our customers.'

With new contracts in the pipeline, those 135 technicians are expected to swell by more than 40 more in the coming months. Andy said, 'At the end of this year our head count will be over 200 people in the UK alone. We need a facility to look after them properly and that's where the idea came from. We originated the saying 'Smart Repair Plus,' which to us is pushing the boundaries of Smart repair and doing that little bit extra and larger repair than the norm.'

To maximise the site, Nick Bunn's business of Global Smart Repairs will also be based there, training both ARS staff and technicians from outside the company.

### Cutting edge

But the way in which ARS has committed wholeheartedly to this training division should come as no surprise. It has been equally agile with its alloy wheel cutting service. The workshop was originally established to cater for wheels that couldn't be repaired to an acceptable standard by its army of mobile technicians.

Just over four years ago it expanded its capabilities to cater for diamond cut. Originally it employed a fairly standard system; two big ovens and a manual track system.

Phil said, 'We thought we'd do 35 wheels a day and were soon doing up to 70.'

With demand outstripping capacity, a solution was required, and Phil knew exactly what it was. Years previously he had planned a new system which was almost completely automated, with a single track system which reverses itself and self-regulating ovens and cooling systems.

Phil explained, 'We realised we needed to do something to increase throughput, so we invested over £260,000 in this. It opened three months ago. It's an intelligent system that can be controlled with a single button. The track will allow 92 wheels at any one point. It takes 90 minutes for the first wheel to go around the track, and then one minute for every wheel thereafter. With this set-up, we have the capacity to do 400 wheels a day.'

Running 24 hours a day with just a few technicians, the return on investment has been immense.

### Core

Both the training side of the business and the wheel cutting service would make successful, stand-alone operations in their own right. It's remarkable then, that these are essentially 'add-ons' to what is ARS' core function – carrying out fast, high-quality smart repairs for dealership groups.

The reason for the diversity is simple, to make life easier for the customer. By offering a complete service, a full suite of smart repair, the idea is to save dealerships from negotiating and managing multiple supply contracts.

**400**

wheels can be done per day

### Partnership

But the partnership approach goes both ways, and while ARS aims to be a single source for dealerships, it wants the same thing from its partners; paint company Lechler, and paint supplier GB Refinish Supplies.

John Barclay, managing director of GB Refinish Supplies, said, 'I look at these partnerships as a triangle – you've got the customer, the distributor and the paint company. Everyone has to buy into that to make it work.'

So intertwined are the 'partners' now that technicians are situated at each other's sites to assist with training and implementation of new technologies and processes, while no area of the business is off limits when it comes to adding value – for example, Lechler and GB Refinish Supplies helped ARS update its IT system, while ARS is trialling new Lechler innovations and will offer constructive feedback.

Andy said, 'We can be demanding, we know that, but that's because our customers are demanding. If they want something now, we've got to deliver it, and we can't do that unless we can get exactly the same from our suppliers. We need to have a good relationship with them.'

“  
I look at these partnerships as a triangle

The future is clearly a bright one for ARS. With sites in Liverpool, Newcastle and even the UAE – all of which are ripe for growth – there appears to be no limit to where the company can go. Assuming, of course, it can find the people to power it. The company wants technicians with a minimum of four year's training because so many of them are customer-facing, and the ability to communicate well and represent the brand is fundamental.

Phil said, 'It's one thing finding someone who can do the job, but they also need to be able to hold a conversation and develop a relationship with the managers. You have to build trust. So when we employ technicians we need to make sure not just that they can do the job, but also that they can represent us professionally and generate new business.'

However, ARS has not yet hit an obstacle that it's found insurmountable, and with a dedicated recruiter on the books and its own training facility, it's a fair bet it will also find a way around the skills crisis so prevalent in the industry.

Andy concluded, 'We pretty much cover the majority of England with our mobile technicians, and we're starting up with our first technician in Scotland in a few weeks' time. We're also looking to push our business in smart repair insurance as well. It's less than five per cent of our business now, so I can see that as being quite a growth area in the next couple of years.'