



# Top trailers

Sharon and Mick O'Phee talk trailers



Sharon and Mick O'Phee on the factory floor



Part of the factory floor at Rocklea



Final cleanup before going to the paintshop

O'Phee trains a lot of apprentices



Ken "Hooky" Hook, new product factory manager has been with Mick O'Phee over 20 years

In Brisbane, Rocklea is the place for anything involving road transport. Like Rocklea, the name O'Phee has enjoyed a long association with the transport industry. Today that good name continues to prosper - Mick O'Phee and his wife Sharon manufacture and sell quality semitrailers. Mick had been in the trailer business for over 30 years, but Sharon came to it as something of a novice.

A schoolteacher by profession, Sharon soon learned that building and selling trailers bore little resemblance to her former life. "The business was getting too big for Mick to handle by himself, so seeing as how I was a director anyway, we decided I might as well get involved completely," she said. Mick gave his wife a crash course in trailers and road transport. Sharon learned rapidly, and was soon able to buy used trailers at auctions

when they needed to boost their used stock.

"Our core business is not second-hand though, so I had to learn a lot more about trailer construction," she continued. "Of course Mick has been involved in it all his life, so he made a pretty good teacher."

Coming from someone who is a teacher, that's praise indeed. Sharon has a firm grip on a wide range of trailer-related matters, and manages all the major purchasing and DOTARS requirements. She oversees general administration and management, as well as new production including scheduling.

Mick handles sales and marketing for the most part. "We both do a lot more than you could probably fit in the story," he said. "The business has become fairly complex, and we both wear a number of different hats."

One of the most important aspects of the business is the staff, and O'Phee has about >>>



O'Phee is the Queensland distributor for Hamelex and Vawdrey



All stock is built to order

50 people, many long term.

To give some perspective on the number of "hats" required by Sharon and Mick, O'Phee not only builds its own wide range of trailers, it still sells second-hand units, and is the Queensland distributor for Vawdrey and Hamelex White.

"We don't build anything out of alloy, but we can repair it," Mick said.

The association with these other two builders gives them a credible presence in Queensland. "It means that we can respond to any demands for trailers they build by simply offering the client either one or the other. Both make trailers that we don't," said Mick.

Building in the vicinity of up to five trailers per week, the workshop is always busy. "We

don't carry any stock, it's all built to order," Sharon told *T&T*. "We also have a good reputation for building specialist and innovative trailers." Side tippers, extendable trailers and innovative "Titeliners" are just some of the specialised work done at Rocklea.

As far as a woman operating in a man's world, Sharon admitted that it could have been a lot harder. "The people we deal with really don't care what gender you are as long as you deliver on what you say you can."

O'Phee has always prided itself on being a company that builds trailers to a recipe, as opposed to a price. "We don't aim to be the biggest," Mick said, "we do aim to be the best though. A trailer is a long-term investment, it's a part of your fleet, and just as >>



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Finished trailer and dolly awaiting delivery



Repair and service manager Chris Grandin checks a trailer before delivery.

important as the prime movers in it. So you can't compromise on quality."

There is a transparent openness about the O'Phees that comes through in the way they operate. Mick and Sharon know each employee by name, and have an excellent personal relationship with them. "Our employees are our strength, that's why we have been successful, because we have really good people working for us" Sharon said. "As well as that, both Mick and I are always accessible to the clients, and we keep in close contact with the workshop."

Mick added, "We touch every trailer that goes out of here." A series of checks throughout production makes certain that any problems are found and remedied.

While based in Queensland, O'Phee Trailers sells its product Australia wide, although there are often particular requirements for operators in the Sunshine State. "Some of our bigger clients who operate on a national basis have special requirements - we are always happy to

change a trailer to suit its operating conditions," Mick said. "The factory is not a closed shop either, a client can come in and inspect the work in progress on a trailer at any time they wish."

Both Mick and Sharon keep abreast of what is happening in the road transport industry, ready at all times to change a product or component to suit. "There are always changes in things like trucks, workplace requirements and safety issues," Mick said. "You have to be ready to move quickly or be left behind"

There is a solid partnership at work here. It's fairly uncommon to find a husband and wife operating so closely in a business this size and in a field like road transport. With Mick involved in the design and manufacturing of the semitrailers, and Sharon operating in a general management position, making sure the administration, orders and production schedules are on track, things tend to flow very well. But after so many years in the trailer business you tend to expect excellence. ☺



O'Phee spray booth. Merc is the yard truck getting a clean up