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JUL-AUG 2026 VOL 5 NO4



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THE INVESTMENT BEHIND TODAY'S WORKSHOPS**



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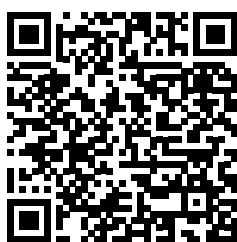
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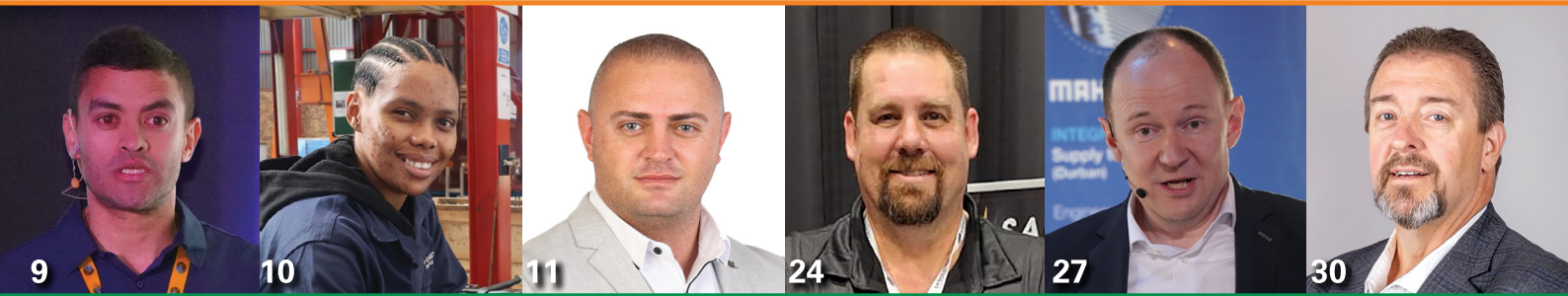
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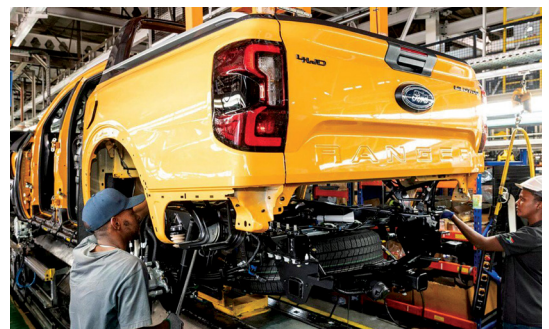
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OCTORAL

# DISCOVER OUR HIGH QUALITY COATINGS



# MY TURN

BY RIAAN VAN ZYL



**R**ecently, while chatting to a veteran of the industry, we found ourselves discussing the future of collision repair—the opportunities, the challenges and the rapid pace of change. While waxing lyrical about an industry he has dedicated most of his working life to, he paused for a moment and said, almost wistfully, "I miss the old days."

Curious, I asked him what he meant.

His answer was simple: "When everyone used to work together."

That short statement stayed with me long after our conversation ended.

It also made me wonder whether we've lost something along the way. Have we become so focused on surviving today's pressures that we've forgotten the value of collaboration? Or has the industry simply evolved into one where everyone is looking out for themselves?

To be fair, the pressures are real. Repairers are navigating shrinking margins, increasing vehicle complexity, skills shortages, insurer expectations, investment in new equipment, OEM requirements and customers who expect faster turnaround times than ever before. Suppliers face their own challenges, manufacturers have their own priorities, and insurers are under constant pressure

to manage costs.

In an environment like this, it's understandable that many businesses adopt a "look after number one" mentality.

But is that really the best way forward?

The collision repair industry has always been an ecosystem. No workshop operates in isolation. Repairers rely on suppliers. Suppliers rely on repairers. Insurers rely on professional, safe repairs. Vehicle manufacturers depend on qualified repair networks to protect their brands. Training providers rely on industry support to develop tomorrow's technicians. If one part of that ecosystem struggles, eventually everyone feels the impact.

Perhaps working together doesn't look exactly the way it did decades ago. The industry is bigger, more competitive and far more technologically advanced. But collaboration is still possible—and arguably more important than ever.

Working together doesn't necessarily mean agreeing on everything. Healthy debate is essential. Competition is healthy too. But there is a difference between competing and becoming fragmented.

When we share knowledge, support

skills development, mentor young technicians, participate in industry bodies and engage in honest dialogue, we strengthen the entire sector. When businesses, insurers, suppliers and OEMs sit around the same table to tackle common challenges, everyone benefits. Most importantly, so does the customer.

South Africa's collision repair industry has weathered economic downturns, changing technology and countless disruptions over the years. Its resilience has always come from the people within it—people who are passionate, resourceful and determined to find solutions.

Maybe my industry veteran was less nostalgic about the past itself and more nostalgic about the spirit that existed within it.

As we look ahead to an increasingly complex future, perhaps that's worth rediscovering.

After all, if we truly want to build a stronger, safer and more sustainable collision repair industry, we'll achieve far more by pulling together than by pulling apart.

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## SAMBRA Initiative Puts Young Automotive Talent In The Spotlight



**MIWA and SAMBRA hosted youth automotive competitions in the Eastern Cape, offering training, hands-on experience and career pathways for young learners in 2026.**

As South Africa observed Youth Month, organisations within the automotive aftermarket in the Eastern Cape created meaningful opportunities for young people to develop and demonstrate their technical abilities. Through practical competitions and targeted training, learners gained valuable industry exposure while discovering career opportunities in the automotive field.

On 6 June 2026, the Motor Industry Workshop Association (MIWA) held its annual Motor Mech Competition at Port Rex Technical High School in East London. Alongside this event, the South African Motor Body Repairers'

Association (SAMBRA) introduced its first learner competition dedicated to panel beating and spray painting at Baysville Technical High School.

In preparation for the event, Apex Paint Company delivered specialised in-house training to learners enrolled in the school's spray painting and panel beating programmes on Friday, 5 June. The session focused on important areas of the refinishing trade, including automotive paint systems, surface preparation, spray-painting methods, workplace health and safety, personal protective equipment, handling hazardous materials, and career prospects in the industry.

Once the training was complete, the competition followed on the same day. Each team, made up of a panel beater and a spray painter, was tasked with repairing and refinishing damaged vehicle panels

under timed competition conditions.

Abie Kriek, SAMBRA Regional Representative for the Eastern Cape, explained that panel beating contestants needed to inspect damage, reshape and align panels, use filler where required, and prepare surfaces to a standard suitable for painting. Spray painting participants then completed the refinishing stage, which included preparation, priming, colour application and clear coating, all while meeting strict safety and quality requirements.

Kriek said every skilled artisan began with a chance to learn, practise and prove their ability. He noted that although the competition was modest in scale, it marked an important step in introducing young people to the highly skilled and increasingly advanced careers available in the motor body repair sector. He added that the long-term future of the industry depended on drawing in and developing a new generation of artisans.

The event formed part of the wider Motor Mech Show initiative, where aspiring mechanics and technicians also competed in the MIWA Junior Motor Mech Competition. Winners from both the MIWA and SAMBRA competitions were announced at Port Rex on Saturday, 6 June.

Together, the two competitions aimed to strengthen links between technical education and industry while highlighting the abilities of young up-and-coming technicians. They reflected the sector's continued commitment to youth development and to keeping technical careers visible, relevant and within reach for young South Africans.

Kriek concluded that Youth Month served as a reminder that talent could be found in classrooms and workshops throughout the country. He said it was the responsibility of industry to ensure that such talent was recognised, supported and developed into the skilled professionals who would shape the future of South Africa's automotive sector.



# Hella Returns To Thermal Management With Long-Term Aftermarket Push

**Hella Automotive South Africa is sharpening its focus on thermal management, with Product Manager Grant Christian outlining the company's renewed strategy at the Hella Synergy event held in Sandton on 9 June 2026.**

Speaking to delegates, Christian said Hella's return to thermal management is not a new departure, but a continuation of long-established expertise. He pointed to the company's history with Behr, noting that the former joint venture had already built a recognised reputation in thermal management before the partnership came to an end. Now, he said, that capability is returning under the Hella brand.

Christian described the move as a return to Hella's core strengths, stressing that the company should not be seen as a newcomer to the segment. Instead, he positioned Hella as an experienced player re-entering the market with a clear long-term plan.

That return comes at a time when thermal management is becoming increasingly important in modern vehicles. Christian said today's cars and commercial vehicles are far more complex than in the past, with more sensors, electronics, turbocharged engines, control units, hybrid systems and electric vehicle technologies all generating additional heat. As a result, effective thermal management is no longer limited to keeping engines cool. It now plays a broader role in ensuring performance, reliability and efficiency across increasingly sophisticated vehicle systems.

Christian said this growing complexity is also creating a stronger opportunity in the aftermarket. To support that, Hella began rebuilding its thermal management portfolio in 2025 with around 900 stock keeping units across six product lines for passenger vehicles, commercial vehicles and light commercial vehicles. In 2026, the company expanded that range by adding a further 1,000 SKUs. By 2027, Hella plans to have a portfolio of more than 6,000 SKUs, with further growth expected in 2028 as the company

fills additional gaps and strengthens its market position.

A key part of the strategy, Christian said, is to build the portfolio around the vehicles that matter most in South Africa. He noted that the local vehicle parc continues to evolve, with Asian manufacturers taking a stronger position across multiple segments. Hella has therefore aligned its portfolio with the fastest-growing parts of the market in order to ensure relevance, demand and opportunity for customers.

