

# BodyShop Africa

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**SKILLED TRADE STAYS OFF AI'S FRONTLINE  
EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH PPG'S JEROME ZAMBLERA  
RESURRECTING A 1968 JAGUAR S TYPE**



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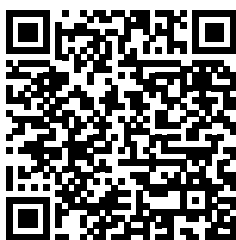
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## TOGETHER, WE DRIVE EXCELLENCE.

As a proud association of the Retail Motor Industry Organisation (RMI), SAMBRA is committed to uplifting industry standards and providing motor body repair peace of mind.

Join our community of dedicated motor body repair professionals today.

### WHY THE SOUTH AFRICAN MOTOR BODY REPAIRERS' ASSOCIATION?



**Advocating  
for a  
transparent  
& sustainable  
industry**



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business  
education &  
knowledge  
sharing**



**Lobbying for  
a fairer more  
equitable  
workspace**

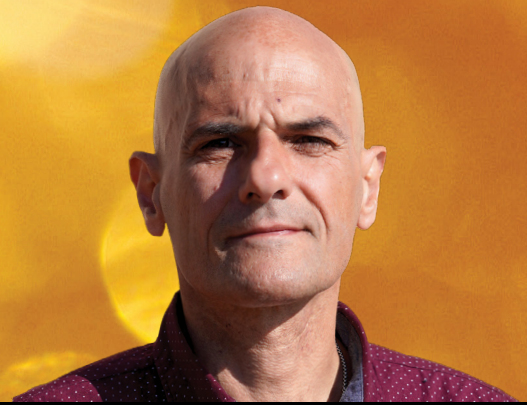


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# MY TURN

BY RIAAN VAN ZYL



**A**s the collision repair and refinish industry moves deeper into 2026, one message resonates clearly through this edition of *BodyShop News Africa*: complexity is rising, but so too is the industry's resolve to adapt, professionalise and lead.

Across these pages, you will see how technology, skills development, regulation and economics are reshaping every part of our value chain. Vehicles are heavier, smarter and packed with safety systems; repair methods are evolving just as quickly. From megacasting and ADAS to AI-assisted planning and estimating, the modern bodyshop is no longer defined solely by craftsmanship, but by precision, data and disciplined processes.

A recurring theme in this issue is the pressure created by escalating write-offs and shifting insurance dynamics. Locally, SAMBRA's call for broader safeguards highlights uncomfortable truths about transparency, consumer protection and the movement of damaged vehicles back into circulation. Internationally, rising claim severity, softening insurance markets and higher deductibles are influencing customer behaviour and repair volumes. These

trends demand more open engagement between repairers, insurers and OEMs on reparability, affordability and long-term sustainability.

Equally important is the conversation around skills. From workplace-based apprenticeships to formalised qualifications such as Vehicle Damage Quantification, the industry is taking meaningful steps to close the gap between certification and real competence. Educators, associations and employers consistently stress that hands-on experience, attitude and accountability matter more than ever. As vehicles grow more complex, the cost of incorrect repairs – technical, financial and human – is simply too high.

Innovation, however, is not confined to technology alone. This edition also celebrates creativity, resilience and passion within our community. From a small independent workshop using social media to rebuild after Covid, to a classic Jaguar revived through patience and craftsmanship, the common thread is an industry that refuses to stand still.

Africa's automotive landscape continues to evolve in powerful ways. Morocco's emergence as a leading manufacturing hub, growing interest

in coatings and refinish across the continent, and closer alignment with global standards all point to opportunity. To seize it, collaboration between repairers, suppliers, insurers, training bodies and regulators will be essential.

As always, *BodyShop News Africa* exists to inform, challenge and connect the people who make this industry work. I hope this edition leaves you encouraged, well informed, and ready to navigate the changes ahead with confidence, integrity and pride in the work we do every day.

That confidence is built through shared knowledge, honest debate and a willingness to confront uncomfortable realities. It grows when safety is prioritised over shortcuts, when standards replace assumptions, and when collaboration overrides fragmentation. Our collective responsibility is to ensure progress does not leave smaller businesses behind, nor compromise the trust placed in us by motorists. The road ahead may be demanding, but it remains navigable – together.

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## Workplace Experience Emerges as Key Factor in Boosting Learner Employability



**Louis Van Huyssteen, RMI National Training Director**

**The Retail Motor Industry Organisation has renewed its call for stronger workplace-based training, emphasising that hands on experience remains the most influential factor in helping learners secure employment**

The message follows insights shared during a recent WorldSkills Conference panel held at the Chief Albert Luthuli International Convention Centre in KwaZulu Natal.

Louis van Huyssteen, RMI National Training Director and member of the merSETA Accounting Authority, joined a discussion focused on understanding what convinces employers to hire a learner after a learnership or apprenticeship. Drawing on the realities of a sector that includes around 23,000 employers and more than 300,000 employees, he highlighted the particularly practical nature of hiring decisions within small and medium sized businesses.

According to van Huyssteen, employers look well beyond formal qualifications when assessing potential recruits. He

explained that businesses want learners who can contribute meaningfully from the first day in a real workshop environment. Exposure to diagnostic tools, real vehicles and day to day customer challenges gives candidates a notable advantage.

He cited successful examples of effective workplace integration at centres such as the College of Cape Town and the Port Elizabeth TVET College. These Centres of Specialisation have drawn positive feedback from employers, demonstrating the value of an approach that blends structured training with real work environments. Van Huyssteen believes the next step is to expand and replicate this model more broadly across the sector.

In addition to technical experience, he stressed the significance of soft skills. Small teams rely heavily on attitude, reliability and a willingness to learn. These attributes often outweigh theoretical knowledge, particularly in environments where productivity and teamwork are essential.

A growing concern in the industry is the widening gap between certification and genuine competency. Van Huyssteen explained that one of the most common reasons employers hesitate to hire newly qualified learners is a lack of practical experience despite holding a formal qualification. This reinforces the need for training systems grounded in routine workplace exposure rather than classroom learning alone.

The value of structured, competency-based approaches was also highlighted. Data from merSETA shows that since 2014, approximately 61,000 learners have undergone training, with about 17,000 qualifying as artisans through apprenticeship routes. These figures underline the measurable impact of workplace centred learning.

Naphtally Mokgotsane, Acting CEO of merSETA, reaffirmed the organisation's commitment to supporting small, medium and micro enterprises in developing artisan skills. He noted that merSETA will continue to prioritise grants and resources that benefit both learners and employers.

While the shift to occupational qualifications has not been without difficulties, van Huyssteen acknowledged encouraging cooperation between the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations, merSETA and industry stakeholders. TVET colleges also have an important role to play as they evolve their delivery models to align more closely with workplace requirements.

Van Huyssteen concluded that the future of skills development depends on bringing training even closer to actual work settings. Minimising time spent away from the workplace, while maintaining high training standards, will help create a system that serves both learners and employers. Strengthening workplace-based apprenticeships is essential for rebuilding the sector's long-term skills pipeline, especially considering the recent decline in the number of qualified artisans.

# Rising Vehicle Write Offs Spark Call for Wider Industry Safeguards

**The South African Motor Body Repairers' Association (SAMBRA) has warned that the increasing number of vehicle write offs is placing the automotive industry under growing strain.**

Some vehicles are reportedly being written off at only 35 per cent of their value, a trend that SAMBRA believes may compromise consumer protection and overall system integrity.

Juan Hanekom, National Director of SAMBRA, which operates under the Retail Motor Industry Organisation (RMI), notes that the surge in write offs is flooding the market with damaged vehicles. This development is placing pressure on current mechanisms that track and regulate the movement of such vehicles.

