

# The people who make it make the difference...

*O'Phee Trailers are a rarity in today's mass produced world. They make unique trailers to each customer's specification but they refuse to compromise on one point – quality.*

The O'Phee name has been synonymous with semi-trailer manufacturing for over 35 years and, today, O'Phee Trailers is owned and managed by Mick and Sharon O'Phee.

Its location on Ipswich Road, in the Brisbane suburb of Rocklea, places the

company's headquarters and manufacturing facility right in the heart of the local transport industry. The spacious site incorporates two similar sized building – one for new production and the other for servicing and repairs. It's an operation that over time has established a reputation for excellence, Sharon explains.

"It's something we've always done – we don't really aim at the high end of the market – we simply pride ourselves in producing a top quality product. We find that, by default, we tend to attract people who are perhaps a little fussier."

"We cater to a customer's specific wants and needs much better than a

high volume manufacturer that's geared up to a 100 trailers per month. I guess we're the true definition of a purpose built trailer manufacturer. Mind you, if a company wants 20 of one trailer type we're quite capable of doing that, too."

Every customer is seen as unique at O'Phee Trailers. Mick meets with customers and compiles their specifications down to intricate detail. The resulting order goes to the engineering department who draws up a complete set of individual plans for every trailer that's made.

"We're always doing unusual things," says Sharon. "It keeps our engineer team and Factory Manager,

Ken Hook, thinking, not to forget the guys on the production floor who never get bored. Our production is flexible so it doesn't matter what comes through. There's no production line as such – we have separate production bays. Each trailer stays in the one bay and the same team of blokes builds that trailer from the very start through to the paint stage. It comes in as raw steel and goes out as a complete trailer.





The guys are multi-skilled and they take pride in what they make. When it comes back after being painted they stand a little bit taller because they didn't just make a small part, they made the whole trailer."

As with everything else, paint is to customer specification so whatever colour they want they get. Sharon and Mick believe there's no point building a top quality product and not presenting it well, so they have a long-term association with PPG.

"We don't want to compromise all the good work we've put into the design and fabrication so we've always fully sandblasted every single trailer then coated with a fast build primer. Our preparation system is very stringent and we've always finished with PPG paint – at the moment we're using Delfleet."

"We have a tipping skeletal trailer combination coming through at the moment which is going into a highly corrosive salt mine environment and PPG helped with a process to give it extra protection. It won't be sandblasted, it will be spray galvanised first then coated with a special anti-corrosive paint procedure that PPG's Doug Stein put together for us, before being finished with the topcoat."

"Because we only purpose build for customers we don't do stock units – everything in production is for a customer. We do a pretty substantial volume but it's dictated by the mix of trailer types and how complicated each is to build."

Perhaps due to its willingness to build to the special needs of individual customers, O'Phee Trailers has a long history of innovation in trailer design.

"I think O'Phee Trailers have always been at the forefront of

industry developments. We tend to be the first to have a go at a new design and then everyone seems to tag along. Because we don't produce huge volumes, when the bigger companies begin doing them it looks like they were the ones that started it – but we're used to that!"

"Recently we created a trailer called LPS (Load Protection System). The concept comes from Europe and is new to Australia but we've been able to modify it to achieve something nobody else has. It uses gates on the side of the flat trailer to hold the product in and we've made it possible to load two pallets when the gates are closed. Other manufacturers haven't yet worked it out so that's a pretty big advantage over our opposition."

"O'Phee Trailers has had a lot to do with industry safety, too. Mick worked with the bulk receival companies who weren't happy with the convertible type of trailer because the drivers had

to climb up to tarp it and they deemed it too dangerous. So we created the TOVA (Top of Vehicle Activity) system which allows safe tarping and untarping without climbing. Many bulk receival companies have now made it the industry standard and we've been able to retrofit it to our existing convertibles."

Recently the team at O'Phee Trailers put the first four-axle trailer concept on the road for a customer to trial. It also involved helping the customer apply for a special permit to use the trailer on a set route only.

"It's a new standard emerging in Australia. Previously trailers have only been manufactured to Prescriptive Standards but some people are realising that in certain circumstances a non-conforming trailer is actually better for the industry and for the roads."

"For instance, a four-axle trailer is allowed to carry more weight, meaning that less movements are required along a given route which might result in one or two less trips per day. That means it has less impact on road traffic and in the long run it's actually a safer trailer than a three-axle type."



"It's not just special because it's got four axles, it also has a special GPS tracking system. With it Queensland Transport know where it is at any given time and, via special sensors on each axle, know exactly how much weight it's carrying. They're currently monitoring the impact it's having on the road structure which is a first in Australia."

For operators in the transport industry, Mick, Sharon and the highly skilled staff at O'Phee Trailers offer a one-stop service from design through to final production of an individual, top quality trailer and it's clear that's not going to change in the future.

"Mick and I are very hands on – and we touch and feel every trailer that comes through the factory. We have a beautiful complex and we're happy with the size of the company – we're just going to improve efficiency to become even better at what we do. Our size allows us to produce trailers very quickly but we can also maintain closer control. Our quality control is excellent because we never lose sight of the fact that it has to meet the expectation of our customers. We have a saying that the final inspection is done by the customer."

"People regard us as a niche maker who really looks after customers and the proof is in the pudding. Around 80% of our business is repeat business which tells us we must be doing something right for them to keep coming back."