The current offering spans both engine cooling and air conditioning. Christian highlighted products such as radiators, intercoolers and expansion tanks on the engine cooling side, as well as compressors, condensers, interior blowers and expansion valves in air conditioning. Together, these account for around 2,400 SKUs across 70 product lines.

Further expansion is already planned. Christian said the roadmap to the end of 2027 includes additional product lines such as heat exchangers, thermostat management modules, thermostats, pressure switches, high-pressure lines and evaporators. Hella is also preparing to expand further into electric vehicle and hybrid thermal management technologies, ensuring that the portfolio keeps pace with future vehicle developments.

Christian stressed that a successful thermal management programme depends on more than product availability alone. Customers also need technical support, product data integrity and confidence in quality. Hella is aiming to support this through complete fitment solutions, including associated components such as gaskets, O-rings and circlips where required.

He added that technical support will be available through Hella's digital platforms, including resources such as installation guidance, technical information and diagnostic data. Product information will also be supported through TecDoc and other data platforms, with details including OE cross-references,



**Grant Christian.**

application coverage and technical specifications.

Another part of the strategy is inventory optimisation. Christian said Hella is working to simplify stockholding for customers by reducing unnecessary complexity in certain applications. In some cases, where competitors may offer several part numbers for similar vehicle applications, Hella aims to streamline the offer into a single SKU. According to Christian, this can reduce ordering risk, improve stock efficiency and make inventory management easier for customers.

In closing, Christian said Hella's message to the market is clear. Thermal management is becoming more critical as vehicles become more advanced, and Hella intends to meet that demand with proven expertise, a rapidly expanding portfolio, strong car parc coverage and a long-term commitment to the aftermarket.

"We are ready to support our customers as this evolution of the car parc continues to grow," he said.



## Young Hyundai Technician Plays Key Role In Building Commercial Vehicles



**At Hyundai Automotive South Africa's Commercial Assembly Plant, every H100 and EX8 truck is the result of careful workmanship by a dedicated production team.**

Among the technicians contributing to this process is Kwanele Sibisi, a Newcastle-born assembly technician who has quickly become one of the plant's strongest performers.

Sibisi joined the operation in 2024 through the Youth Employment Service programme and has already contributed to the assembly of more than 2,000 commercial vehicles. Her performance has remained consistently strong, reflecting the precision and discipline required in a manufacturing environment where every detail affects the final quality of the vehicle.

Working on the assembly line, Sibisi helps convert semi-knocked-down

vehicle kits into completed Hyundai commercial vehicles for use by businesses across South Africa. Her duties include fitting components, carrying out inspections and confirming that parts meet the required standards at different stages of production.

For Sibisi, the role is especially meaningful because it connects directly with her long-standing interest in engineering. She says she has always wanted to be part of creating practical products that people rely on in their daily lives.

She takes particular pride in seeing Hyundai commercial vehicles on the road, knowing that her work supports businesses and entrepreneurs. For her, each vehicle represents the skill, care and attention invested by the assembly team.

The Benoni-based facility has produced more than 22,000 vehicles since it

opened in 2013. It currently assembles the Hyundai H100 and EX8, while the Hyundai GT11 6-ton truck is expected to be added to the production line later this year.

Quality remains central to Sibisi's approach. She believes that every vehicle leaving the line reflects the responsibility and teamwork behind the production process, and she is committed to ensuring her own work consistently meets the highest possible standards.

Murge Mathapershad, General Manager of the plant, says Sibisi's contribution demonstrates the focus needed to maintain Hyundai's assembly standards. He notes that quality is central to the plant's work and that Sibisi's consistency, concentration and attention to detail have made her a standout member of the team.



# South Africa's AutoGas Sector Moves Into Focus With First Dedicated Industry Workshop

**South Africa's automotive and energy sectors took a closer look at AutoGas as a practical cleaner-fuel option, with the country's first dedicated AutoGas Workshop that was held in Johannesburg in July.**

The event, hosted by the Liquefied Petroleum Gas Safety Association of South Africa (LPGSA) in partnership with the Retail Motor Industry Organisation (RMI), was set for 3 July 2026 at the Indaba Hotel in Fourways. It aimed to give industry players, technical professionals and fleet operators a clearer understanding of the commercial, regulatory and environmental opportunities linked to liquefied petroleum gas as a transport fuel.

AutoGas, also known as LPG, gained attention in South Africa at a time when the transport sector faces mounting pressure from high fuel prices, supply uncertainty and the need to reduce emissions. While it is not a zero-emissions technology, supporters saw it as a useful transitional fuel that could help lower greenhouse gas output, improve air quality and strengthen energy resilience in the near term.

Internationally, AutoGas is already well established. More than 28 million vehicles run on the fuel worldwide, supported by over 82,000 refuelling stations. Markets such as Turkey, South Korea, Poland and India have shown how LPG can be incorporated into cleaner mobility strategies while offering meaningful savings to motorists and fleet owners.

The South African workshop covered transport policy, cleaner mobility initiatives and the regulatory requirements that shaped the development of the local AutoGas market. LPGSA also secured participation from the World Liquid Gas Association, with specialists from established AutoGas markets expected to share international lessons and best practice.

Gadibole Dihlabi, Managing Director



**Attie Serfontein.**

of LPGSA, said the workshop marked an important step in developing a safe and credible local AutoGas industry. She said South Africa had an opportunity to build a sector that supported affordable mobility, cleaner transport and improved energy security, provided it was underpinned by strong safety, compliance and professional standards.

The RMI, through the Automotive Remanufacturers' Association, had also been promoting the role of alternative energy through its GreenDrive initiative. Attie Serfontein, National Director of the ARA, said AutoGas offered immediate opportunities for workshops, technicians, motorists and fleet operators.

According to Serfontein, LPG could deliver savings of up to 50% compared with petrol and around 30% compared

with diesel. He added that it could reduce carbon dioxide emissions by up to 21%, cut fine particulate matter by up to 95% and significantly reduce nitrogen oxide emissions.

For fleet owners facing tight margins and growing decarbonisation demands, he said the figures highlighted why AutoGas deserved serious attention. He also stressed that LPG was not a distant concept, but a technology already available in South Africa's aftermarket.

As the country explored cleaner and more affordable mobility solutions, the workshop was expected to help position AutoGas as a near-term option for businesses and technical professionals looking to adapt to changing transport demands.



## New Automotive Hub Set To Drive Opportunity In Alexandra



**Alexandra's growing automotive sector is set to receive a major boost as the City of Johannesburg prepares to bring the Alexandra Automotive Hub into operation.**

The facility forms part of the City's drive to strengthen township economies by creating practical spaces where small businesses can grow, residents can gain skills and local enterprises can connect with wider industry opportunities.

The project, led by the Department of Economic Development, has been supported by the Joburg Development Agency and the Joburg Property Company. Together, these partners have helped move the Hub from concept and construction towards a more active phase focused on operations, partnerships and long-term sustainability.

A key development has been the

appointment of the Automotive Industry Development Centre as the anchor tenant. Its involvement is expected to give the Hub strong technical and industry grounding, while supporting training, business development and improved access to the automotive value chain.

Preparations are now under way to ensure the facility is ready for handover. This includes finalising management arrangements, engaging local stakeholders and ensuring that the Hub is positioned to benefit Alexandra's entrepreneurs, mechanics, artisans and young people seeking industry-relevant skills.

Community participation has been an important part of the process, with the City aiming to ensure that the Hub becomes more than just a physical

facility. The intention is to create a working platform for enterprise growth, skills transfer and local job creation.

The official handover for operations is planned for 22 July 2026. This milestone will mark the start of the Hub's next chapter and acknowledge the contribution of the partners involved in bringing the project to this point.

A broader public launch is expected during Transport Month in October 2026, when the City will showcase the Hub as a flagship example of township economic development.

Once fully operational, the Alexandra Automotive Hub is expected to support emerging businesses, attract investment and help residents take part more meaningfully in one of Johannesburg's important economic sectors.



# RMI Strengthens Support For Artisan Excellence

**The Retail Motor Industry Organisation has reaffirmed its commitment to artisan development by hosting the Second Annual South African National Artisan Awards Selection Committee Inception Meeting at its National Office in Midrand.**

The gathering, convened by the Department of Higher Education and Training, marked a significant step in preparations for the 2026 awards which celebrate excellence across South Africa's priority artisan trades.

The Selection Committee brings together representatives from government, industry, organised business and the skills development sector. Their role is to ensure that the awards process remains transparent and credible. During the meeting, members reviewed nomination criteria, assessment procedures and the electronic nomination platform ahead of the national call for entries. The aim is to provide a seamless nomination process while guaranteeing that every nominee is assessed fairly and consistently.

The meeting also included interviews for the national awareness campaign which will highlight the importance of artisans in driving economic growth. These recordings will emphasise the value of vocational education and training and the need to recognise skilled professionals who are shaping South Africa's future.

For the RMI, involvement in the awards aligns with its longstanding commitment to developing the next generation of automotive artisans. The automotive retail aftermarket is one of the country's largest artisan employers, supporting around 23,000 businesses and employing approximately 300 000 people. Thousands of qualified artisans keep vehicle fleets operating safely every day.