Hanekom explains that SAMBRA has long supported the creation of a transparent Vehicle Salvage Database (VSD), which would improve oversight of insurance related write offs and provide clearer visibility of these vehicles within the system. However, he believes that the scale of the current challenge means this measure on its own may no longer be adequate.

One limitation, he says, is that the VSD would only apply to insured vehicles. In a country with more than 13 million vehicles on the road and an average vehicle age of around 10.8 years, a significant portion of the national fleet falls outside any formal tracking process. This gap increases the likelihood that damaged vehicles might re enter the market without proper disclosure.

According to Hanekom, some vehicles that are declared uneconomical to repair still find their way back into circulation. This raises concerns about safety, transparency and the reliability of vehicle histories. He warns that the lack of comprehensive regulation may inadvertently encourage practices that undermine consumer confidence.

While the VSD remains a key part of



**Juan Hanekom, National Director of SAMBRA**

the solution, SAMBRA argues that South Africa should consider broader measures that work alongside it. Hanekom points out that several international markets have established structured systems to manage vehicles that have reached the end of their usable life. These systems typically include clear processes for deregistration, dismantling and material recovery, supported by documentation and oversight to ensure accountability.

Any South African framework, he adds,

must be tailored to local conditions and developed collaboratively. Insurers, repairers, manufacturers and regulators would all need to work together to build a system that strengthens transparency and improves safety throughout the vehicle lifecycle.

Hanekom believes that by expanding on existing initiatives, the industry has an opportunity to enhance consumer protection and ultimately contribute to safer roads across the country.

## Motoring Mavericks Inspires New Generation of Auto Leaders



**The National Automobile Dealers' Association (NADA) has unveiled Motoring Mavericks, a campaign designed to help young South Africans see car dealerships as vibrant career destinations.**

With youth unemployment still a national crisis, the initiative aims to show that dealerships are not just about selling cars—they are full-scale businesses offering diverse opportunities.

Modern dealerships rely on technology, data and innovation, creating demand for marketers, finance specialists, HR managers, business leaders and skilled

technicians. "Many senior leaders in the industry started in entry-level roles and worked their way up," says NADA Director Ashley Samuel. "We want young people to see dealerships as places where they can grow, learn and succeed."

The campaign profiles young professionals thriving in roles such as Sales Executives, Marketing Specialists, Service Technicians and Finance & Insurance experts. Their stories, shared through short videos and interviews, provide practical guidance on how to enter the industry and progress.

South Africa's dealership network remains central to the automotive sector, facilitating most of the 596 818 new vehicles sold in 2025. With new brands arriving and technology reshaping the landscape, dealerships are evolving into fast-paced environments where ambitious youth can build strong futures.

Motoring Mavericks will roll out across TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, Facebook and LinkedIn, ensuring young South Africans can easily access career insights and inspiration from peers already succeeding in the automotive retail space.

# GDED Strengthens Township Automotive Sector Through Skills and Enterprise Development

**The Gauteng Department of Economic Development (GDED) is accelerating inclusive economic growth through its High Impact Partnership Delivery Model, a framework designed to deliver measurable outcomes in priority sectors.**

Among these is the automotive industry, a cornerstone of Gauteng's manufacturing base and a vital contributor to township economies.

Through the Automotive Skills Development Programme, GDED is formalising informal mechanics, strengthening township based automotive enterprises and opening pathways into the broader automotive value chain. The initiative is implemented in partnership with MNPC and Qualitas Training, ensuring that both business development and accredited technical training are delivered in a structured, outcomes driven manner.

To date, 78 mechanics have been supported, many of whom previously operated unregistered backyard workshops. Twenty two participants have already completed MNPC's business development programme, receiving assistance with compliance, financial management, market linkages and access to funding opportunities. This support was added to the programme despite not being part of the initial deliverables, underscoring GDED's commitment to holistic enterprise development.

A central pillar of the programme is Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), which allows experienced mechanics to convert years of informal experience into accredited qualifications such as the Red Seal. According to Saalim Adamgee, Director at Qualitas Training, certification alone is not enough; training must build understanding, problem solving and practical competence to meet industry standards.

Beneficiaries have already begun to see tangible benefits. Tshenolo Selete of Tshekzeez Auto in Soweto described the programme as a turning point, enabling him to formalise his business, pursue insurance related work and work towards RMI accreditation.

The programme has also confronted systemic barriers, including national backlogs in issuing trade test serial numbers. GDED worked with accreditation bodies to resolve these issues, demonstrating a proactive approach to implementation challenges.

Building on Phase One, which focused on mechanics in the southern, western and central corridors, Phase Two will expand to include automotive electricians and diesel mechanics in the northern and eastern regions. It will also support access to the G Fleet value chain, OEM supply chains and funding mechanisms such as the Gauteng Enterprise Propeller.

Through structured partnerships, targeted skills development and enterprise support, GDED is enabling township automotive businesses to transition from informal operations to competitive, sustainable enterprises—ensuring they play a meaningful role in Gauteng's evolving industrial landscape.



## Women-led Helderberg Workshop Launches Practical Training Hub to Nurture Future Mechanics



**A women-led automotive workshop in Somerset West is taking a bold step to help address South Africa's growing skills shortage by turning its premises into a practical training environment for young people who want to pursue a career in mechanics.**

Somerset Mechanical Centre (SMC), a long-standing member of the Motor Industry Workshop Association (MIWA), has served the Helderberg community for more than 15 years. Owned by Director Tazkia Abrahams and Co Owner Marjory Mentoor, the workshop is now expanding its purpose. Alongside its repair services, the team is working to support the development of new technical talent for the automotive sector.

The concept emerged as a response to a persistent industry challenge. According to Abrahams, finding qualified mechanics has become increasingly difficult. She explains that several job adverts were posted over the past year, yet very few candidates had the necessary training. Discussions with manufacturers and other industry players revealed a shared struggle, with many competing for the same limited pool of skilled workers.

This prompted Abrahams and Mentoor to consider how their workshop could

contribute more directly to a long-term solution. They began exploring ways to use their operational environment as a platform for structured training and mentorship.

Abrahams says they wanted to find a way to add more value as community members, not only as business owners. This led to the idea of transforming the workshop into a training space where young people could gain real experience.

The initiative is aimed primarily at matriculants from surrounding rural areas, including Strand, Macassar, Firgrove, Sir Lowry's Pass and Grabouw. Many of these young people face limited access to further education and formal employment opportunities.

The programme places strong emphasis on hands-on learning. Abrahams explains that technical skills are vital, but so is guidance on workplace behaviour. Trainees will learn what is expected in a professional environment, including punctuality, responsibility and working within established procedures.

Training will cover essential mechanical skills, with options to specialise in fields such as diesel mechanics and wheel alignment. Participants will also be

introduced to the regulatory requirements that govern a compliant workshop.

The project is being developed with support from key industry bodies, including MIWA, the Retail Motor Industry Organisation (RMI) and merSETA. These organisations are helping to shape the framework and ensure that the training provided meets sector standards.

Mentoor believes that collaboration of this kind is crucial. Training authorities may supply the structure, but workshops offer the practical exposure needed to prepare young people for the realities of the industry.

The initiative also carries a strong focus on community upliftment. Mentoor notes that creating meaningful opportunities for young people from rural backgrounds is central to their vision.

Despite the positive momentum, several challenges remain, particularly around funding, transport and basic daily needs for trainees. Abrahams explains that significant investment has already been made to upgrade equipment and improve the workshop space. However, practical issues such as transport to and from the workshop and providing meals continue to be major considerations, as these factors directly influence a trainee's ability to learn effectively.

