

Combining tradition and progress

IT IS SAFE TO SAY THAT O'PHEE IS A CLASSIC FAMILY-OWNED BUSINESS. ESTABLISHED ALMOST HALF A CENTURY AGO, THERE IS THAT TYPICAL AURA OF TRADITION SURROUNDING IT, AND IF YOU CALL UP, IT IS HIGHLY LIKELY YOU WILL SPEAK DIRECTLY TO AN O'PHEE. BUT, THE COMPANY IS ALSO AN INFLUENTIAL FORCE IN MODERN AUSTRALIAN TRAILER DESIGN.

Family businesses are an important cornerstone of any economy, but often associated with the small business segment. Few people know that some of the most influential enterprises in the world – including automotive icon Ford and retail giant Wal-Mart – are also family-led.

Although no statistics are complete enough to map the presence of family businesses throughout the world, many studies have confirmed the importance of them for any given marketplace – which is especially true for Australia, where some of the most innovative

businesses are still family-owned. In fact, family owned entities account for around 70 per cent of all Australian businesses, employing some 50 per cent of our workforce.

Like so many a family company, O'Phee is not publically traded and therefore less visible in the public space, but it certainly is a regarded fellow of Australia's trailer manufacturing elite – nothing like the small-size firm you may expect when talking about a family business.

Instead, O'Phee is a company on the move, fully aware that to survive in a

fast-evolving business landscape, it has to out-innovate the competition and seek new avenues of growth – such as embracing the PBS scheme and venturing into the side-loader market.

Specialised in the design and manufacture of container skels, drop deck and flatbed trailers, O'Phee's portfolio now also comprises side-loaders, which keep adding to the brand's success. The brand's side-loader model, labelled O'Phee BoXLoader, was first presented at the Brisbane Truck Show in 2011 and is the result of an international collaboration with French



company BXL. "Ever since day one, it has left a mark in the wharf haulage market," says Managing Director, Mick O'Phee. "It's a great example of how far we go to keep pushing the envelope. We are continually searching for new and better manufacturing techniques and invest heavily in tooling and technology to maintain our competitive edge – even if we have to implement new technology from overseas."

According to Mick, the O'Phee brand is all about offering that "one-stop-shop" experience many in the industry have been talking about recently. "I know it's somewhat of a buzz word at the moment, but we really want to be the one point of contact from design to final product – all supervised by our highly qualified staff. Every team member is part of the O'Phee family and committed to high quality production."

Still owned and managed by Mick and Sharon O'Phee and located in the Brisbane suburb of Rocklea, O'Phee has established a reputation for solid engineering and personal back-up service. "We want to offer the transport industry performance, reliability and excellent customer service underwritten by the O'Phee [family] name," says Mick. "In that sense, what we do goes way beyond designing and selling

a simple commodity item."

To Mick, the key to building "a superior product" is keeping in mind the harsh Australian environment. "Everyone can build a standard trailer, but only few can design a

product that will last in the trying transport environment you find in Australia. As an Australian business, we certainly have an advantage in that regard."

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marketplace that made O'Phee venture into the PBS business well before 2009, when the company unveiled a new A-double combination to provide a whole new level of productivity to the container handling segment. Permitted to run at 79 tonnes GCM, the new combination consisted of a single trailer capable of carrying one 20-foot container, which pulled a second trailer using a converter dolly. The second trailer was able to carry two more 20-foot containers or a single 20'/40'

container. Now O'Phee have progressed to a 40/40 A-double design, as well as other innovative A-double and PBS combinations. “It's fair to say we left a mark in the industry back then,” says Mick. “With the new O'Phee PBS-approved A-double configurations we were able to halve the number of truck journeys to the port of Brisbane. These achievements have been the result of a lot of hard work over a very long period of time well before implementation of 2009, but we were

prepared to think outside of the box and work together with the Leaders of Government regulatory bodies and our loyal customers and lead the industry in a time of change.”

Now that PBS is gaining ground in Australia, O'Phee is well positioned for the next half-century in the industry. And with the O'Phee BoXLoader container side-loader model stirring up the side-loading and wharf market, there is still room for improvement. “I think we have only just scratched the surface,” says Mick. “If you keep your eyes and ears open, you will always come across new opportunities to make our industry safer and more efficient. That's where we want to step in and lead from the front.”

But, despite that on-going commitment to grow and influence Australian trailer design, one thing is not going to change, according to Mick. “We'll always stay an Australian-owned family business. Strong, reliable and honest.” ■

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