The sector plays a critical role in developing two of the thirteen priority trades identified by the Department of Higher Education and Training through



**Louis van Huyssteen.**

its Centres of Specialisation programme, namely Motor Mechanic and Diesel Mechanic. These skills will become increasingly important as the industry embraces new vehicle technologies including electric and alternative energy vehicles.

Louis van Huyssteen, RMI National Training Director, said that recognising artisan excellence is about more than celebrating individual achievement. He explained that artisans are the foundation of a safe, professional and sustainable automotive industry.

Programmes such as the awards shine a spotlight on individuals whose skills keep South Africa moving while inspiring more young people to consider artisan careers. Recognition also reinforces the value of quality training, continuous development and industry excellence.

Van Huyssteen added that the RMI is proud to support initiatives that raise

the profile of artisans and strengthen South Africa's skills pipeline. He noted that investing in artisan development is ultimately an investment in economic growth and competitiveness. Nominations for the 2026 awards will open nationally in the coming weeks, encouraging artisans, employers and training partners to recognise individuals who demonstrate exceptional technical skill, professionalism and commitment to their trade.

The programme will culminate in the awards ceremony on 5 September 2026 where outstanding artisans from across the country will be honoured for their contribution to industry excellence and national skills development.





## BMW And MINI Tighten Parts Guidance As Vehicle Glass And Lighting Become Software-Critical



**BMW and MINI have issued new technical position statements that make one message clear for collision repairers: windshields and headlamps are no longer simple replacement parts.**

On modern vehicles, they form part of a wider safety and software ecosystem, where fit, calibration and electronic compatibility can directly affect vehicle performance. The guidance says certified repairs should use only new brand-specific original equipment components for windshield and headlamp replacement.

The windshield statements are particularly focused on advanced driver assistance systems, or ADAS. Forward-facing cameras, sensors and head-up display functions rely on exact optical clarity, correct curvature, precise mounting points and dependable

integration with the vehicle's electronics. BMW and MINI say aftermarket or salvage windshields are not approved because they have not been validated by the brands for structural integrity, ADAS performance or overall vehicle function. Salvage glass also carries unknown history, including possible crash loads, previous repairs, weather exposure, heat damage or flooding.

The concern is not merely cosmetic. A windshield acts as a lens for camera-based safety systems. If the glass has slight distortion, the wrong thickness, a different tint or a mounting bracket that places a camera at the wrong angle, the vehicle may misread lane markings, obstacles or road conditions. Independent ADAS guidance also notes that even small variations in glass shape or mounting position can interfere with calibration and reliability.

For this reason, the new statements require calibration after windshield replacement. The brands specify that safety systems must be checked using the appropriate BMW or MINI ISTA software, followed by diagnostic testing according to brand repair procedures. Systems potentially affected include adaptive cruise control, forward collision warning, lane departure warning, automatic emergency braking and head-up display functions.

The headlamp guidance raises a different but equally important issue: software compatibility.

BMW says installing a used or aftermarket headlamp may create an incorrect module set. Although such a unit may appear to be plug and play, it can prevent remote software updates and stop dealers from manually updating vehicle software. If another module later suffers a critical failure, diagnosis and repair may be blocked until the correct new original headlamp modules are installed and programmed.

Modern headlamps can include control modules linked to adaptive lighting, ADAS options and other vehicle-specific equipment. A module with the wrong part number may not communicate properly with the vehicle network and can trigger wider system failures. The statement also warns that a software update attempt could partially complete, then disable the replacement headlamp module, creating a potential visibility hazard.

For repairers, insurers and vehicle owners, the practical takeaway is that cheaper parts may create larger downstream costs.

A non-approved windshield can affect safety calibration, while an incompatible headlamp can interfere with software maintenance and diagnostics. As vehicles become more connected and sensor-dependent, the repair decision is no longer just about whether a part fits. It is about whether the part preserves the safety, updateability and intended function of the whole vehicle.



# US Counterfeit Airbag Verdict Highlights Growing Vehicle Safety Crisis



**A jury in Florida has awarded more than \$600 million to the family of a young mother who died after a counterfeit airbag exploded during what should have been a relatively minor road accident.**

The case has drawn renewed attention to the dangers posed by fake safety components entering the vehicle repair market.

The woman, 22-year-old Destiny Byassee, was killed in June 2023 when the airbag in her car failed catastrophically during a crash. Rather than cushioning the impact, the device burst apart and sent metal fragments through the vehicle. According to the legal team acting for her family, the airbag had been fitted after an earlier collision involving the same car, before she purchased it. Her family says she had no idea that a counterfeit replacement part had been installed.

The lawsuit targeted Jilin Province Detiannuo Safety Technology Co., Ltd.,

known as DTN, which was accused of manufacturing the airbag inflator involved. Although the company reportedly responded to the legal claim through solicitors and denied responsibility, it did not appear at trial. The jury ultimately awarded \$243 million in compensatory damages and a further \$360 million in punitive damages.

Lawyers representing the family described the verdict as an important step in holding producers of counterfeit vehicle safety equipment to account. They argued that a survivable collision became fatal solely because a fake airbag had been placed in the steering wheel. The woman left behind two young children.

The wider issue extends beyond a single case. US regulators have been increasingly vocal about the threat posed by suspect airbag inflators, particularly those linked to DTN. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration recently moved to ban certain defective Chinese-made inflators after an

investigation connected them to at least 10 deaths and several serious injuries across 12 crashes in the United States. Officials said all of the incidents involved driver-side frontal inflators marked with the identifier “DTN60DB”, which were believed to have entered the country unlawfully.

Earlier this year, the agency issued an urgent warning to the vehicle repair sector, urging workshops not to install questionable components and to verify the origin of replacement airbags through reputable suppliers. The warning also stressed the importance of checking used vehicles that had previously been involved in collisions where airbags deployed.

Industry experts say the case underlines a longstanding concern about post-collision inspections and the quality of replacement parts. Safety authorities continue to advise that if one of these suspect airbags is found in a vehicle, the car should not be driven until the issue is properly addressed.





## PPG Extends WorldSkills Europe Partnership to Back Car Painting Talent



**PPG has renewed its partnership with WorldSkills Europe for a further two years, strengthening its support for vocational training and the next generation of skilled tradespeople across the continent.**

The coatings company will play a key role in the Car Painting competition at EuroSkills Düsseldorf 2027, scheduled for September 2027. As part of its support, PPG will provide paint, equipment and technical expertise, with staff from its Automotive Refinish training centre in Hilden assisting the event.

WorldSkills Europe promotes technical, vocational and service-based education, helping young people build practical skills for working life. Its EuroSkills competitions bring together emerging talent from across Europe and aim to reflect current industry standards and technologies.

Ben Blackledge, chair of the board at WorldSkills Europe, said PPG's manufacturing and coatings expertise would help keep the competition relevant to modern industry. He added that the partnership supports both young people and Europe's broader competitiveness.

PPG has previously contributed to WorldSkills Lyon 2024, EuroSkills Herning 2025 and several national competitions in painting, decorating and car painting. The company says these efforts form part of a wider push to raise awareness of skilled trades as valuable and rewarding career paths.

Jérôme Zamblera, PPG vice president for EMEA Automotive Refinish, said the company wants to inspire more young people to enter the sector while helping address Europe's growing skills gap. He highlighted initiatives such as national car painting contests, school partnerships and donations of PPG LINQ digital technology, including the MOONWALK paint mixing system.

The renewed agreement also aligns with PPG's global commitment to invest \$10 million through 2030 in skills programmes, including partnerships with technical and vocational schools, community colleges, training providers and skilled trades competitions.



# Plasnomics to Launch Global Benchmark Plastic Repair Centre In US, no Plans for South Africa

**Plasmonic is preparing to open its first Plastic Repair Excellence Centre in Dallas, Texas, in August, positioning the site as the inaugural facility in what it plans to develop into a wider international network.**

The company describes the Dallas operation as a first-of-its-kind centre designed to bring together collision repair businesses, insurers, vehicle manufacturers, suppliers, recyclers, researchers and public-sector stakeholders. Its purpose is to promote repair-first thinking and support more sustainable approaches to automotive plastic repair.

Rather than functioning solely as a training venue, the centre will operate as an active repair, research and innovation hub. Plasmonic said the facility will handle real repair work while demonstrating leading repair techniques, tools, products, material recovery systems and emerging technologies.

The Dallas centre will combine day-to-day repair activity with research and development, recycling initiatives, skills development, sustainability projects and collaboration across the sector. Plasmonic aims for the facility to become a reference point for best practice in plastic repair and circular repair innovation.

Mario Dimovski, President of Plasmonic, said the project represents more than the opening of a new site. He described it as the first tangible step in creating a future framework for plastic repair.

Plasmonic said it will continue working with leading multi-shop operators, while also drawing on support from insurance networks and expanding dialogue with original equipment manufacturers. The company intends to build a model that can be studied, improved and replicated by the wider industry.

Dimovski said Dallas marks the beginning of a broader programme,



adding that the company is laying the groundwork for the next stage of plastic repair development.

The company believes the sector needs to move away from inconsistent and fragmented repair practices. Instead, it is calling for a specialised workforce supported by data-led, repair-first systems that can deliver commercial, operational and environmental gains at scale.

Plasmonic also said the Dallas facility will be committed to zero-waste plastic repair operations. Damaged parts, repair waste, non-repairable components and

other plastic materials will be identified, separated by material type and routed into appropriate recycling or recovery channels.