Progress is steadily advancing. Compliance procedures are nearly completed and renovations are ongoing. If plans remain on course, SMC hopes to officially launch the training facility on 1 July 2026.

Looking to the future, Abrahams has ambitious expectations for the project. She envisions expanding it into a fully developed training centre in the Helderberg area. This would be a place where young people can learn a trade, gain practical experience and build a sustainable career.

As the automotive industry continues to face a shortage of technical expertise, initiatives like this highlight the vital role independent workshops can play in developing the next generation of artisans.

# FROM THE DESK OF

## SAMBRA

## Bridging the Gap in Vehicle Damage Assessment Gains Industry Momentum

**A long-standing challenge within South Africa's automotive repair and insurance sectors has been the disconnect between vehicle damage estimators and assessors – a gap that has often resulted in friction, delays, and disputes in the repair process.**

At the heart of this divide is a difference in approach. Estimators are trained to look beyond visible damage, accounting for secondary and underlying impact, while assessors have traditionally worked from what is immediately evident. Without a shared technical framework, this misalignment has impacted efficiency, repair accuracy, and ultimately the customer experience.

Encouragingly, the industry is now seeing meaningful progress toward resolving this challenge through the rollout of the Vehicle Damage Quantifier (VDQ) qualification – an initiative that is steadily establishing a common standard across both disciplines.

The Vehicle Damage Quantification Governing Body South Africa (VDQGBSA) is commended for its leadership over the past decade in driving the professionalisation of this critical function. Through its efforts, supported by key industry stakeholders, the VDQ qualification is gaining traction as a unifying benchmark for vehicle damage assessment.

By providing both estimators and assessors with a shared technical foundation, the qualification effectively creates a single source of truth – improving alignment, reducing disputes, and supporting more accurate and consistent repair outcomes.

According to Juan Hanekom, National Director of the South African Motor Body Repairers' Association (SAMBRA),



a proud association of the Retail Motor Industry Organisation (RMI), the growing momentum is particularly encouraging.

“We are now seeing the real impact of this work come through. The first candidates have successfully completed the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) process, followed by the External Integrated Summative Assessment (EISA), and have received their certificates from the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO). This is an important step in formalising the profession and enabling further progress, including alignment with job grading structures,” says Hanekom.

The role of training providers has also been instrumental in supporting this progress. The Institute of Training and Consulting (ITC) has played a key role in facilitating both the RPL and EISA processes, ensuring candidates are assessed against the required occupational standards.

Importantly, industry adoption is accelerating. Several insurers are beginning to incorporate the VDQ qualification and professional designation

into panel requirements, with broader implementation expected as the sector works toward December 2026 targets. This signals a clear shift toward standardisation and a more consistent approach across the value chain.

Hanekom emphasises that while SAMBRA has long supported the development of the qualification, the current progress reflects a broader, collaborative industry effort.

“As SAMBRA, we fully support the move toward standardisation and the professionalisation of vehicle damage quantification. Alignment across estimators and assessors is essential if we are to reduce friction in the system, improve repair accuracy, and ultimately deliver a more consistent and reliable outcome for the customer.”

With over 300 candidates currently in the pipeline, the increasing uptake of the qualification points to a sector that is actively working toward greater cohesion, credibility, and efficiency, underpinned by a shared commitment to raising standards across the industry.



## PPG Announces Major Global Investment in Skilled Trades Education



**PPG, together with the PPG Foundation, has unveiled a significant global commitment of 10 million dollars (R170 million) to be invested through to 2030 in support of skilled trades education.**

The funding places particular emphasis on advanced manufacturing and coatings applications, aiming to equip the next generation of workers with the practical and technical expertise required in modern industrial environments.

The initiative focuses on expanding access to hands on training and specialised knowledge by partnering with technical colleges, vocational schools, community colleges and workforce development organisations. Through these collaborations, the programme seeks to ensure that learners gain job

ready, technology enabled skills that align with the evolving demands of global industry.

Malesia Dunn, executive director of the PPG Foundation and corporate global social responsibility, emphasised both the urgency and the long term value of this investment. She noted that industries across the world increasingly depend on a skilled workforce capable of navigating advancements in coatings application and manufacturing technology. According to Dunn, PPG's goal is to help individuals prepare not only for the challenges of today but also for the workplaces of tomorrow.

This new commitment builds on PPG's previous workforce investment of 2 million dollars allocated for 2023 to 2025,

a target that the organisation not only met ahead of schedule but surpassed.

A key element of the expanded programme is its global reach. In Finland, OSAO Vocational College, one of the nation's largest vocational institutions, has integrated the PPG LINQ digital ecosystem into its automotive painting curriculum, giving students access to cutting edge tools used in the contemporary automotive refinish industry. Similar donations have already benefited 20 vocational schools across Europe.

In China, PPG continues to support the China National Petroleum and Chemical Industry Work Skills Competition, also known as the PPG Master Cup, which prepares students for roles in modern industrial environments throughout 2024 and 2025.

In the United States, PPG funding contributes to the Lost Angels Career Center, which offers a 12 week vocational programme for disadvantaged young adults, combining practical training with an apprenticeship component. The company also supports Pittsburgh's Bidwell Training Center by providing resources, including coating testing equipment, for its Chemical Laboratory Technician programme, enhancing material science education.

In Brazil, PPG continues its long standing involvement with Cidade dos Meninos, supplying paints, coatings and training materials for a free professional course in automotive painting and refinishing.

The new investment coincides with the 75th anniversary of the PPG Foundation in the United States, marking a significant milestone in the organisation's history of supporting education, communities and future innovators. Dunn highlighted that the enhanced commitment to skilled trades remains central to strengthening local communities and developing sustainable career pathways, while also helping meet the growing workforce needs within the coatings and manufacturing sectors.



# How Ford's Shift to Megacasting Could Influence Vehicle Repair Costs



**Ford Motor Company is planning to replace complex assemblies with giant, single piece aluminium castings for its upcoming electric pickup.**

The technique, known as megacasting or unicasting, involves forming large structural sections as single components rather than assembling them from hundreds of smaller parts. Early reporting suggests this strategy is aimed at lowering both production costs and consumer repair bills.

By consolidating many components into one large casting, Ford significantly reduces the complexity of the vehicle's structure. With fewer joints, welds, and seams, potential failure points are reduced, and certain repairs may become more straightforward. This reflects industry findings that megacasting can lower manufacturing complexity and costs, which in turn can lead to reduced repair expenses.

Historically, insurers and repair technicians have been concerned that replacing a large megacast part could be more expensive than repairing traditional multi piece steel assemblies. However, studies of similar gigacast structures, such as those used by Tesla, indicate that these fears may not

fully materialise. Research from Thatcham and WardsAuto shows that gigacast components can reduce repair costs in both partial and full replacement scenarios compared with multi piece constructions. For example, Tesla's gigacast rear structure demonstrated significant savings in real world crash repairs due to reduced labour and simpler part geometry.

If Ford designs its megacastings with modular repairability, as Tesla has done, owners may experience similar benefits. Features such as sectional replacement areas or "wedged in" repair inserts allow technicians to repair only the damaged portion rather than the entire casting. This approach has been cited as a major factor enabling lower repair bills for gigacast vehicles.

Despite the promising potential, megacasting introduces new challenges. According to industry analyses, megacast parts, while robust, are more difficult to repair if severely damaged. High scrap rates and the need for specialised tools and training can increase costs for automakers and potentially for repair shops and insurers. Workshops may need new certifications and

equipment to manage aluminium megacast repairs, which could initially offset some consumer savings.

