

## 50 Years Building A Solid Base for Future Success



**F**letchers of High Wycombe is a well established independent bodyshop currently celebrating their 50th year in business.

*Clive Fletcher, the current generation of the Fletcher family running this bodyshop that's celebrating its 50th year in business*



50 years is a really historic landmark - imagine the changes that the company has seen. Changes in vehicle and communications technologies have particularly impacted on the body repair industry while the Fletchers business has also carefully navigated management succession. The company was established in 1956 by John Fletcher and his son Clive is

now at the helm. Successfully rising to the challenge of 50 years of change should certainly be applauded. With 50 strong years behind them, current managing partner Clive Fletcher is well aware that he cannot afford to rest on the laurels of past achievements. The company has plans for their future success too.

### Looking Forward

Analysing current market trends has convinced Clive that the company needs to diversify into SMART repairs. The company is well positioned, immediately off the busy A40, and has adequate forecourt provision to set up a drive-in SMART repair service. Their 50 years in the neighbourhood will also stand them in good stead as they build up this new part of the company.

*"We do advertise," explains Clive "and this works in*

*conjunction with our established reputation. Because we have been in this area for 50 years we have a wide and very loyal customer base that grows through word of mouth. I would like to smooth out the peaks and troughs in demand for our services and am currently investigating alternative forms of marketing."*

The SMART repair side of the business will add to the company's already good spread of bodywork that supplements the accident repair work they undertake. 8 years ago the company gained Fiat approval and this offers them a steady flow of work via the local, very active dealer. Additionally the company has gained a reputation with historic vehicle owners, many of whom come back to Fletchers time and again for their vehicle restoration requirements. This enviable position blossomed when the company restored the 'Master of Masters' winner at the Rolls Royce Enthusiasts Club, first in 1992 and then again in 1996.

### Customers Come First

Clive acknowledges that they see a broad spectrum of motorists and they pride themselves on tailoring the service they provide to each one, according to their needs. The vintage vehicle owner for instance can be very demanding about quality and authenticity



*Carl Temple primarily runs reception*



*A sure sign of a professionally managed bodyshop is the state of their paint mixing room*

*This 1933 Rolls Royce Phantom 3, restored by Fletchers has twice won the coveted RR Enthusiasts Club Master of Masters*

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and company staff must sometimes be very patient. Others are keen to get the job finished and back on the road as soon as possible, which can also require patience and skill from estimating and reception staff.

Reception/estimating manager **Carl Temple**, who has been with Fletchers for 4 and a half years, also points out that they have a good rapport with customers, many of whom have been to Fletchers on a number of occasions over the years.

*"Unlike some bodyshops where a high volume of throughput is the sole aim, we can afford the time to understand our customer's requirements. We get to know them and they feel comfortable with us. This works in our favour because they then recommend our service to their friends and family."*

## 2 Years of Massive Investment

Fletchers has been on their present site off the A40 on the edge of busy Buckinghamshire town High Wycombe for 16 years. Two years ago they were able to buy the premises outright and have since invested around £300,000 in the site. The original building dates from the 50s or 60s so it needed considerable 'refreshing'. This was achieved with:

- new windows
- air conditioning system

- installed in reception
- demolishing old outbuildings and re-building in their place a new paint mixing room and plant room for the compressor and dust extraction kit
- complete re-cladding of the exterior to give it a unified appearance
- outdoor re-surfacing at the rear of the building

At the same time, the company invested in new equipment such as a complete overhead centralized dust extraction system in the open plan workshop; a new scissor lift and a new Spanesi jig; Glassmatix estimating system; Audatex AudaEnterprise estimating system. This investment phase has been completed with the acquisition of an inverter welder and the Accident repair system.

Clive has two views on investing in equipment. *"As someone who started on the shopfloor, I like having the right equipment to do the job. As a business owner, I know that in today's fast changing environment if we don't invest in up-to-date equipment we'll be left behind. It is often a false economy trying to keep a piece of equipment in service."* That's not to say the company is feckless when it comes to equipment – their spraybooth, for instance, was one of the first models to comply with the EPA emission regulations when they came into force in the 90s. *"And we were one of the first*

*bodyshops in the Wycombe area to move to waterborne finish paint products over 10 years ago"*, says Clive proudly.

## Phasing in Improvements

The premises are not quite finished yet either. While the workshop and reception have both undergone transformations, the final phase of current plans will be renovation of the parts store and administrative offices. Parts storage was moved upstairs however this has not been as successful as envisaged, proving too much of an inconvenience for bodyshop technicians. Fortunately there is a spare room downstairs that will be kitted out for parts storage. This will allow the company to develop a management suite upstairs overlooking the workshop.

*"We've got more computers than staff,"* quips Clive as he gazes around at the estimating hardware that will sit alongside the company's Motex Easi-Est bodyshop management system. Various other terminals currently reside in the small admin office tucked in behind the bright, airy and cool reception room. This includes a wireless, tablet pc that is used for mobile estimating. The company uses a computer-integrated barcode system for recording time sheets and job cards. *"It's a great system that gives us an easy and useful quality control system,"* explains Clive. *"I know that what goes out our door is better than most."*



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