South African Plasmonic Council member, Charles Canning told BodyShop News Africa "Currently, we are setting up the distributor network in South Africa and the repair kits will be available soon. We are trying to find local alternatives to some of the tools that will make the kit a lot more affordable for repairers in South Africa without compromising on quality. But, there is no talk of a repair centre in South Africa yet. Perhaps in time to come we will see one".





## Ford's Quality Comeback Shows AI Needs Human Memory



**Ford's recent quality push has offered a useful reality check for companies racing to automate difficult work. Artificial intelligence can process huge amounts of data, flag patterns and support faster decision-making, but it cannot easily replace the practical judgement built up by experienced people over many years.**

The carmaker adopted AI tools across parts of its industrial system, including quality checks in factories. Executives had hoped that automated inspections and machine learning would help identify problems earlier, reduce disruption and improve consistency. That ambition made sense in an industry where defects are expensive, margins are under pressure and investors are demanding greater efficiency.

But Ford has now made clear that technology alone was not enough. The company has brought back more than 300

veteran quality specialists and engineers in recent years after recognising that automated systems were missing something important. Charles Poon, Ford's vice president of vehicle hardware engineering, has said AI is only as good as the information used to train it. In other words, a system fed mainly with formal design requirements may still fail to capture the hard-earned knowledge of people who have seen parts fail, launches stumble and production lines behave unpredictably.

That is the heart of the lesson. AI is strong at repetition, speed and pattern recognition. Experienced engineers are strong at context. They understand the small signs that suggest a bigger problem is forming. They know when a supplier variation matters, when a tolerance looks risky and when a design that works on paper may prove awkward on the line. Those insights are not always written down neatly for a machine to absorb.

Ford's renewed focus on human expertise appears to be paying off. The company has returned to the top of the mainstream rankings in the J.D. Power U.S. Initial Quality Study for the first time since 2010. It has also linked its improvement to broader changes in leadership, engineering, manufacturing and supply chain discipline, alongside the rehiring of veteran talent.

The broader message is not that AI has failed. It is that AI is a tool, not a substitute for knowledge. When companies remove experienced workers too quickly, they risk stripping out the very expertise needed to make automation useful.

For manufacturers, the smartest path is likely to be a partnership. Machines can scan and alert. People can interpret, teach and challenge. Ford's quality comeback suggests the future of work may depend less on replacing experts than on making sure their judgement is built into the systems that follow them.



# BASF Coatings Becomes Surventis and Begins New Chapter as Independent Business

**Surventis has officially launched as an independent company, marking the completion of its carve-out from BASF and positioning the former BASF Coatings business as a major global player in automotive coatings and surface treatment.**

The newly independent company is majority-owned by funds managed by global investment firm Carlyle, in partnership with Qatar Investment Authority. BASF retains a 40 percent stake in the business. With annual sales of around €3.9 billion, about 10,700 employees and more than 42,000 customers, Surventis enters the market as one of the world's leading suppliers in its field.

The company unveiled its new corporate brand on 1 July 2026, reflecting what it describes as a foundation of scientific expertise, innovation and renewed momentum as a standalone organisation. Its new website, [surventiscoatings.com](https://surventiscoatings.com), has also gone live.

Surventis will continue to develop, produce and market coatings and surface treatment solutions for industrial, automotive and refinish customers worldwide. Its portfolio includes well-known brands such as Chemetall, Glasurit and R-M, with a focus on high-performance and sustainable solutions.

Headquartered in Muenster, Germany, the company operates in more than 140 countries through a network of over 30 production and development sites. Its Muenster base is home to what the company describes as the world's largest integrated paint manufacturing site.

As an independent business, Surventis says it will be able to operate with greater speed, agility and focus. Carlyle is expected to support the company through targeted investment in global capabilities and local operations, drawing on its experience in building standalone industrial businesses.

Jens Luehring, Chief Executive Officer of Surventis, said the launch marked "an exciting new chapter" for employees



around the world. He said the company was building on more than 130 years of coatings expertise and some of the industry's most trusted brands.

"Our customers will benefit from a faster, more focused partner, with our full attention on the surfaces they make and sell. Their success is our success," Luehring said. "We are already a leader in this industry, and our ambition is clear: to become the leading coatings technology company."

Tanaka Maswoswe, Partner at Carlyle, said Surventis was well placed to accelerate innovation, strengthen customer partnerships and pursue global growth opportunities.

For customers, the transition is intended to provide continuity. Surventis said it will continue operating with the same products, technologies, brands and technical teams, while maintaining its focus on reliability, quality and service across its three business areas.



# 2026 Collision Repair Expo And Auto Aftermarket Expo Set New Benchmark



The 2026 Collision Repair Expo and Auto Aftermarket Expo concluded as the largest combined automotive trade event ever held in the southern hemisphere. Held at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre in Melbourne, Australia, the trade fair featured more than 400 leading brands across the collision repair and automotive aftermarket sectors while attracting 15,000 attendees across three days, setting a new attendance record.

Stuart Charity, CEO of the organiser, the Australian Automotive Aftermarket Association (AAAA), said the 2026 expo exceeded every expectation and took the event to another level.

"The show floor was buzzing for three straight days, exhibitors invested in spectacular displays and the level of engagement, networking and business activity was exceptional," said Charity.

"The expo brings the industry together like nothing else – connecting workshop owners, technicians, collision repairers, manufacturers, suppliers and industry leaders face-to-face to share ideas and invest in the future of the industry."



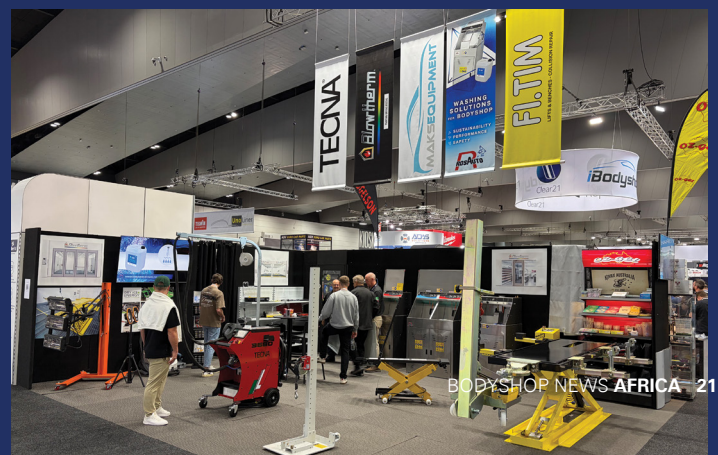
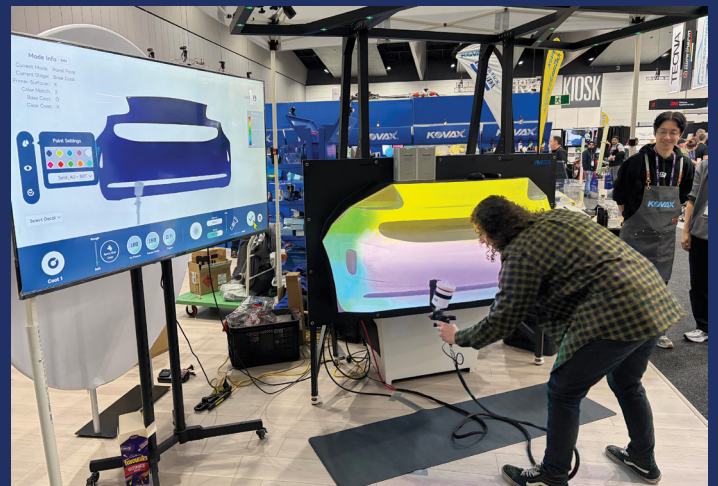


A highlight of the event was an extensive free training programme, with thousands of collision repair professionals, automotive technicians and workshop owners participating in sessions led by internationally recognised trainers and Australian industry experts. This included Steve Smith from Pico Technology (UK), Scott Hicks from TOPDON USA, Keith and Liz Perkins from L1 Automotive Training (USA), and Robert Snook from Business Success Global (UK).

The free Collision Repair Training Program delivered practical sessions focused on business performance, leadership, customer experience, ADAS processes and a session on the major trends reshaping the industry.

Additionally, the Technical Training Program delivered practical diagnostic training technicians could immediately apply in workshops, while the Business Management Training Program focused on profitability, leadership, workshop performance and preparing businesses for increasingly complex vehicle technology.

