



Merseyside Car Hospital

Ashley Bernstein and Stephen Siddell interview

Both Managing Director Ashley Bernstein and Director of Operations Stephen Siddell have always had strong ideals to develop their accident repair centre Merseyside Car Hospital (MCH). Ashley says that he doesn't come from the aftermarket division itself, instead detailing a marketing and accountancy background, which meant that he "never had any preconceived ideas of the running of an accident repair centre". He said he views the bodyshop as a business and his aim was to set the business aside from others in the industry, which is where the hospital theme came from.

Stephen also has a background in business and management, rather than in the automotive industry, which is why their approach is focused on looking at the whole repair process from the point of view of their customers.

It isn't hard to see how MCH is different from other bodyshops, as the entire shop follows the vision of a hospital; instead of a reception there is admissions, the panel area is a fracture clinic and the latest addition is a minor injuries section for small damages to cars. As Ashley says: "Sick people go to hospitals, so sick cars go to a car hospital!"

But how does MCH operate its business? Ashley's hospital vision manifests itself in a bodyshop that puts high-quality customer care at the forefront of its work. Since opening, MCH has had a partnership with 3M and specifically with Les Keates, who is their point of contact from the company. High standards are a large part of this working partnership, as Ashley and Stephen have their own expectations of quality – but they also have 17 different car manufacturer approvals to meet, as well as approvals from the three emergency services. Ashley stresses: "3M, as a company, is renowned for its quality and because we are a quality repairer, we want to use quality materials."

3M products Ashley and Stephen's team use in the bodyshop include 3M Masking tape, 150 mm, 180 mm and 3,000 mm grinding discs, and 3M Dirt Trap to protect the bodyshop oven. Stephen highlights 3M Dirt Trap, explaining that "Dirt Trap provides a solution that allows us to make a better repair [through giving] a better finish to the oven itself, and [making] the aesthetics of the booths look a lot



nicer". Both Stephen and Ashley pride themselves on the cleanliness of their bodyshop, Stephen adds: "When we're having audits [and] when people come in to look at [the repair centre] Dirt Trap works better and it appears better on the eye."

Having a strong working relationship with 3M has allowed MCH to grow alongside the changing requirements of the automotive industry. For example, side panels are now bonded on to cars instead of welded and it's 3M panel bonding that technicians in their bodyshop use because "the manufacturers we have approvals for insist we use high-quality materials for high-quality repairs".

When it comes to new products on the market, Ashley points out that in the industry you aren't likely to be proactively looking for things yourself. Instead, it's his and Stephen's contact with Les from 3M that sees new and improved products introduced to their bodyshop. Speaking on this relationship with Les and 3M, Ashley says it's a "100% great relationship and [we have] great confidence in them".

Summing up their relationship with 3M and how it has helped MCH tackle bodyshop challenges, Ashley says: "With technology, they're market leaders at the forefront of everything. [They] make the transition period to new products smoother, because they are proactive in what they do."

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