

Family success story

NEIL BEER
seymour

Road ahead paved with opportunity

NOT THE DEMISE OF HOLDEN, NOR A GLOBAL PANDEMIC CAN HOLD A FATHER AND SON TEAM BACK, WHO BOTH SEE BRIGHT ECONOMIC TIMES AHEAD FOR SEYMOUR AND THE REGION

Anyone involved in a family business will tell you that it's not like any other business.

And we all know someone, who has a horror story, about how this family operation folded because of competing personalities and uncontrolled emotions, which got in the way of sound decision-making.

For decades, Neil Beer Seymour, a distinguished name in local car sales, has been successfully going about its business because father and son work as one, focussed on clear goals, with good intentions, and they listen to what the other is saying.

Father, Neil, and son, Greg, will both tell you that this year, 2020, will be a year to forget and remember.

A year to forget because of coronavirus and the downfall of the iconic, Aussie motoring brand, but it's also the year that their baby, which they have built together, will be transformed into something bigger and better, which will ensure this family business has a long future ahead of it.

This week, the Telegraph sat down with Greg Beer, to get his reflections on an incredible 2020, his family's long association with the region and what's around the corner for the local dealership.

Greg said they're currently in the middle of a significant upgrade of their Emily Street site, which will increase their workshop capacity, as well as their range of brands and the size of their showrooms to satisfy demand post-coronavirus.

"We have just put the finishing touches on a new, eight-car workshop, which brings our capacity up to 13 bays, and within weeks we are about to start work on a new showroom, which will be between our Nissan, Subaru and Mitsubishi showrooms, which will be home to two new brands," he said.

Greg admits there were a few sleepless nights when the state went into lockdown.

He said the suddenness of the COVID-19 shutdown took everyone by surprise and the uncertainty that followed was unprecedented.

"It was pretty tough, yes, and our business dropped by about 50 per cent, which was very tough on the staff, but we are now back to about 80 per cent capacity."

Greg said he and the team had been overwhelmed, and pleasantly surprised, by the level of customer and community support during coronavirus.

The dealership, which has always called Emily Street home, was established in the early 1960s by prominent local, Bernie Smit.

Neil, who is originally from Kerang,



Greg Beer is taking positive steps to grow the family business post-coronavirus.

had been involved in the car industry for many years in Melbourne and wanted his own dealership as well as being closer to family.

Neil married Jan Lawrance, a Yea local, who came from a successful farming family, with roots going back to the early 1900s.

Neil purchased the business in 1980 and managed to navigate the economic turmoil of the late 1980s and early 1990s thanks, in large part, to the loyalty of his customers, who responded to his gentle, giving, nature and willingness to go that extra mile, to do more than one is required to do.

Greg said selling cars is like selling anything: your customers are your greatest advertisement because you live and die by referrals and word of mouth.

Today, those customers, and many of them repeat customers, help employ 43 staff, who contribute to a company that has an annual turnover of \$30 million.

In 2003, Greg came back to Australia after a three-year stint overseas when Neil convinced him to come and work for him.

In 2012, he started purchasing the business off his father and, today, is the major shareholder.

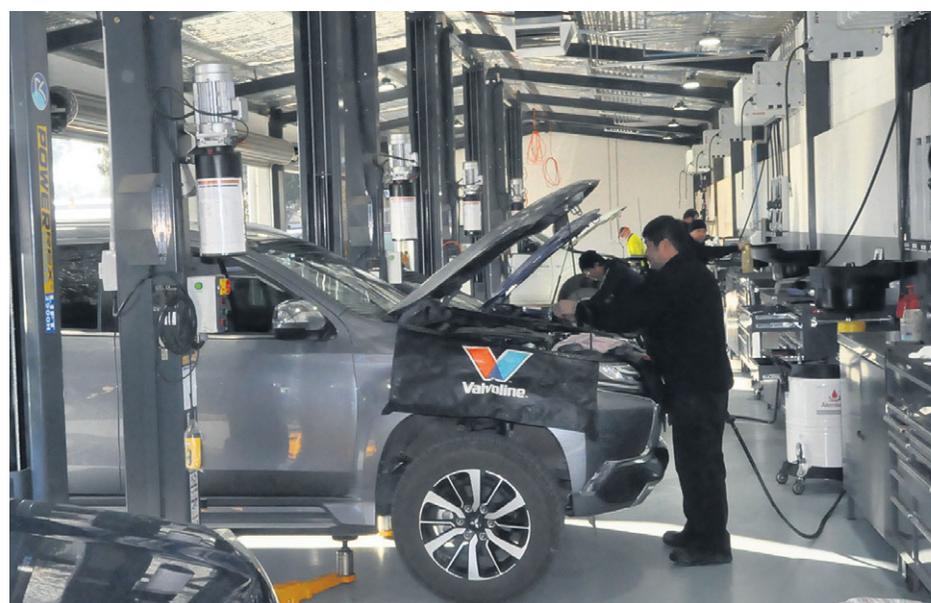
In 2015, Greg expanded and brought Nissan and Subaru in and the following year took-on Polaris motorbikes.

But like COVID-19 so perfectly illustrated, there are things which are out of your control.

So, when the news came through earlier this year that the Holden-badged car was no more, Greg, despite the initial shock, grasped the moment and recognised there was an opportunity here.

"I was actually in America at a conference when the news came through," he said.

"I went through a lot of emotions at the time, as did every Holden dealer, I'm sure, as well as anyone one who drives a Holden, or just loves the brand, but when



Neil Beer Seymour has completed a major expansion of its workshop, which means they now have capacity for 13 bays.

one door closes another one opens."

He said it's a big change for the automotive industry and, unfortunately, all the hard work of Holden staff across the state, and the rest of the country, had not been enough to overcome the economic reality.

Greg added that, ultimately, it was a business decision by General Motors, Holden's parent company, but he said you can't help but feel for all those people directly affected and their families.

So, what has been the secret of Neil's and Greg's success.

Greg said when you run a business in a country town you form strong emotional connections with your customers, who become your friends, and some of them your very good friends.

He said all car dealers have a common goal, which is to sell cars, and they're passionate about doing it.

He said everyone in the industry knows each other and are great friends and they bring this same level of excitement and

Neil and Greg Beer have had a long, and positive, association with Holden, but the brand will soon be replaced by other car manufacturers at the Emily Street dealership.



To celebrate 40 years in the business, the Beers are giving away \$100,000 to one lucky winner if you buy a new or used car before the end of the year.

enthusiasm to the shop floor.

Greg said selling cars, particularly in the bush, is a very personal thing, which means you need to spend time with people—sometimes a lot of time—and it's about building lasting relationships and gaining customers for life.