Given Ford's stated intention to reduce repair bills through megacasting, consumers may ultimately benefit from:

- Lower-cost repairs on low to moderate severity damage where modular repairability is possible.
- Reduced labour hours due to simplified structural designs.
- Faster turnaround times, particularly if Ford invests in standardised repair procedures nationwide.

However, for severe collisions involving structural compromise, repair costs may remain high or even require full casting replacements, a situation that is still evolving as automakers refine repair strategies.

While megacasting brings both opportunities and challenges, available evidence suggests that Ford's adoption of this manufacturing method will likely reduce repair costs for many types of damage, particularly if the company incorporates repair friendly design features already proven effective elsewhere.



## Skilled Trades Stay Off AI's Front Line, says Anthropic



**Workers in skilled trades, including repair-focused occupations, remain among those least exposed to artificial intelligence, according to new research from Anthropic.**

For collision repairers, the message is reassuring but not an excuse to switch off. AI is reshaping office and screen-based work fastest, while hands-on technical roles still depend on human judgement, dexterity and responsibility for physical safety.

Anthropic, the company behind the Claude AI models, analysed real-world use of its systems alongside a task-based view of what today's large language models can plausibly do. In its labour market report, it introduces a measure it calls observed exposure, combining theoretical capability with how often people actually use AI for work, with additional weight given to automated uses rather than simple assistance.

In other words, the research aims to separate what AI could do on paper from what it is doing in workplaces right now.

On that basis, installation and repair roles sit near the bottom of the exposure rankings, alongside other physically grounded jobs such as construction and building and grounds maintenance. While knowledge work is already seeing heavy AI use for writing, coding and analysis, the day-to-day tasks of diagnosis, strip and fit, structural measurement, welding, refinishing and quality control are difficult to digitise. They rely on complex environments, specialist tooling, material behaviour and tacit know-how that is learned on the job.

That does not mean AI will bypass the bodyshop. The fastest gains are likely to come in the surrounding workflows. Think estimating support, parts identification, repair method look-up, supplement narratives, customer

updates, and training materials. On the technical side, AI-assisted scan tools, calibration guidance and image-based damage triage may continue to improve, but they typically augment technicians rather than replace them. The risk, and the opportunity, is that admin-heavy work becomes quicker and more standardised, raising expectations for cycle time and documentation quality.

For repair businesses, the sensible response is to invest in the fundamentals that AI cannot provide: skills development, process discipline, and a culture of safe, correct repairs. At the same time, it is worth tracking which digital tasks you can streamline, because insurers and customers will notice faster turnaround in other sectors and expect similar service. Anthropic's research suggests the spanners are safe for now, but the paperwork and the systems around them are changing quickly.



# Black Cars on the Rise: Global Trend Reflected in South Africa

**Black cars are becoming increasingly popular both internationally and locally, with South African buyers now mirroring global colour preferences.**

According to Jetour South Africa's sales of the new T-series, local customers are showing a bold shift towards darker tones. This echoes findings from global surveys, which reveal that colour is far more than a cosmetic choice — it is tied to identity, style, and even purchasing decisions.

A survey conducted by Axalta across the United States, China, Germany, and Mexico found that 88% of consumers consider colour a key factor when buying a car. Many even delay purchases or switch manufacturers if their preferred shade is unavailable. Similarly, BASF's annual Colour Report shows that while white remains dominant globally, black has steadily gained ground. By 2025, one in four cars worldwide was black.

Locally, Jetour's T2 has seen black emerge as the standout choice since its launch in October last year. Onyx Black accounts for 28% of sales, with the Dark Knight edition adding another 7%. Together, more than a third of all T2s on South African roads are black. Glacier White and silver tones follow closely, while the T1 reflects a slightly different balance, with Titan Silver leading, followed by Onyx Black and Glacier White.

Green is also rising globally as the fastest-growing non-neutral colour, a trend mirrored in South Africa where 15% of Jetour T2 buyers have opted for Aqua Green. Meanwhile, traditional



favourites like blue and red are showing slight declines.

Black's appeal lies in its timeless association with luxury and elegance. Globally, 73% of luxury vehicle buyers select black, valuing its versatility, resale strength, and compatibility with almost any interior trim. Jetour's compact urban-styled T1 and rugged adventure-ready T2 both offer Onyx Black alongside Glacier White, Titan Silver, and Aqua

Green, ensuring customers can align their choice with both global trends and personal style.

As Jetour's sales demonstrate, black is no longer just a luxury statement — it is fast becoming the colour of choice for everyday drivers, reflecting a powerful global shift in automotive design and consumer preference.



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## Axalta Advances Bodyshop Innovation with New AI Driven Planning Partnership



**Axalta has unveiled a new collaboration with aspaara, an advanced AI optimisation platform designed to transform bodyshop planning and operational efficiency.**

Now part of the Axalta Drivus portfolio, the technology offers refinish businesses a streamlined way to manage workflows, eliminate bottlenecks and boost productivity without increasing staffing requirements.

Aspaara's system integrates directly into existing bodyshop management tools, adapting in real time to each workshop's demands. The platform creates a digital twin of the bodyshop and runs more than 5,000 simulations per week, enabling predictive modelling that can increase throughput by as much as 16%. Acting as an AI powered co pilot, it supports the full refinish process—from planning jobs to enhancing booth utilisation—resulting in quicker repair times and improved delivery accuracy.

Fabien Boschetti, Vice President of Sales for Axalta Refinish in EMEA, said the partnership reinforces Axalta's commitment to innovation and customer support. He noted that the company has long championed digital colour retrieval and automated paint mixing technologies, making AI driven optimisation a natural progression for modernising the sector. As bodyshops face growing complexity, Axalta aims to equip them with tools that enable them to adapt rapidly and operate more efficiently.

Following a successful initial rollout in Switzerland, the collaboration is now being extended across Europe, the Middle East and Africa. Bodyshop managers will be able to accept, adjust or override AI recommendations, ensuring human expertise remains central while benefiting from enhanced planning intelligence. Early results show that users can reduce administrative planning time by up to 75%, with many achieving a return on investment in just two months.

Boschetti emphasised that the partnership marks a shift in how bodyshops manage workflow, saying it gives businesses the ability to minimise downtime, optimise technician workload and make informed scheduling decisions. By integrating aspaara into the Drivus ecosystem, Axalta is offering customers a forward thinking solution designed to redefine operational performance in the modern refinish industry.

# BMW and Encory Push Battery Recycling into a New Era with Salching Breakthrough

**Germany has taken another significant step towards closing the loop on electric vehicle battery production as the BMW Group, together with its circular economy joint venture Encory GmbH, begins operating a new Cell Recycling Competence Centre in Salching.**

