



The spanner man

Paul Cockram talks with Steve and Kim Bevege

I was interested in cars and that from a younger age. I used to fix lawnmowers when I was a kid at home. I come from Nelligen, that's where I was born. We moved up here when the

mill shut in Nelligen. Dad's brother owned a saw mill. We moved up here when I was four. I started work at Lionel Coffey's dairy when I was in primary school. I used to help with the

THE BLOKE

milking before school, after school and on weekends.

In my early teenage years, I used to drive tractors helping Lionel with hay-making in the district. From this I gained a wealth of knowledge about the local land, and an understanding of and interest in the way machinery works.

Then in my mid-teens, I worked at Charleston Stud at Farrington as a stable and farm hand. I also worked at Percheron Pine Forest planting pines. We had to fly into work each day on a Beaver prop-driven aircraft that could carry up to five people.

After working for a spell at Watson's Shell Service Station I started an apprenticeship at Robbo's when I was 18, — D&S Motors with David, Murray and Ian. I worked there for eight years or so. That was 1980 and I started off as just a helper.

Old Robbo had broken his arm years before and couldn't do much. So I went there helping him cut his firewood and doing this and that, working in the garage and then they offered me an apprenticeship.

After D&S, I became sole mechanic at the Shell Service Station under Noel and Kay Elbourne. Then in 1991 we opened our business on Monkitee Street in February of that year.

It's worked out well for me — we're super busy all the time. I don't think we've ever been busier now than we are now. We have three good mechanics now and Kim's got two ladies in the office with her. Having good staff is the key.

We fix everything — tractors, trucks and farm machinery, the lot. I spend most of my time out in the truck doing field work.

Kim and I went to school together at Braidwood Central and started dating when we were about 18. She's a local girl.

Kim: Neilsen was my maiden name. There were a lot of us out in the Mongarlowe area. Peter Bowie's place out there now was my ancestor's place. And my mother was an O'Connell, that's all the Ballalaba area —that's the heritage that I've got.

I taught at BCS for a while after I finished teacher's college. But I gave up teaching to help Steve with the business — I couldn't do both.

UNDER THE HOOD IN THE 'WOOD

Steve: In recent years the Braidwood area has seen quite an increase in commuters and weekenders. I do heaps of for people who've bought blocks in the region. They say, "Oh, I'm up on such-and-such road. Usually I know whose place they bought since I've been there before. "We've got a tractor," they say and more often than not I know that tractor.

When people call me out to do some work for them I often end up telling them all about the place they live in. "There's a good waterhole down here," or "this place is got a lot of good box firewood on it," or it's got this or that and they go, "Oh, which one's that?"

Cars have changed dramatically since I started in the business. Everything's electronic now which in some ways is good, some ways it's really bad. Tractors are nearly the same. You can bet as soon as you go to it and something's not working, it'll be electric. Like a sensor or this or that, but once it's working, it's good.

The younger blokes, they've worked on all the new cars. They know more about some of the cars than I know. They say, "Oh, that will do that because of this or that," and I'll think, "Oh right, hell, onto that."

The majority of NRMA jobs I do are electrical breakdowns. Like, the immobilizers will stuff up and the car won't start. Also, things like fan belts; if you break a fan belt on the road now you can't fix it roadside like you used to because it's a major job on a lot of cars. It can be a terrible job sometimes with belts about two meters long and going around all these pulleys. You need a diagram of it to see how it all goes.

With the fuel injection on some cars now, the electricals on them can kill you. The pulse that comes out of there. You



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: STEPHEN BEVEGE, TONY BOPPING, NOEL CLARKE, DAVID WILLIAMS AND BRIAN (CLOCKA) KAIN. OUTSIDE OF WORK, STEVE'S MAIN INTEREST WAS ENDURO MOTORBIKE RIDING AND RACING. IN THE LATE 70S, STEVE AND A GROUP OF HIS FRIENDS FOUNDED THE BRAIDWOOD MOTORCYCLE RACING CLUB. THEY USED TO APPROACH LOCAL FARMERS TO MAP OUT COURSES ON THEIR LAND AND WOULD ORGANISE RACE MEETS THERE.

don't muck around. And high pressure in the fuel lines on common rail vehicles. You can't just crack the injector to see which cylinder's missing like with older vehicles. To know which cylinder's not working if it's fuel, you need to feel it pulsing inside the steel line by touch. But you can't just go undoing the pipe and seeing if you've got a bit of fuel there. Bloody fuel can come out and pierce your skin — it's really powerful stuff.

But modern cars are generally reliable. They're good and not that much goes

wrong. They do high kilometres. It's nothing for cars to be running around with 400,000 km on them and they're still good as gold. They don't burn oil. The engineering in them is pretty good, I think — the quality.

It's been a lot of hard work, especially when we first started. I did ten years of seven days a week, full tilt all the time. Hardly saw the kids till they were about 10. "Oh look, there's your father." Apart from that though, the mechanic business has given us a good lifestyle.



[LEFT] STEVE IN TRACTOR ALLEY WITH SOME OF THE 'TOMORROW' PROJECTS. [BELOW] KIM AND STEVE AT HOME.

