



Mick Curtin from Curtin Engine Reconditioning



Rochelle and Mick, Dave, Jenny, and Ethan - three generations of the Curtin family help run Curtin Engine Reconditioning



MTA | Q&A

From a tin shed in Mackay to one of Queensland's most respected engine machining specialists, Curtin Engine Reconditioning has spent five decades doing the work others won't. Manager and second-generation operator Mick Curtin talks legacy, loyalty, and why apprentices are the lifeblood of his business.

WORDS & PHOTOS: LARA WILDE

TELL US ABOUT THE CURTIN ENGINE RECONDITIONING BUSINESS.

MC: We're Curtin Engine Reconditioning, based in the industrial suburb of Paget in Mackay. We specialise in engine component machining across a remarkable range, from motorbikes right up to V20 diesel mining engines. We also do powertrain reclamation and metal spray of a large variety of components. It's a broad scope of work, and that's what sets us apart in this region.

THE BUSINESS HAS BEEN AROUND SINCE 1975. HOW DID IT ALL BEGIN?

MC: It was started by my mother Jenny and father Dave, so this is very much a family business in the truest sense. Dad did his apprenticeship at the local Repco as a fitter and turner automotive, but no sooner had he finished his trade than he left to start his own business. When he opened the doors to Curtin Engine Reconditioning in 1975, he began with

"WE SPECIALISE IN ENGINE COMPONENT MACHINING... FROM MOTORBIKES RIGHT UP TO V20 DIESEL MINING ENGINES. WE ALSO DO POWERTRAIN RECLAMATION AND METAL SPRAY OF A LARGE VARIETY OF COMPONENTS."

small engines but he always had a vision of servicing the growing mining and heavy industrial sector. As soon as he could invest in larger machinery and upgrading the equipment and sheds, Dad spent the business earnings to meet industry needs.

Mum and Dad were living in a caravan under a mango tree in the workshop yard when I was born. I grew up in and around the workshop, starting work full time as an apprentice here in 1997, and have been manager for the last 10 years. There was no grand plan for me, I just loved the industry. It's always been in my blood.

HOW HAS THE OPERATION GROWN OVER THE DECADES?

MC: We still operate out of the original tin shed, which says something about where we started! A new building went up on the same property in the late 1980s, and then we purchased and moved into the bigger property next door from the late 1990s. In total, we've grown to about six times our original footprint. The work has grown with us too - what started with small six-cylinder Holden and Ford engines now includes massive V20 diesel engines. It's been quite a journey.

WHAT DOES A TYPICAL DAY LOOK LIKE AT CURTIN ENGINE RECONDITIONING?

MC: Organised chaos! That's the honest answer. We have a team of 16 - a customer and communications manager, a supervisor, four floor tradies, a hard-working trade assistant, six apprentices, a secretary, and my sister Rochelle who manages the office ►

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MTA Queensland members have access to critical business support and advice that can help save time and money.



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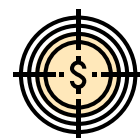
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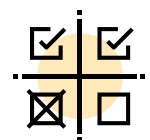
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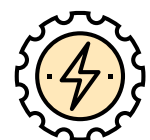
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"WE SPECIALISE IN THE MACHINING OF LARGE ENGINES, AND NO ONE ELSE IN OUR REGION DOES THIS AT THE SCALE WE DO."

and our financials. Mum and Dad own the company but are retired as employees. Getting all of that running smoothly every day is a job in itself.

I'd like to be more hands-on in the workshop but with a team this size the reality is I have to manage the company. That's where my time goes. I still spend time on some passion projects though, where I like to work on some engine rebuilds that feature all Australian-made components.

WHAT ARE YOUR CORE SERVICES, AND WHAT GIVES YOU A COMPETITIVE EDGE IN THE MACKAY REGION?

MC: We specialise in the machining of large engines, and no one else in our region does this at the scale we do. Beyond that, our metal spray and cast welding repair capabilities mean we can take on highly niche jobs that most workshops would turn away. Combined with our advanced, state-of-the-art machine shop, we can handle almost everything in-house. That's a significant advantage for us and for our customers.



KEEPING UP WITH CHANGING SPECIFICATIONS ACROSS SUCH A VARIETY OF ENGINES MUST BE A CHALLENGE. HOW DO YOU MANAGE THAT?

MC: I'm constantly sourcing new specification programs, and with the sheer variety of engines and manufacturers we work on, there's no single solution that covers everything. It takes persistence and a commitment to staying informed. It's one of those things you never really finish - you're always learning. Mum and Dad are big believers that the businesses that are passed down from generation to generation must constantly seek new ways to improve and stay at the forefront of industry innovation and developments. ▶

"MORE THAN ANYTHING, THOUGH, I HOPE I'VE DONE ENOUGH TO BUILD A WORKFORCE THAT CAN CARRY THIS BUSINESS INTO THE NEXT GENERATION."

WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST PRESSURES ON THE BUSINESS RIGHT NOW?

MC: The cost to operate. Between compliance costs and the broader regulatory environment, the cost burden on businesses like ours continues to climb. Skills shortages are a real challenge. There is only one TAFE in Brisbane that provides training for engine reconditioning, and we are always looking for new opportunities to upskill our team and stay at the cutting edge of industry. Because of how niche our work is, we've never been able to simply hire off the street. We've always had to grow our own and that means training apprentices from the ground up.

APPRENTICES CLEARLY PLAY A CENTRAL ROLE HERE.

MC: They're number one. Full stop. Without apprentices, we don't have a future. What I

look for when taking someone on is pretty straightforward: they need to be tidy and respectful, they should have done some research into what we actually do, and they need to show some form of work ethic. From there, we develop them across every part of the workshop - every team member learns how all our processes operate and becomes competent across the board.

WHAT'S THE MOST SIGNIFICANT RECENT INVESTMENT YOU'VE MADE IN THE BUSINESS?

MC: Our power supply upgrade. Without it, we simply couldn't grow, our operation has a very high demand on electricity, and we'd hit a ceiling. It wasn't glamorous but it was essential. We're also in planning stages for workshop extensions, which is exciting.

We're big on constantly upgrading our machinery too. It's an ongoing commitment that sits alongside good communication as the two pillars of how we stay competitive and profitable.

YOU'VE BEEN AN MTA QUEENSLAND MEMBER FOR AROUND 40 YEARS. WHAT DOES THAT MEMBERSHIP MEAN TO YOU?

MC: Network building and business advice, that's the core value. Organisations like MTA Queensland are essential for businesses like ours. We're tradespeople, and we need to be business people. Having someone in your corner who understands the commercial side - pricing, compliance, advocacy - makes a genuine difference. ▶



The Curtin Engine Reconditioning team: Shane, Carlos, Rochelle, Robson, Mick, Brenton, Tom, David, Bailey, Jenny, Jordon, Ethan, Wade, Ray, Ryan, Pagan





“KNOWING THAT YOU AND YOUR TEAM ARE CONTRIBUTING TO THE COMMUNITY AND BUILDING GREAT RELATIONSHIPS. THAT’S WHAT IT COMES DOWN TO.”

LOOKING AHEAD, WHAT ARE YOUR GOALS FOR THE NEXT THREE TO FIVE YEARS?

MC: I want to continue building a good team, maybe add another few staff and get the workshop extensions underway. More than anything, though, I hope I’ve done enough to build a workforce that can carry this business into the next generation. Whatever shape the industry takes, I want the people here to be equipped to handle it and to look after each other.

WHAT’S YOUR TAKE ON WHERE THE QUEENSLAND AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY IS HEADING?

MC: If we keep going down the current path, we’re going to end up in a situation where the industry can only service vehicles, not truly repair them. That hands an enormous amount of control to importers. I hope there are enough of us in the trade who can work alongside organisations like MTA Queensland to push back on that. It matters for workshops, for customers, and for the country.

DO YOU HAVE ANY ADVICE FOR SOMEONE JUST STARTING OUT IN THE TRADE?

MC: Do it because you’re passionate about it. If you’re in it for the money alone, you’ll struggle. Join an interest group relevant to your area, and talk to someone like MTA Queensland early, especially about the business side of things like how to price your work properly. Most of us are good at what we do. The challenge is building a sustainable business around that skill, and you don’t have to figure that out alone.

BEST PART OF RUNNING AN AUTOMOTIVE BUSINESS?

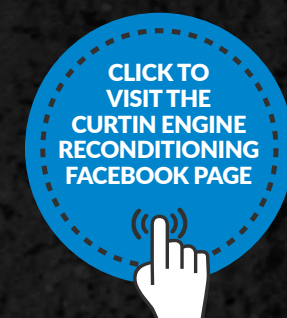
MC: Knowing that you and your team are contributing to the community and building great relationships. That’s what it comes down to.

BIGGEST MYTH ABOUT THE TRADE?

MC: That it’s a licence to print money.

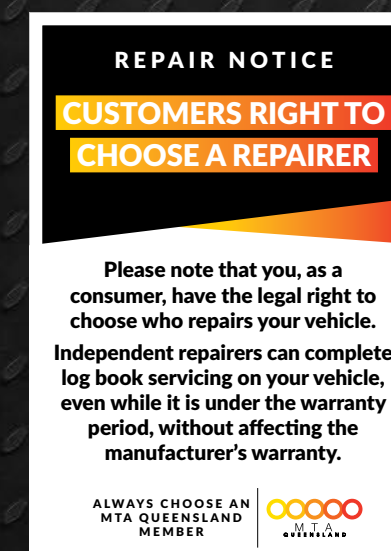
ONE TOOL YOU COULDN’T LIVE WITHOUT?

MC: Beer! 🍺



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