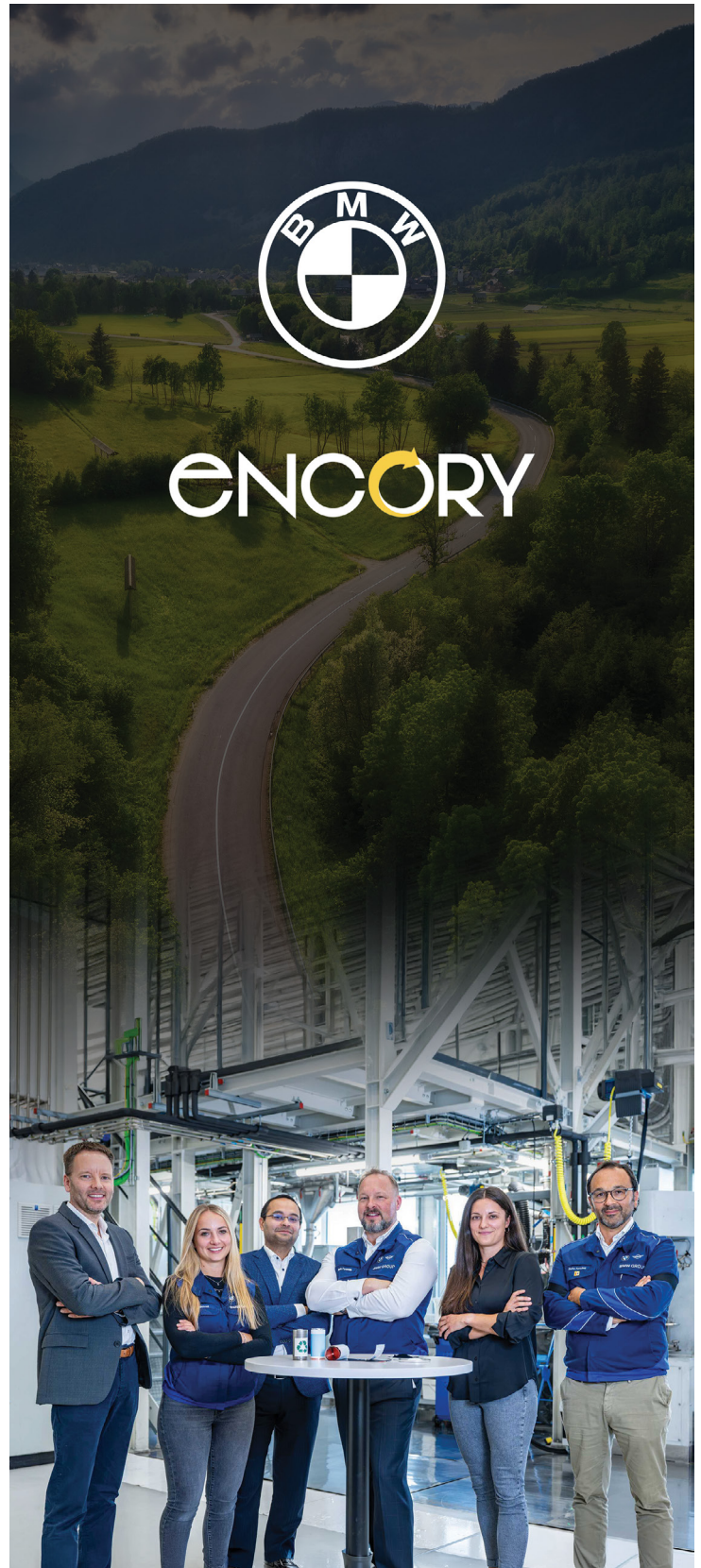
The initiative marks a decisive shift towards mechanical “direct recycling”, a method designed to recover valuable raw materials from battery cell production without the use of energy intensive chemical or thermal treatments.

Instead of breaking cells down into their basic chemical components, the direct recycling process mechanically dismantles production scrap and entire unused battery cells, separating cathode from anode materials so they can be fed straight back into pilot cell manufacturing. This approach preserves more of the materials’ original structure, reduces energy consumption and emissions, and shortens the route back into the production cycle. Markus Fallböhmer, BMW’s senior vice president for battery production, has stated that the technology positions the company at the forefront of sustainable battery manufacturing and offers considerable potential for further optimisation.

The Salching facility, located in a repurposed industrial building of roughly 2,100 square metres of production and warehouse space, also incorporates office areas and rooftop photovoltaic systems that contribute to its energy supply. Once fully scaled, it is expected to recycle material in the mid double digit tonne range each year, with estimates across sources indicating between 50 and 90 tonnes of material annually. The recovered active materials will be transferred to BMW’s Cell Manufacturing Competence Centre in Parsdorf, creating a tight regional loop that keeps transport distances short and strengthens Bavaria’s battery technology cluster.

Encory, founded by BMW and Interzero, is responsible for constructing and operating the site, while BMW retains ownership of the intellectual property behind the mechanical recycling process. Approximately 20 employees are expected to be based at the centre, contributing to logistics, dismantling and materials recovery operations.

With the rapid growth of electric mobility, the pressure to secure reliable supplies of critical battery materials is increasing. By focusing on direct recycling rather than traditional high temperature or chemical methods, BMW and Encory are demonstrating that a more resource efficient, regionally integrated circular economy is both feasible and commercially attractive. The Salching project stands as a practical example of how Europe’s automotive industry can reduce waste, lower emissions and maintain strategic control over essential raw materials at a time when sustainability and supply chain resilience are more important than ever.



# PPG Acquisition Of EMM Forms Part Of Broader Strategy Addressing Industry Trends

PPG recently took control of EMM, the Europe-based manufacturer of Colad, Finixa and Hamach. In an exclusive interview, *BodyShop News Australia* Editor *Darren House* spoke to PPG's Jerome Zamblera, Vice President Automotive Refinish EMEA, about the acquisition and the broader strategy driving the company's diversification activity.

**BODYSHOP NEWS:** PPG has further diversified its product and service offering with the purchase of EMM. What trends are driving these business decisions?

**JEROME ZAMBLERA:** From a broader industry trend perspective, I guess when you look at the refinish industry, most of the focus goes on what is collision repair, right? Now, what is clear is that in many of our global regions, the macros are not positive from a volume perspective. Accident rates tend to be fairly stable when you look at the situation across the world – it's not an issue like we had in 2020 during the COVID years of dropping mobility – there was a drop in miles

**“So for us, this acquisition is a clear strategic move to become a key player in the allied space and really become a one-stop shop to the body shops.”**

driven, which means drop in accident rate. The accident rate is fairly stable.

However, we're seeing in multiple regions and in particular, North America but also in Western Europe in the last two years, there has really been a trend

towards many repairs that would normally end up taking place actually being on hold, based on different reasons. We've seen an escalation in car insurance policy premiums and deductibles as well, so clearly as people's disposable income has not increased to that magnitude,



we've actually seen many consumers taking the decision not to get their car repaired.

So, this has been a significant driver to a soft market not only in 2025 but also in 2024, so over the last two years overall in the mature countries. We know also that totals [write-offs] are increasing, mainly again in North America and Europe, so less cars end up being repaired.

And then, at various speeds, consolidation has been one of the drivers on the body shop level across the various regions – a very high rate in the US for multiple years, a slower rate in Europe; a higher rate in Australia than what we've had in Europe but not at the level of the US.

So consolidation is an ongoing trend, and together with consolidation comes efficiency and increased repair efficiency at the body shop level, which all means – from a paint manufacturer perspective – erosion in volume. That's a little bit of the landscape on which PPG and some of our peers have been working.

Now, clearly what this means is either you just watch and react, or you be proactive. I think one of the key drivers, one of the key differentiators, of PPG over the last few years has been our productivity towards diversifying our portfolio of activities. What our CEO calls inside the paint can, diversifying it to outside of the paint can – and we've had an initial focus on digital services. This started in 2019 – just before COVID – with the launch of our automated mixing machine, PPG MoonWalk.

Then we added a second wave of innovation a few years after with the launch of PPG LINQ, which is our digital ecosystem for the body shop. So, digital services has clearly been a focus for us to offset the trend in the marketplace and the impact on paint volume.

There's also allied products. On allied products, PPG has been doing multiple things over the years. In 2018, we acquired a company in the US called SEM. In 2020 in Europe, we acquired a small Italian company called ICR (Industria Chimica Reggiana), mainly focusing on putties, stoppers and fillers, which is a significant segment within allied products. The acquisition of EMM, which we recently closed, follows the same trend – it's allowing us to continue to diversify outside of the paint can into that allied space.