Another popular platform, the ADAS Training Zone, featured live training and demonstrations, helping workshops strengthen capability in advanced driver-assistance systems. Visitors at the Collision Repair Expo also experienced live welding demonstrations in the







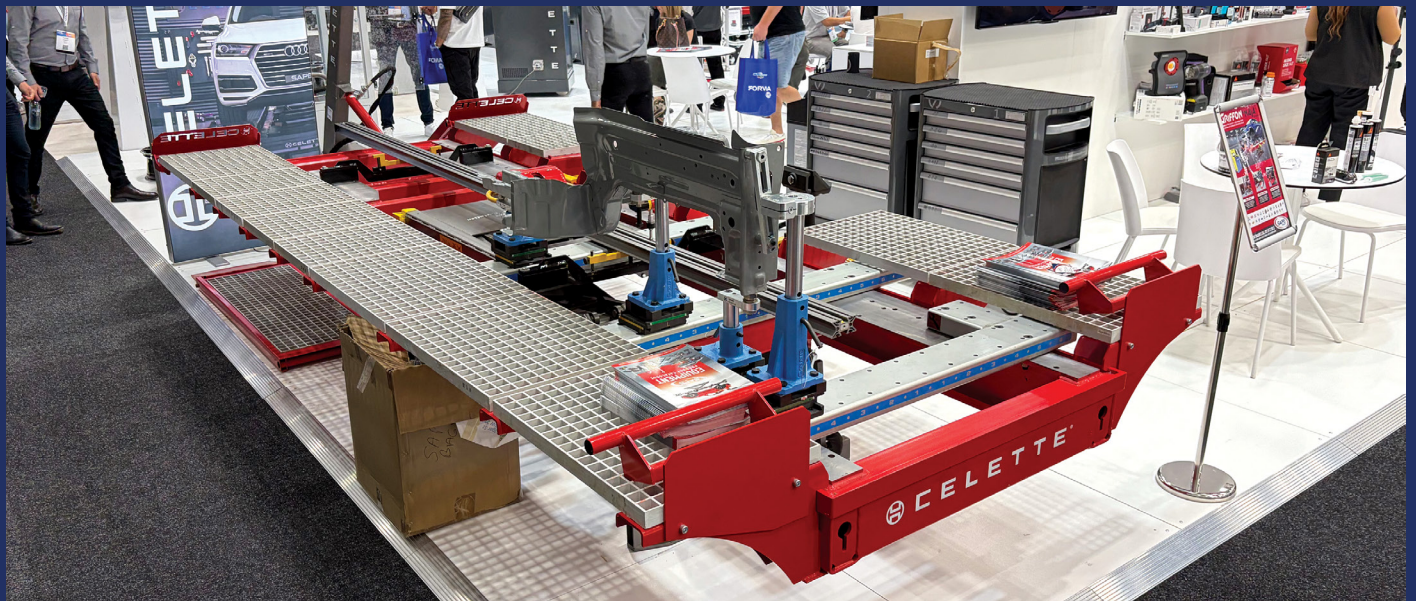


I-CAR Welding Zone and refinishing demonstrations from the Lowbake Spray Booth.

The expo also facilitated networking, with thousands of business connections made across the three days, culminating in the Friday afternoon networking function, which the AAAA described as Australia's largest automotive industry gathering.

"The passion, professionalism and commitment shown by our industry across the three days was extraordinary," said Charity.

"This event showcased the incredible strength of the automotive aftermarket and collision repair sectors, and the confidence our industry has in its future. We sincerely thank our exhibitors, sponsors, speakers, trainers, partners and every visitor who contributed to making this such an unforgettable event."





# SAGOLA SETS SIGHTS ON RENEWED GROWTH IN SOUTH AFRICA

For Adrian Harvey, Regional Distribution Manager for Sub-Saharan Africa and South Africa, Sagola's renewed focus on the local market is both practical and ambitious. His brief is straightforward: "My main role is to find and manage distribution in South Africa and sub-Saharan Africa," he says, with a particular emphasis on the automotive collision repair sector.



Adrian Harvey.

Although Sagola has a presence in industrial protective coatings, Harvey's immediate focus is clear. "When it comes to especially the automotive segment, that's the main area that I'm going to be focusing on," he explains. "I'm looking mainly for automotive distributors."

Sagola, the Spanish spray gun and spray equipment manufacturer, has been around for more than 75 years. It was acquired by Elcometer about six years ago, bringing together Sagola's spray equipment expertise with Elcometer's well-known instrumentation range, including paint thickness, scratch depth

and adhesion testing equipment.

Harvey says Sagola once had a strong foothold in South Africa, but that momentum was lost over time. "They used to be in the South African market, quite big at one stage," he says. "There have been a few other people that have actually taken up the role and just not done anything." The result was a brand with recognition, but without the local structure needed to grow.

That is now changing, largely through the acquisition of Edward Searle, a long-established South African business

with more than 100 years of history. For Harvey, the acquisition solves one of Sagola's biggest local challenges: stock availability.

"One of our stumbling blocks was not having a local warehouse," he says. "If I look at our opposition, everyone's got a local warehouse. They deliver within a day or two." By contrast, distributors previously had to import stock directly, often waiting a week or two. "Unfortunately in the industry, a lot of people, they don't like waiting. They want it now."

Edward Searle's infrastructure changes that picture. The company's main office is in Wynberg, on the border of Alexandra, with branches in Cape Town and Durban and a satellite branch in Port Elizabeth. "We're now getting our stock into the warehouse. We're getting local pricing," Harvey says. "For us, it actually seems like this could be a game changer."

The acquisition also has a useful historical link. "Funny enough, they were actually old Sagola distributors at one stage," Harvey notes. "It was just one of those things that just fell into place."

Beyond distribution, training is a key part of Harvey's strategy. He wants distributors to understand the equipment properly and to be able to demonstrate it with confidence. "I train the distributors and they go ahead," he says. "That's the



big thing, to try and get that focus going.”

One of Sagola’s most striking training tools is its virtual reality spray system, already used in training centres and colleges internationally. “It gives you the idea of how to spray. It creates muscle memory,” Harvey says. “The great advantage of this is not using paint and material and electricity and everything else. So in the long term, it’s a cost saver.”

He believes this type of technology has particular relevance for younger entrants to the industry. “With how technology is changing and how the youngsters love playing games, it’s one of the most ideal ways of actually training people.”

That leads into a broader concern: skills. With EVs, hybrids and ADAS systems becoming increasingly important, Harvey believes the collision repair sector must attract a new generation of repairers. “Some are, some aren’t,” he says when asked whether the industry is ready. “I think the biggest problem is education.”

Young people, he argues, often know little about the sector. “They don’t know anything about the collision industry,” he says. “Yet there are so many opportunities and new opportunities coming.” For Harvey, the solution lies in reaching learners earlier and encouraging greater collaboration across insurers, OEMs, associations, panel beaters and distributors. “People just need to work together.”

Technology will also reshape the industry, but he is cautious about removing skilled people from the process. “The human factor is always the most important part,” he says. While AI and robotics may bring benefits, he adds that equipment still needs people to maintain, monitor and check it properly.

On the product side, Harvey says Sagola continues to innovate according to industry need. “They’re always looking at something new,” he explains. “It’s more a case of what does the industry need and how can we improve on what we have currently got?”

The latest example is the Sagola HEX, launched at SEMA, with a hexagonal air cap that pre-atomises paint. Harvey says it provides “a finer spray onto the car, gives you a smoother finish, and actually gives you lower paint consumption.” At the same time, Sagola has strengthened its mid-range offering, which he describes as “more our bread and butter than anything else.”

All products are still designed and manufactured in Vitoria, Spain, with every gun tested before being packed and shipped. “We try and make sure our quality stays,” Harvey says.

For the South African market, his message is direct. “We are looking for distribution channels. We are open for all automotive distributors,” he says. “We will not sell directly to the public or to end users, purely because we want to build that trust with the distributors.”

With local warehousing, renewed support and a growing product range, Harvey believes Sagola is well placed to re-establish itself. As he puts it: “Sagola’s here. We’re here to stay. We’re here to give a good offering.”





# Mahle Argues For A Broader Road To Future Mobility

Marco Warth, Mahle's Vice President for Corporate Research and Advanced Engineering, used the company's International Media Tech Day on 3 June to make a simple but important point. The future of mobility will not be shaped by one technology alone. It will be defined by a mix of solutions, each suited to different markets, energy systems and transport needs.





**“The future of mobility will not be shaped by one technology alone. It will be defined by a mix of solutions, each suited to different markets, energy systems and transport needs.”**

Warth's presentation was rooted in engineering rather than slogan-driven debate. He argued that future mobility is being shaped not only by politics and market pressure, but by the practical work of improving drivetrains, thermal systems, filters, electronics and software. For Mahle, those shifts are not just challenges facing the industry. They are opportunities to innovate.

A key part of his argument was that Mahle is built to think long term. Owned by a foundation rather than stock market investors, the company reinvests its earnings into products, research and broader social goals. Warth suggested that this gives it a different perspective in a period of rapid transition. Rather than chasing a single fashionable answer, Mahle is trying to prepare for a more complex and varied future.

That future, he said, will be more diverse than many assume. Battery electric vehicles will grow. So will hybrids. Hydrogen has a role. Renewable fuels also matter. Even the internal combustion

engine, if made more efficient and paired with cleaner fuels, still has a place in the transition. In Warth's view, there is no universal solution because there is no universal transport system. A bicycle, a passenger car, a heavy truck and a stationary engine all face different operating realities.

That has obvious relevance for markets such as South Africa, where affordability, infrastructure and energy supply remain decisive. Warth made the point that the climate impact of a vehicle depends not only on the vehicle itself, but on the source of the energy powering it. Electric mobility delivers the greatest benefit when the electricity comes from renewable sources. The same logic applies to fuels. Cleaner inputs can significantly change the emissions picture.

Cost, he stressed, will remain a determining factor. In freight and logistics, technology must make business sense. Operators will choose the solution that moves goods reliably

and economically. Warth showed how the case for hydrogen, battery electric or other systems can shift depending on energy prices. That uncertainty strengthens the argument for flexibility and for technologies such as hybrids, which allow operators to adapt to changing conditions.

At the heart of Mahle's strategy is efficiency. Warth described it as the company's central organising idea. Efficiency means achieving the greatest possible result with the least possible input, whether that input is time, energy, money or raw materials. It is a principle that applies to every part of the vehicle.

He illustrated this with clear examples. In cold weather, an electric vehicle must use energy both to travel and to heat the cabin. Better thermal management can preserve range while keeping passengers comfortable. Faster charging improves the practical value of electric mobility. In both cases, efficiency is not just a technical measure. It directly affects how useful and attractive a vehicle is in real life.

