

# 50-Years anniversary in the seat industry!

The times have certainly changed from small beginnings in 1963 when I began an apprenticeship as a motor trimmer, and 2013, which sees me celebrating 50-years in the seating industry.

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I began my apprenticeship as a motor trimmer with Humphries Motor Body Works located on a block behind my family home in the river side Brisbane suburb of New Farm. Today I am the Managing Director and proud flag-waver of Transport Seating Pty Ltd, which is a family-owned Australian business and widely recognised as a front-runner in their field. Transport Seating has an unchallenged reputation for innovation, quality and outstanding customer service, which has resulted in longevity in a tough business environment. My secret for success is working exceptionally hard and creating something to be really proud of; fortunately my team share this attitude and between us we continue to build on this philosophy.

In my early days I worked on cars such as Jaguars, Alfa's and MG's, but after one year into my apprenticeship I began a second job with Admac who were building seats for Denning coaches. Working these two jobs at such an early age was hard work. It didn't take me long to realise that my real passion was making seats; I simply loved it and it is a passion that has never diminished; in fact has increased as the years move on.

In the late 60's Sid Foggs would order a coach from Superior coaches and before driving back to Newcastle Sid would drive the new coach around to Admac in Fairfield Road Yeronga with his son Phil for the new seats to be fitted. This was my first experience of fitting seats into coaches.

I spent eleven years with Admac until they became victims of the 1974 floods. Then without an employer I had a brief stint with GBW Bodyworks making parts and assembling components. This was at a time when Skennars Coaches and Greyhound were the dominant players in the express work between Sydney, Brisbane and Cairns. It was Clarry Skennars association with GBW Bodyworks and a need to refurbish his seats that took me back into refurbishment. Redline Coaches one of the biggest operators in the 50's and 60's would use the Admac seats exclusively in all their coaches.

In the late 70's Les Stewart of Stewart & Sons in Bundaberg was looking for Admac seats for his coach, but as Admac had closed following the 74-floods Les was told that I had the jigs and was manufacturing the same seat. Les contacted me for a quote and within a week Les had placed his first order for a set of seats for a bus he was building for Stewart & Sons at his Bundaberg workshop.

In 1975 I opened Southside Trimming, which was my first business venture. My two biggest customers were Skennars and Greyhound the two express kings. Russell Penfold from Greyhound began by giving me all the series 5 and 10 Eagles whilst Clarry from Skennars simply said "Rodney anything that needs doing, just do it" and I did.

During the 60s and 70's there were seven bus body builders in Brisbane building a range of buses and coaches; these being Athol Hedges, Commonwealth Engineering, Denning, GBW Body Works, Motor Body Specialists, Superior Industries and Watt Bros. Austral and MCA followed after. Ansair of Melbourne and Custom Coaches of Sydney also featured in the bus and coach industry at the same time. During this era I would often be asked by Superior Industries to fit hood linings into Ambulances or be asked by Athol Hedges to fit seats into their buses. Lee Gammer of GBW manufactured his own seat frames, but would have me cut, sew, fit and assemble seats at their plant. On the funny side I can remember that all buses for Skennars Coaches had blue vinyl with white piping, because this was Clarry's standard colour.

I re-entered the world of seating in 1979 when Kevin Johnston started the coach building company; Motor Coach and he asked me to replicate the Admac product I had worked on for eleven years. My reply was "not a problem". My relationship with Motor Coach gave me the resources to build a new facility in Capalaba and it wasn't long before I was approached by Peter Townsend and Bill Oddie from rival bus builders Austral Denning to build seats for them too.

Around this time there was an air of excitement beginning to build in the Marine Industry, which was developing out of its infancy. I had been quietly observing the opportunities that obviously existed in Marine for specialised seating therefore, the natural progression was for me to become involved and grow with marine as it developed into the significant industry in Australia it is today. Since that time my focus has been pretty well spread between the Bus, Coach and Marine Industries and to a lesser extent in the Motorhome Industry.

In 1988 I realised that all was not well in the industry and I sold my business to Henderson Saydair who had for years pursued me as a take-over target. I spent the next three years doing refurbishment work until in 1992 when Kevin Johnston invited me to be the third partner in Transit