I don't know the ratio in Australia, but I can tell you that in Europe, the rule of thumb is if a body shop spends €100 on paint and allied, we've got €60 to €70 on paint, €30 to €40 on allied. We've got a strong position on paint in the region and across the various countries, but we still





Credit: PPG Industries Inc

have significant improvement to do in the allied space. It's increasing our share of wallet of the body shop spend.

So for us, this acquisition is a clear strategic move to become a key player in the allied space and really become a one-stop shop to the body shops.

**BSN: You can't create crash demand so in a flat market, it makes sense to sell other products your customers use.**

**JZ:** I want to be clear – it's not that we are forgetting one to focus on the other. We'll continue to focus on expanding our position from a paint perspective. We'll continue to focus on innovating as well and innovating always with one single thing in mind, which is providing repair solutions to our customers that make them more efficient and more profitable.

I think we are positioned very well – we've been able to gain some fairly sizeable business over the last year, with some sizeable carry over into 2026, so that positions us well in 2026 in a market that we see as being 'flatish' from a paint volume perspective. That positions us well to grow our volume and then

everything else – digital solutions, allied – is an opportunity for us to accelerate that growth momentum.

**BSN: You've touched on the market you are responsible for – EMEA. Are trends in that market no different to global trends?**

**JZ:** No, it's not any different. The underlying macros to the collision repair industry are as I described before – an accident rate that is flat on a car parc that frankly, in this region, hasn't really been growing, with the average age of vehicles increasing. This trend is not likely to change.

What we are expecting though, is kind of an uptick, because some of those repairs we discussed before that didn't take place will take place at some point, nourishing repair volume in 2026 and further years. But taking everything into consideration – all the pluses and minuses – at best, we think the demand for coatings in the market is going to be flat. So for us, growth will come from share gain and increasing our share of wallet within the total spend of our

customer base – the body shops.

**BSN: We keep hearing that ADAS and autonomous driving will end crashes – not now but eventually. Is that on your strategy radar or is it too far away?**

**JZ:** It's on the strategy. I remember some of the studies maybe before COVID [or] 2019 were projecting that by 2025, 35 per cent of the total car parc in Europe would actually be fully equipped with ADAS and that we would start seeing the first impact of autonomous driving in the region. Clearly, we are far away from this.

Now, I'm not saying we will not get there, but it's clear that is really a long way out. Still, it's an element we need to take into consideration – although we see the accident rate as being flat, we can expect it will start to slightly erode over time as well. EMEA, the region I manage, is a blend of very mature countries – western Europe – as well as a blend of emerging countries – Middle East, Africa, some of the central European countries. Fortunately, that geographical portfolio is balanced because in the emerging part of the region, we are not expecting the accident rate to actually go down for multiple years in a row. So overall – and I don't have a crystal ball – at least for the next five years we are not expecting that accident rate in Europe is going to go down. In the bigger EMEA region, it is going to go down.

If you take a much longer view – 10, 15, 20 years – we will have continued to look to diversifying our business outside of pure paint for collision repair.

**BSN: Might the diversification strategy broaden and be more ambitious than we've seen so far?**

**JZ:** The sky is the limit. Thinking about the underlying strength, we've got a great team. Speaking about this region, we are the paint company with most 'feet on the street'. We've got a very, very dense and professional distribution network, so we have a reach that is one of the best to the end user in the region.

These are strengths. We are strong from an innovation perspective inside the paint can and outside the paint can.

PPG as a company has a very strong balance sheet that offers the opportunity to invest both in innovation – R&D to call it this way – and potential future acquisition. Personally, yes, I will continue to look for opportunities in this region to leverage my strength – that strong team, strong distribution network, a very wide customer base – in order to look for other opportunities to sell, and that could be selling products, solutions, services as well.

**BSN: Are you close to doing deals with other companies?**

**JZ:** I'm not going to give you anything

**“We are building strength as a company to be able to continue to grow in that industry – take share as well as diversify.”**



EMM headquarters in Zwulle, Netherlands. Credit: EMM International BV



(laughs). Just keep in mind that we're continuously looking for opportunities – organically and inorganically.

**BSN: Onto your most recent diversification purchase – why EMM?**

**JZ:** Well, for multiple reasons. EMM has very strong brands. Very well-known brands and strong brands in the region – Colad, Finixa and also Hamach – for everything that is dust extraction systems as well as, let's say, paint room furniture.

Very strong brands that are well-known with wide distribution reach as well in the region. A very comprehensive product portfolio. Strong competence from the team, strong agility from the team, very strong logistics in the region as well. I'm not saying they cover 100 per cent of a body shop's allied products requirements but very, very close.

These are some of the key assets of a company like EMM, but also, naturally, we've been working with EMM for years. Since we started the project to develop our mix and shake technology – that development was taking place in partnership with EMM. So, we've been

working in partnership with EMM for many years and as our strategy is to be growing our business outside of the paint can and, in particular, in the allied product space, EMM naturally became someone that we started to have further discussions on at a different level.

**BSN: EMM says for customers, it is business as usual post-sale. Can you give us any idea about how the company might change behind the scenes under PPG?**

**JZ:** We will continue to invest with the same plan that EMM had. I'll give you an example – EMM had a plan to expand their warehouse and logistics footprint in the Netherlands. Those investments will continue to support the growth of EMM and we might even decide to go further than what EMM as a standalone company decided to do.

We will continue to invest in the brands of EMM, those three strong brands – Colad, Finixa and Hamach. In particular, the Hamach brand is one where we see a significant potential for expansion in multiple countries in Europe where, as a standalone company, EMM being a medium-size company maybe didn't have the same level of reach to generate that growth.

So, from a customer perspective and thinking about EMM's existing customers, this continues to be business as usual. We will clearly leverage the asset [and] further invest in that asset to expand the reach of the brands and the products of EMM within and outside the EMEA region.

**BSN: I think EMM has significant growth potential in Australia.**

**JZ:** Yes, I agree. In Australia and New Zealand, Asia, North America and Latin America. Strong brands; strong team; very, very strong product range.

**BSN: You mentioned earlier that your peer companies are also responding to**

**the flat body repair market. AkzoNobel and Axalta recently announced a merger, and BASF announced a divestiture of its coatings division. Do you think these moves are part of that response or just coincidental timing?**

**JZ:** It's difficult for me to speak about the driving forces behind some of the decisions taken by my peers, but I would say that if you go back to the beginning of our conversation and think about the longer term trends in the collision repair industry, I think in different ways this has driven key stakeholders, key players in the industry, to find ways to generate faster growth and efficiency, and in different ways.

Two of my peers are considering teaming up because they consider that by getting together, they will be able to generate a lot of efficiencies and higher growth levels than what they are doing independently today. Also, BASF took the decision to partially divest their automotive and refinish businesses at this moment in time because they actually consider that strategically, these businesses will be able to generate better value for shareholders if they are separate from BASF.

You see, it's all in the search of efficiency and growth. We took a different approach, which is to really focus on growing in adjacent segments as a standalone owned company.

**BSN: It's certainly been an interesting few months for the industry.**

**JZ:** It's like everything that happens, right? It's a surprise when it happens but when you think about it – you rationalise it – it's clear. The underlying macros for refinish, overall collision repair, are not macros that are showing an increasing demand but at the same time, we are building strength as a company to be able to continue to grow in that industry – take share as well as diversify. These are really my key messages.