Warth pointed to several Mahle innovations designed to meet that challenge. These included range extenders, electric drive systems and advanced thermal management modules. He also highlighted a quieter blower design inspired by the shape of a penguin's fin. By using simulation, cloud computing and generative artificial intelligence, engineers were able to test millions of variations and identify a design that reduced noise while improving efficiency. For Warth, that showed how even familiar components can still be significantly improved.

Hydrogen also featured in his vision, especially for regions with strong renewable energy potential. He referred to Namibia as a promising example of how solar and wind resources could support future hydrogen production, opening industrial and export opportunities alongside cleaner transport.

Warth's message was consistent throughout. The transition to cleaner mobility will be shaped by diversity, efficiency and adaptability. Mahle is not trying to force a single answer onto a complex global market. It is positioning itself to support multiple paths, each matched to the realities of different regions and applications.



# FROM ENGINES TO BATTERIES - THE INVESTMENT BEHIND TODAY'S WORKSHOPS

The transformation of the modern dealership workshop is no longer a distant prospect. It is already under way as battery electric vehicles (EVs) and plug-in-hybrid electric vehicles (PHEVs) steadily join traditional internal combustion engine (ICE) models on South African roads.



For franchised dealers and independent workshops alike, the question is no longer simply how these powertrains differ, but what it actually costs to equip a workshop to service them safely and efficiently.

According to the National Automobile Dealers' Association (NADA) and the Retail Motor Industry Organisation (RMI), workshops servicing electric vehicles require dedicated high voltage safety equipment, specialised diagnostic tools and technicians who have completed manufacturer approved training.

At first glance, it is easy to assume that an EV workshop is dramatically more expensive than a conventional one. The reality is more nuanced. Most franchised dealerships already own the majority of the equipment required to service ICE vehicles. Becoming EV ready is therefore an incremental investment rather than replacing an entire workshop, putting the additional costs into proper perspective.

Let's start with the traditional workshop and then the new kids on the block.

## THE COST OF AN ICE WORKSHOP:

A modern ICE workshop is centred

on mechanical systems. Engines, transmissions, exhaust systems and fuel components require significant tooling and infrastructure, including professional tool sets, engine hoists, transmission jacks, oil storage and disposal systems, exhaust extraction equipment, emissions testing systems, diagnostic computers, vehicle lifts and compressed air systems.

A well-equipped franchised dealership workshop will typically have between R1.5 million and R4 million invested in workshop equipment, diagnostic computers and supporting infrastructure before servicing its first vehicle. Diagnostic computers alone can cost between R30 000 and R120 000 each, often with annual software subscriptions. Emissions testing equipment can exceed R100 000, while oil management systems, engine hoists and other heavy duty equipment add substantially to the overall investment.

In other words, a modern ICE workshop is already a multi-million rand operation before a single customer vehicle enters the service bay.

## THE COST OF AN EV READY WORKSHOP:

Electric vehicles eliminate many of the mechanical systems associated with conventional vehicles. There are no oil changes, exhaust systems or spark





plugs. Instead, workshops must invest in equipment capable of safely working on high voltage electrical systems.

According to guidance from NADA, the RMI and the Tyre Equipment Parts Association (TEPA), an existing dealership workshop typically requires insulated one thousand volt tool sets, high voltage protective gloves, insulation testers, specialised multi-meters, battery lifting equipment, thermal imaging devices, EV compatible diagnostic systems and on site charging infrastructure before it can safely service electric vehicles.

Industry estimates suggest that upgrading an existing dealership workshop to basic EV readiness generally costs between R400 000 and R1 million, while a fully equipped EV certified facility with multiple trained technicians can require an investment of between R1 million and R3 million. High voltage insulated tool sets alone may cost between R30 000 and R100 000, while battery lift tables range from R80 000 to R200 000, depending on specification.

Unlike ICE workshops, however, EV facilities do not require oil disposal systems or exhaust extraction equipment. The investment shifts away from mechanical infrastructure towards electrical safety, battery handling and advanced software diagnostics.

#### THE COST OF A PHEV WORKSHOP:

Plug-in-hybrids combine both technologies, retaining a conventional combustion engine while adding a high voltage battery and electric drive system.

For workshops, this effectively means supporting two powertrains under one roof. A PHEV capable facility requires all the tooling and infrastructure associated with ICE vehicles, together with the high voltage safety equipment, specialised diagnostics and technician training needed for EVs.

As a result, a fully equipped PHEV dealership workshop generally represents the highest investment level. If an ICE workshop requires between R1.5 million and R4 million in equipment, and EV capability adds a further R400 000 to R1 million or more, a fully equipped PHEV workshop will typically have between R2 million and R5 million invested in tooling and infrastructure.

#### MORE EVOLUTION THAN REVOLUTION:

The difference between ICE and EV workshops is often less dramatic than many people expect. Traditional workshops already require substantial capital investment in mechanical equipment, diagnostic technology and emissions compliance. EV capability

builds on that existing foundation rather than replacing it.

The real change lies in where the money is spent. ICE workshops invest heavily in mechanical hardware and fluid management systems. EV workshops direct more of their investment towards electrical safety equipment, battery handling technology and sophisticated software diagnostics.

For dealers, the decision is therefore strategic rather than purely financial. Becoming EV ready requires additional investment, but not a completely new workshop.

As South Africa's vehicle parc continues to diversify, dealership workshops will continue evolving alongside it. The tools may increasingly shift from engine hoists and exhaust extractors to battery lifts and insulation testers, but one reality remains unchanged: professional vehicle servicing has always required significant capital investment, regardless of what powers the vehicle.

- **Sources:** National Automobile Dealers' Association (NADA); Retail Motor Industry Organisation (RMI); Tyre Equipment Parts Association (TEPA); Toyota South Africa Motors; BMW Group South Africa; Mercedes-Benz South Africa; Volvo Car South Africa.





# FROM THE USA

WITH STACEY PHILLIPS RONAK



## Modern Plastics, Modern Problems: High Tech Solutions For Today's Repairs

With plastic repair evolving far beyond basic bumper work, today's vehicles are challenging technicians with advanced polymers, multi-layer composites, ADAS-integrated fascia, EV-specific plastics and rapidly emerging repair technologies.

During the Collision Industry Conference (CIC) meeting in April, Bud Center, Director of Technical Products and Curriculum at I-CAR, moderated a panel of leading technical experts exploring the next generation of plastic repair. They included Kurt Lammon, President of Polyvance; Frank Phillips, CEO of 4Plastic; and Jason Scharton, 3M Global Relations Leader.

"More than 60 per cent of the parts cost on today's repair plans consist of plastic

parts," said Phillips. "However, less than 30 per cent of bumper covers, less than 10 per cent of headlamps and less than one per cent of textured parts are being repaired today."

Panelists talked about the chemistry that makes up most bumper covers – polypropylene (PP) – which Phillips explained is repairable. With the right tools, processes and approach, he said that a high-quality repair is achievable.

"There are huge opportunities to consider repairing over replacing in this parts category," he said.

Representatives from Plasmonic, which is building a global foundation for automotive plastic repair, have reported that various past pilot programmes



**Bud Center.**

**He dispelled the myth that a bumper with a radar sensor behind it is radioactive.**

achieved more than 75 per cent repair-versus-replace rates for plastic bumpers.

Although plastic parts / content in modern vehicles are increasing, Scharton has observed that the practice of plastic repair has declined in recent years.

"An increase in sensors located behind bumpers and fascia panels, coupled with OEM directives on 'do-not-repair zones' and maximum coating thicknesses, have made some shops leery of bumper repair and/or unwilling to take the time to decipher OEM repair procedures, finding it easier to just default to replace over repair," he said.

In addition, he attributed a decline in plastic repair to COVID-era backlogs and work surplus, which prioritised faster throughput and shorter cycle times to grow and maintain revenue and profit. As a result, shops focused on replace in general, over repair.

With fewer bumpers identified for repair, Scharton said some technicians were out of practice, leading to lower efficiency and poorer results and quality as it takes time to rebuild skills. This created a negative



**From left: Jason Scharton, Kurt Lammon and Frank Phillips.**



feedback loop, according to Scharton, who emphasised the importance of re-engaging with plastic repair.

"Recognise that there is more plastic available to repair than just bumper covers," he said, using headlights (especially tabs) and fluid reservoirs as examples.

As body shops are no longer flush with work, Scharton said plastic repair may help keep higher-profit-margin labour revenue in the business.

"Some parts, such as headlights and the more complex bumper covers, have become quite expensive, and repairing them versus replacing them might allow a total to be repairable," he said.

However, Lammon stressed the importance of not performing repairs on battery cases or related components – even though they are automotive plastics – and advised the industry to always follow OEM repair procedures.

### PLASTIC REPAIR CHALLENGES

Lammon addressed three primary challenges with plastic repair. The first is the industry conflating OEM prohibitions



against repairing bumpers with advanced driver-assistance systems and a general OEM prohibition of bumper repair.

During the panel, he dispelled the myth that a bumper with a radar sensor behind it is radioactive. "If a tab is broken or there's some damage in an area that's well away from the radar sensor, I think the shop should be able to repair it if it creates a better outcome for the consumer, shop and bill payer," he emphasised.

"Of course, if the OEM prohibits repair altogether, the shop should abide by that whether we think it's excessive or not."