# Dean Furman: Why AI Is the Most Underrated Tool in South African Business

# Dean Furman, South African innovation strategist and CEO of 1064 Degrees, delivered a fast paced, entertaining and often provocative session at the National Automobile Dealers' Association's (NADA) Connect 2026 conference, that challenged business leaders to rethink how they approach artificial intelligence.



Far from being a distant technological horizon, Furman argued that AI is already reshaping sales, marketing and strategy at a speed most companies have not caught up with.

"AI is not the future. It is the present, and for many of you, it is already the past," he said, to a mixture of laughter and uncomfortable nods.

Furman's central message was simple. Companies do not need advanced technical skills to get value from AI. What they need is curiosity, courage and the willingness to experiment.

"Even if you do not know what AI stands for, you can use it like an absolute legend," he joked. He reminded the audience that people often underestimate themselves and overestimate the complexity of modern tools.

He encouraged leaders to ensure that every employee, from junior sales staff to executives, develops basic AI

literacy. This is no longer optional. It is a competitive requirement.

One of the most striking moments in Furman's talk was his demonstration of AI driven role play. ChatGPT acted as a customer, complete with objections, hesitations and specific product concerns. After Furman responded in real time, the AI evaluated his performance with candid precision.

It told him, "You are friendly and eager, but you leaned too heavily on broad claims. Back it up with specific facts."

Furman explained that this level of personalised feedback, delivered instantly and consistently, is something even the best sales managers struggle to provide at scale. With AI, every salesperson can rehearse tough scenarios, refine messaging and dramatically improve closing skills.

Furman demonstrated how AI can assess marketing collateral with

professional precision. He uploaded an advert and asked the system to critique it as a world class content strategist. The AI quickly dissected the weaknesses, scored multiple categories and produced a sharper version tailored for emotional impact.

"It is like having a marketing agency in your pocket," Furman remarked. He highlighted that brands can refine brochures, social posts and website content in minutes instead of weeks.

Furman devoted part of his session to the new generation of "thinking modes". These allow AI models to reason, solve multi step problems and approach challenges with structured logic rather than surface level text prediction.

He explained that models like Gemini, when placed in thinking mode, demonstrate intelligence comparable to Mensa level reasoning. "Why would you not call in something with a 150 IQ to help you? It is sitting there, waiting for you to use it," he said.

Leaders, he argued, should already be using AI to support strategic planning, scenario modelling and operational optimisation.

Furman also cautioned the audience about data privacy. Many businesses unknowingly expose sensitive information when using free AI tools.

"If you do not switch off that 'improve the model' setting, you are basically giving them the right to use your information however they want," he warned.

He emphasised the importance of enterprise grade tools and clear internal guidelines.

To Furman, the companies that win will be the ones that weave AI into every project, meeting and decision.

"The question should always be: how can AI help us in this?" he said. "Not occasionally, not once a quarter. Every single time."

He closed with a message that was equal parts challenge and encouragement:

***"You do not need permission. You just need to start."***

# The Resurrection of an Old English Dame



Friends who help you spend your money can be either the best friends to have, or the worst. In this case, it turned out to be the former.



In 2017, a friend of Frik Botha alerted him to an advertisement in Landbou Weekblad for a 1968 Jaguar Type S. The car stood on a farm in Schweizer-Reneke in the Northwest Province, slowly surrendering to rust and time. At first glance, little remained of her former glory: a faded, rusty baby-blue paint job, an ill-conceived aftermarket sunroof, a skew nose likely caused by an old accident, and an incorrect 4.2-litre engine replacing her original 3.8-litre heart.

For R15,000, she earned a place on Frik's trailer and the beginning of a restoration journey that would stretch nearly eight years. The first three were largely spent waiting her turn.

The initial task was removing the unsightly sunroof. Frik purchased another Type S as a donor car, sourcing both a correct roof and a replacement nose. Next came the hunt for the correct 3.8-litre inline-six engine. Despite warnings that such a motor would be impossible to find, Frik located two suitable engines within 20 minutes online. One replaced

the mismatched 4.2-litre unit, bringing the car to a "more or less running" state.

In October 2021, the Jaguar was trailered again, this time to British Sports Cars South Africa in Brentwood Park, Kempton Park. There, a full nut-and-bolt restoration began. Only in November 2025 did the restored Type S finally leave the workshop for good.

Talking to Frik is an experience in itself. Raised on a farm in Zambia, he learned mechanical basics early out of necessity. Though a forester by trade, his passion has always been cars, particularly those



with character. That philosophy reflects in his collection: 24 unique vehicles shared with his family, including his wife's MG GT, an old Vanguard, a Maserati, a left-hand-drive Mini, three Jaguars, and a Daimler Mark 2 V8 currently under restoration.

A conversation with Piet and Quintin, the father-and-son owners of British Sports Cars, quickly explains why such restorations take years. Parts availability is one of the biggest challenges, especially for classic and foreign vehicles. While body panels can often be repaired or sourced from donor cars, engine and chassis components are far harder to obtain.

Although many parts are still available in the UK, importing them into South Africa has become increasingly difficult and costly. Where parts once arrived within days, they now often require private couriers. Frik recalls ordering two small suspension rubbers for R1 700, only to pay R2 000 in courier fees. Every mechanical component for the Type S had to be imported.

Restoration services add further expense. Chroming and wood veneering are particularly costly, with the Daimler's woodwork alone amounting to roughly R40 000.

So, what was on the Type S's job list? In short; everything.

The brief was to restore the Jaguar as a usable daily driver, meaning not every repair adhered strictly to original equipment specifications. Decisions balanced cost, safety, drivability, and originality.

With the engine already overhauled, attention turned to the body. All rust was identified, repaired, and treated. The suspension and differential were rebuilt, brake pipes replaced, and the entire wiring harness redone. Original glass fuses were replaced with modern units, with additional safety circuits added. The steering box was swapped for a power-steering rack from a Jaguar XJ6, and the automatic gearbox was upgraded accordingly.

The body and chassis were stripped to bare metal and resprayed in Willow Green, an original E-Type colour. All chrome was re-chromed, wooden trim hydro-dipped offsite, and a custom stainless-steel exhaust fabricated in-house. Inside, the seats were reupholstered in genuine leather, soundproofing installed, new carpets fitted, and a custom-built fibreglass centre console replaced the fragile original hardboard unit.

In February 2025, the Type S embarked on her first proper outing: a drive to the George Old Car Show. Despite weighing 1,888 kg, she drove beautifully: light, composed, and swift on her 205/65R15 tyres. Fuel consumption, at roughly 6 km per litre, is best politely glossed over.

The return trip revealed overheating issues caused by a partially blocked radiator, which was later professionally flushed. Heat shielding was added to protect the boot-mounted fuel pumps, and the engine was replaced with the second overhauled unit Frik had sourced earlier.

What won't be discussed is the total cost of the restoration. As Frik puts it: "If it's worth doing, then do it right, without shortcuts."

"Greenie," as Frik calls her, has since done a matric farewell drive, complete with a bonnet flying open and draping itself dramatically over the car. Frik maintains that mixing money with passion spoils the joy, preferring smiles and excitement over profit.

With the Jaguar ready for delivery in November 2025, Frik has decided to sell her to an enthusiast who will use and cherish her as intended. The asking price is R300,000, an amount that barely hints at the true cost of such a restoration. Should she not be sold by February, she may well appear again at the George Old Car Show on Saturday, 14 February.