Ideally, he would like to see OEMs have specific no-repair zones on bumper covers with radar sensors. He pointed out Plasmonic's efforts to obtain recognition of or allowance for plastic repair from the OEMs.

"Insurance premiums, total losses, etc. are through the roof, and they can't be perceived as being aloof to that consumer concern," added Lammon.

The second challenge he noted is

**"More than 60 per cent of the parts cost on today's repair plans consist of plastic parts. However, less than 30 per cent of bumper covers, less than 10 per cent of headlamps and less than one per cent of textured parts are being repaired today."**

the perception that "if it's plastic, it's disposable."

"This is an attitude that predates my history in the industry, 31 years ago," Lammon recalled. "How do we get technicians and estimators to realise that just because the part is made of plastic, they should consider doing a repair instead of just replacing the part?"

The more expensive the part, he said, the greater the incentive for all parties to repair it.

"I understand that if you could get a perfectly fitting aftermarket cover for \$100 every time, then it would make

this volume of plastic to landfills cannot be denied. "The visibility of environmental and sustainability metrics is increasing over and above common sense. The trend must change."

Lammon said he is familiar with municipalities that take the contents of recycling bins and put it in landfills because there's not enough money in the scrap to justify separating and recycling it.

"That's a society-wide problem, not just a collision industry problem," he said. "At least we have the power to choose to repair the part."

### OEM PROCEDURES AND PROGRESS

During the panel, Lammon, Phillips and Scharton discussed the importance of following OEM procedures throughout the plastic repair process.

While some vehicle manufacturers have position statements addressing where repairs can be made on some models when ADAS is a factor, Phillips said OEMs have not created specific procedures.

Lammon discussed the continual advancement made by OEMs in parts consolidation. He used the example of a Nissan Rogue tailgate made of thermoplastic polyolefin (TPO), the use of fibre-reinforced injection-moulded parts (nylon or PP with glass fibre radiator supports), and bio-based plastics. In 2019, Ford announced a partnership with McDonald's USA that involved upcycling coffee bean skins to reinforce certain vehicle parts. Following the use of renewable raw materials in racing cars, the BMW Group announced in 2025 it would use flax-based natural fibre composites from renewable raw materials for its series-production models.

"Five or 10 years ago, everyone was talking about carbon fibre and the BMW i3 had a CF monocoque," said Lammon. "I think that was a blind alley as there's no way to get the cost down properly for a thermoset carbon fibre-reinforced load-bearing structure." He added that the upcoming BMW i3 is going back to a

sense to replace it," he shared. "However, each situation is different with regard to part availability, replacement part cost, location of the damage, paint matching and the possible need to blend onto adjacent panels, and on and on."

### ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

A related issue Lammon mentioned – which isn't often discussed – is the environmental aspects of plastics.

"Most of the scrap plastic is going into landfill now," he pointed out. "Plastic scrap doesn't have the same value as metal scrap, so the collection and infrastructure are not advantageous for recycling."

Scharton said the impact of sending

**"There are huge opportunities to consider repairing over replacing in this parts category."**



traditional steel structure.

Lammon noted the overall progress toward thermoplastic composites, which would mean continuous fibre-reinforced compression-moulded thermoplastics. "These are gaining ground in aviation and eventually the costs will come down to make sense in the automotive sphere," he said.

**Lammon pointed out that the industry suffers from an image problem. "We've all seen the memes with bumper repairs being done with paint sticks and drywall screws."**



to educate others about plastic repair and how it is being developed using legitimate technologies, such as nitrogen-shielded plastic welding and adhesives on the market today.

He stressed the importance of the industry addressing the bias against plastic repair and "opening their eyes to the profit potential and the impact on the environment."

"If someone got burned by a comeback 20 years ago and has written off plastic repair ever since, they need to reconsider now that the technology has developed," he said.

### EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

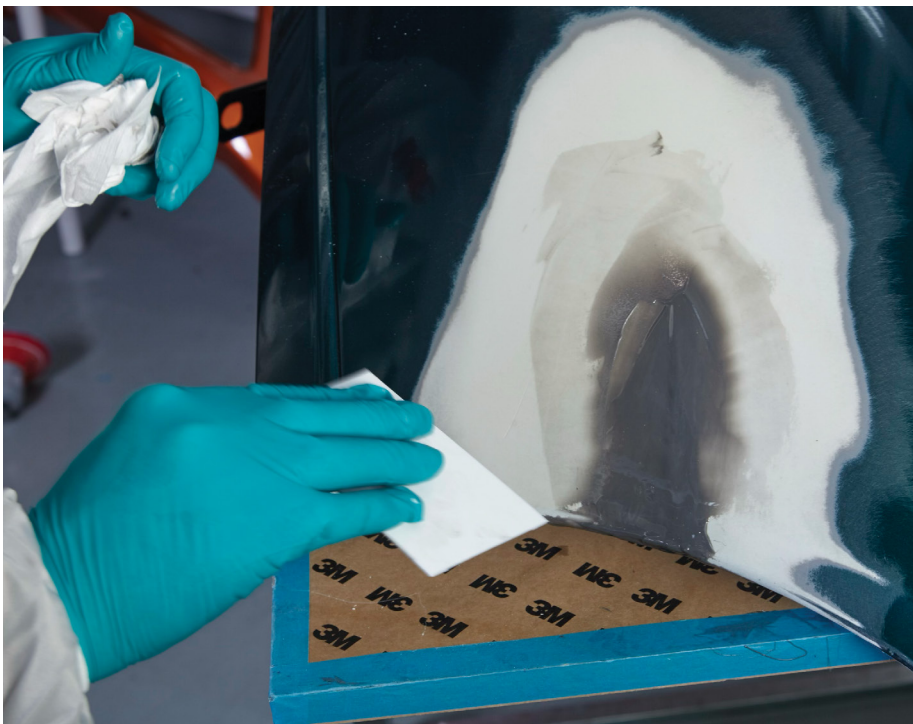
Phillips said that plastic repair has traditionally been viewed as very simple from an educational perspective, so training programmes typically haven't spent much time focusing on it. "Without repetition and continued skill use, technicians become frustrated," he said. "Part of that frustration stems from using inadequate techniques and tooling."

Scharton noted how vocational training programmes are emphasising plastic repair as a critical skill. Plastic repair education is included in the I-CAR Academy curriculum, which focuses on school / apprentice technicians. This type of training is also offered as part of the I-CAR Professional Development Program (PDP) for experienced shop-level technicians.

In addition, the Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) Non-Structural Analysis and Damage Repair (B3) Certification Test includes content related to plastic repair. ASE provides independent third-party testing and certification for automotive, truck and collision repair and refinish technicians. The tests help identify areas where technicians need additional training or practice.

ASE representatives noted that industry experts who reviewed and updated the accreditation standards in 2023 and again this year determined that plastic repair is still a very much needed and valued skill.

SkillsUSA competitions in Minnesota and nationally are showing a marked improvement in student competency in this area, according to Scharton.



"Allowing a newly hired technician to specialise in repairing plastics might be a good approach for shops looking to do more," he said. "Not only does it help a new tech build confidence and skill, but it also allows older techs to focus on other repair areas without having to re-acquire skills lost due to lack of practice."

### HISTORICAL BIAS & FUTURE FORECASTS

Lammon pointed out that the industry suffers from an image problem. "We've all seen the memes with bumper repairs being done with paint sticks and drywall screws," he said.

In response, he encouraged the industry

Stacey Phillips Ronak is a freelance writer for the automotive and technology industries based in Southern California and the owner of Radiant Writing & Communications, a company focused on writing for a wide range of publications and managing communication projects for multinational corporations. Stacey has co-authored two books, including 'The Secrets of America's Greatest Body Shops', and is the winner of multiple APEX Awards including one in 2021 for a column written for *BodyShop News*.



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# FROM THE UK

## WITH HEATHER GRANT

### Vehicle Write-Offs, Women In Body Repair And Illegal Workers All Rising, While Manual Cars Face Extinction

**T**he number of vehicle write-offs in the UK has increased in recent years, with several factors driving the trend. Repair costs have surged, modern cars are much more complex and even minor accidents can involve ADAS recalibration.

A small bump that once required a simple panel repair can now require recalibration of sensors and replacement of expensive electronic parts, to the point that insurers often decide it's not economical to repair.

"We are seeing a clear and sustained increase in vehicles being deemed uneconomic to repair across the UK market," said Neil Joslin, Director at Silverlake Automotive Recycling. "This is being driven by a combination of rising labour rates, increasing parts costs and the complexity of modern vehicles, particularly those with advanced driver-assistance systems.

"What we're noticing in particular is growth in so-called borderline total losses. These are vehicles that historically would have been repaired but are now tipping over the economic threshold. The salvage pool contains more cosmetically damaged, drivable cars than it did previously."

Key findings:

- Mid-range passenger vehicles where repair costs escalate quickly
- Light commercial vehicles, where downtime and cost sensitivity are



More women are considering careers in vehicle maintenance and repair.

critical

- EVs and hybrids, where uncertainty around battery condition can influence decisions.

"At Silverlake, our focus is on delivering consistency and confidence, ensuring that recycled parts are not seen as a compromise but as a reliable, professional solution that supports both commercial and sustainability goals," said Joslin. "We have invested in bespoke technology so real-time parts availability and cost, via our parts portal, can be integrated into body shops' estimating systems, enabling recycled parts to automatically be a realistic option at the very start of the repair process, saving body shops parts sourcing time and boosting workshop productivity."

Industry estimates suggest there were 1.75 to 1.85 million vehicle insurance write-offs in the UK in 2025. If repair costs approach 50 to 70 per cent of vehicle value, insurers often write it off, but write-off thresholds can vary.

Wayne Mason-Drust, Managing Director at Accident Express, said a vehicle that may be treated as a borderline repair in one route can sometimes be pushed more quickly towards total loss in another, depending on the claim type, the commercial model behind it and how the overall costs are being assessed.

"While the industry often talks about write-offs as though there is one consistent approach, in practice there can be noticeable variation," said Mason-Drust. "Manufacturer borderline programmes can be useful where available, particularly when they help keep a repair within reach that might otherwise tip into total loss. In general, anything that supports safe repair retention is helpful, but consistency across the market remains a challenge."

With an ageing UK car parc, more vehicles are likely to sit close to the economic write-off threshold. "An older vehicle may still be a reliable, familiar and

**"What we're noticing in particular is growth in so-called borderline total losses. These are vehicles that historically would have been repaired but are now tipping over the economic threshold."**



affordable asset for the customer,” said Mason-Drust. “The question should not only be whether the vehicle is economic to repair on paper, but whether the customer can realistically purchase a like-for-like replacement after the total-loss settlement.”

Wayne believes that borderline total-loss decisions should be viewed through a customer outcome lens, not only a claims-cost lens. “Under Consumer Duty, customers should receive clear explanations, fair treatment and outcomes that can be evidenced,” he said. “Where a vehicle is technically repairable, there should be a clear record of whether repair-preservation options, recycled parts, manufacturer support or proper repairer input were considered before the vehicle was written off.”

### **WOMEN ENTERING BODY REPAIR INCREASING**

Autotech Academy, which works closely with colleges offering motor vehicle courses and helps newly qualified technicians transition into employment through paid industry internships, says it is seeing increasing numbers of young women choosing careers in vehicle maintenance and repair.

The trend comes at a critical time for the sector. Recent research from the Institute of the Motor Industry shows around 16,000 automotive roles remain unfilled across the UK, with shortages particularly acute in technical positions including diagnostics, servicing and repair.

At the same time, nearly half of the automotive workforce is aged over 45, increasing pressure on employers to replace retiring technicians and attract a new generation of talent.

### **TACKLING EMPLOYMENT OF ILLEGAL WORKERS**

New figures released by the Home

**“The question should not only be whether the vehicle is economic to repair on paper, but whether the customer can realistically purchase a like-for-like replacement after the total-loss settlement.”**

Office highlight a rise in the value of fines issued to organisations found to be employing non-registered workers. The penalties are issued by the Department for Enforcement, Crime and Compliance (DECC) as part of the government’s efforts to tackle illegal working and improve compliance across high-risk sectors.

“This seems an encouraging statistic released by government but closer scrutiny makes one wonder – what is the point and where is the value for money?” said Brian Madderson, Chair of the Car Wash Association. He added:

- The organisation’s FOI requests confirm that only a fraction of these fines is collected (perhaps 5 to 10 per cent)
- The number of organisations fined did not increase and there is little evidence on the ground that non-compliant HCW (hand car washes) are closing because of the DECC actions
- Several organisations have been fined on multiple occasions, indicating that fines are not a deterrent
- The greater value of the fines imposed is entirely due to the government increase

Madderson concluded that there is an urgent need for a national registration scheme to ensure the HCW sector – the

largest in Western Europe - becomes fully compliant or ceases operating. He highlighted that without stronger regulatory measures and effective enforcement, non-compliant operators will continue to undermine legitimate businesses, workers’ rights and consumer confidence in the sector.

### **MANUAL GEARBOX FACING EXTINCTION**

Extinction is looming for manual gearbox cars as well as diesels by the end of the decade, trend analysis by data experts has revealed.

Vehicle Data Global says that although diesel market share has fallen most, the decline of manual transmission is accelerating faster.

Analysis also reveals that the decline of the manual transmission is underpinned by consumer preference as much as Britain’s changing model mix.

The company analysed millions of existing market data points to identify that it is not only replacement of ICE cars by hybrid and EV models driving the decline of manual, but that share has halved since 2016 even for petrol and diesel cars.

Both trends suggest near-simultaneous extinction as soon as 2030, with research, development and production costs increasingly seen as unviable by manufacturers.

It means the end of the traditional ‘motorway mile-muncher’ that dominated fleets and private sales just a decade ago, with diesel’s 92 per cent collapse since 2016 and manuals standing at just 13.7 per cent of the market so far this year.

Based in the UK, Heather Grant has written about the collision repair industry since 1999. She became Editor of UK magazine ‘BodyShop’ in 2000, and after 10 years moved on to become a freelance journalist writing for a wide range of magazines including ‘Motor Industry Magazine’, ‘Repair & Refinish Review’ and ‘Body’ magazine. After serving as Editor of ‘Auto Body Professional’ by ABP Club since 2015, Heather continues to write features for them and contributes to other industry publications including *BodyShop News*.



*Credit: Mazda Motor Corporation*



# FROM THE DESK OF

## SAMBRA

## Why Repairability Is Becoming South Africa's Next Automotive Affordability Challenge

**A**s South Africans keep their vehicles for longer and new technologies become increasingly common, the affordability of vehicle ownership is being shaped by more than the purchase price. Increasingly, the question consumers should be asking is not simply "Can I afford to buy this vehicle?" but "Can I afford to repair it?"

According to the South African Motor Body Repairers' Association (SAMBRA), a proud association of the Retail Motor Industry Organisation (RMI), vehicle repairability is fast becoming one of the automotive industry's biggest affordability challenges, affecting petrol, diesel, hybrid and electric vehicles alike.

"Much of the public debate has focused on whether electric vehicles are more

expensive to repair," says Juan Hanekom, National Director of SAMBRA. "The reality is that repairability has become a broader issue across the entire automotive industry. Modern vehicles are more sophisticated than ever before, and that complexity is changing the economics of collision repair."

Today's vehicles incorporate advanced driver assistance systems (ADAS), cameras, radar sensors, LED lighting, lightweight materials and highly integrated components. While these technologies improve safety and performance, they can also increase repair costs.

"What appears to be relatively minor collision damage can sometimes require replacement of complete assemblies rather than individual components,"



**J Hanekom SAMBRA National Director**

explains Hanekom. "That has significant implications for repair costs, insurance claims and ultimately vehicle affordability."

Electric vehicles add another dimension to the conversation.

"The battery is often seen as the biggest cost concern, but it's important to understand that batteries do not automatically require replacement after every accident," says Hanekom. "Following a collision, the battery must first be safely isolated, inspected and assessed using manufacturer-approved procedures. Only where damage is confirmed, or the battery's integrity cannot be verified, does replacement become necessary. However, because of the battery's value, it can significantly influence whether a vehicle remains economically repairable."

Hanekom says this highlights the distinction between technical repairability and economic repairability.







"A vehicle may be completely repairable from a technical perspective. The repairer may have the skills, equipment and approved repair methods to restore it safely. However, insurers also have to consider the vehicle's market value, total repair costs, potential supplementary damage, repair duration and expected salvage value. Those factors ultimately determine whether repairing the vehicle remains economically viable."

As vehicle technology continues to evolve, Hanekom believes repairability deserves far greater attention from manufacturers, insurers and policymakers.

"Consumers increasingly consider fuel economy, safety ratings and purchase price when choosing a vehicle.

Repairability should become part of that conversation because it directly influences the total cost of ownership over the life of the vehicle."

SAMBRA believes improving repairability requires collaboration across the automotive value chain. While repairers continue investing in specialist training, high-voltage safety systems and advanced diagnostic capabilities, manufacturers and importers also have an important role to play by supporting the local repair ecosystem.

This includes:

- Designing vehicles with repairability in mind.
- Providing repairers with model-specific technical information and diagnostic access.

- Developing clear battery assessment and repair procedures.
- Making individual components available, where safe and practical, instead of requiring full assembly replacement.
- Ensuring adequate local availability of collision repair parts.
- Supporting the repair industry from the moment new vehicle technologies are introduced into the South African market

Although South Africa's new-energy vehicle market continues to grow, fully electric vehicles still represent a relatively small proportion of the national vehicle fleet. Nevertheless, repairers are already investing in specialised equipment, facilities and technician training to prepare for the future.

"The industry is committed to keeping pace with new technology. The next challenge is ensuring that advances in vehicle design are matched by advances in repairability. In the years ahead, repairability will become just as important as purchase price in determining the true affordability of vehicle ownership," concludes Hanekom.

**"The real question is no longer, 'Can I afford to buy this vehicle?' but, 'Can I afford to repair it?'"**



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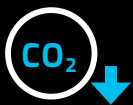






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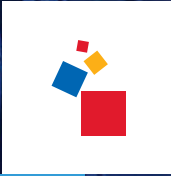


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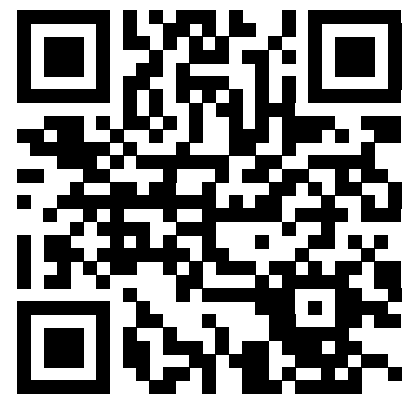
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