# How Post-Covid Out-of-the-box Thinking Turned Around the Fortunes of Small Edenvale Collision Repair Shop

In the bustling collision repair landscape of Edenvale, few businesses embody resilience and innovation quite like Omnia Panelbeaters. At the heart of this transformation is Ronald Janki, part owner and driving force behind the shop's growth. With a genuine passion for cars and a willingness to rethink traditional approaches, Ronald has helped guide Omnia through post Covid challenges, digital shifts and the competitive pressures facing small repair shops today. In this interview, he shares the story behind their success, the impact of creative social media marketing, and the lessons he's learned along the way.

**Your video shorts on social media caught our attention, which means they are clearly successful. Tell us when you started creating them. Is there an interesting story behind it?**

We started in 2020, shortly after Covid. There is no dramatic story behind it other than the impact of the Covid period. We essentially had to rebuild our client base from scratch and the most effective way to do that was through social media, which everyone had become accustomed to during that time.

In the beginning we gained only two or three clients and for at least a year it felt as though nothing was happening. However, consistency proved to be the key. Today, around 50 percent of our walk in business comes from online marketing.

**Why did you start creating the short videos, and who is your target audience?**

We started by answering frequently asked questions from our clients. The aim was to educate and engage people who might need our services, so our target audience includes current clients, potential clients and anyone interested in collision repair or custom work.

**Have you seen measurable results from these short videos? Has a customer ever said they chose your shop because of the videos?**

We do not have formal statistics, but many clients tell us they have seen us on Facebook, TikTok and other platforms. Yes, we have had customers choose our shop specifically because they saw our videos online.

**You are a member of SAMBRA. Tell us about your relationship and experience with them.**

Yes, we are members. Other than the fact that certain insurance companies require the Retail Motor Organisation (RMI) or South African Motor Body Repairers Association (SAMBRA) membership, and that the association's branding may give clients some reassurance, we are not always sure how else to make full use of SAMBRA's benefits.

**Tell us a little about yourself, your business and how you ended up in the collision repair industry.**

I have always had a passion for cars and bikes, especially customising them to my own taste. That is how it all began. I used to buy and sell cars and motorcycles and used this body shop for all my reconditioning work.

In 2016, the owner asked if I wanted to buy the business, and I did. Unfortunately, I soon discovered that it came with a lot of debt and bad habits. I decided to make a complete change by rebranding the business and moving to a new location.

By 2019 the business had grown and I realised I needed help, so I sold shares to a family member who came from the collision industry. Combining our expertise has allowed us to keep developing new ideas and continuously push for improvement. We simply keep trying until we succeed.

**What do you see as the biggest current challenge facing collision repair in South Africa?**

There is intense economic pressure on smaller shops like ours. Most collision repair work is directed to the larger, well known shops. The gap between manufacturer approved shops and small shops is significant because we cannot afford the space, equipment and highly specialised staff required for approval.

**Are you experiencing any challenges in repairing electric vehicles?**

Not at this stage. We have only carried out body work on electric vehicles so far and have not experienced any problems yet.

**What final advice would you offer to other repairers or newcomers entering the industry?**

Do not overthink it. Get started and maintain a consistent standard of quality. Remember that you will win some and lose some, and you must simply keep going.



Ronald Janki and Shaun Singh





# FROM THE USA

WITH STACEY PHILLIPS RONAK

## Navigating The Seas Of Insurance Trends In 2026

Over the last several years, the collision industry has seen a rise in claim severity and the number of vehicles deemed total losses. Many contend that it's due to more technology-driven vehicles on the roads.

During a recent CIECA Webinar, Patrick Sullivan, Editor at Auto Insurance Report, published by Risk Information, discussed these trends and their impact on the collision industry in his presentation, 'Navigating the Seas of Insurance Trends'.

"The last couple of years have been interesting, to say the least," said Sullivan.

He told how consumers are moving away from purchasing sedans and compact vehicles and focusing instead on SUVs and trucks. "They are bigger, more powerful, heavier and packed with more features than ever before," he said.

Compact SUVs make up the largest market share and are primarily purchased by millennial-aged women.

According to data from Cox Automotive and S&P Global Mobility, the average cost of a new vehicle is approximately US\$50,000. Research shows that Americans earning under US\$150,000 are opting out of the new-car market and purchasing and/or leasing used vehicles.

"New cars are becoming largely a luxury product," said Sullivan, who pointed out that buying a three-year-old car is a much different experience than in the past.

"Considering how cars are made today, they have much longer life expectancies," he explained. "They're much better

products than what was on the road in the '80s or '90s, or even the early 2000s." At the same time, newer vehicles have an abundance of technology and safety features.

### CLAIMS SEVERITY ON THE RISE

With Americans buying heavier, more complex vehicles, Sullivan said it often results in more severe accidents and complicated repairs. This is one of the main factors driving up severity, as well as weather-related events.

Since 2008, severity has nearly doubled. According to data from CCC Intelligent Solutions, the average claim in 2000 was US\$2,500, compared to US\$4,768 in Q3 2025.

The largest spike occurred between 2020 and 2021. "You saw a 10.2 per cent increase in the cost of claims and it did not go back down," said Sullivan. Costs have since plateaued, offset by higher insurer rates.

Many people associate severity with safety, technology and ADAS. "Although that plays a role, it's not exactly what's going on," explained Sullivan. "ADAS is only about a third of the fleet, which is a substantial number but not enough to be the main driver of severity issues. Frequency and higher rates have made up the difference."

An additional factor is how vehicles are built. Sullivan told how Vision Zero remains the guiding light for OEMs. The Vision Zero Network defines Vision Zero as a strategy to eliminate all traffic fatalities



Patrick Sullivan. Credit LinkedIn

and severe injuries while increasing safe, healthy and equitable mobility. It was first implemented in Sweden in the 1990s and is gaining momentum in some American cities.

"They've [OEMs] been focused almost exclusively on saving lives and I think very successfully," Sullivan said. However, he said it is resulting in some blind spots around severity, such as new technology and safety features.

Sullivan said total losses have also risen over the last decade. "We're at the highest rate we've ever seen," he said. According to CCC, about 22.8 per cent of claims are total losses. This is up from 16.7 per cent in 2015 and 20.2 per cent in 2023. "This is happening at a time when used car prices are rising, which normally sees a decline in total loss rates as those cars become worth more as used or salvaged vehicles," Sullivan explained. "It's not so much new cars driving this, but the aging fleet."

In addition, there is a decline in lower-dollar claims, which Sullivan said typically results in cars being totalled faster.

The average age of vehicles today is about 12.8 years old. "When those cars get into an accident, they are pretty much totalled," he said. "The decline in low-dollar claims means you're eliminating a lot of those, leading to more high-severity

**Americans earning under US\$150,000 are opting out of the new-car market and purchasing and/or leasing used vehicles. "New cars are becoming largely a luxury product."**

claims and total losses.”

Repairers often tell Sullivan that cars are totalling out faster due to their advanced electronics. “You need less damage for a total loss than you did historically,” he said.

In addition to new ADAS features, there are wires, cameras, sensors, seat warmers, touchscreens, mega casting and calibration, all of which are leading to a more complicated repair. “The addition of accident-avoidance technology and the complexity that accompanies it is not offsetting severity or frequency,” he said.

With a fundamental change taking place to repair a car, Sullivan also found that OEMs aren’t thinking about repairability. “When it comes to repairability, they’re focused on Vision Zero, and they’re focused on making premium cars that sell,” he said. “As you add complexity and severity gets higher, it pushes insurance pricing up.”

### INSURANCE INDUSTRY UPDATE

Sullivan spoke of how insurance carriers experienced ups and downs over the last five years, with 2022 and 2023 being the worst years since at least the 1970s.

Not only were there fewer people on the road during the pandemic, but Sullivan



Credit: Clark Van Der Beken / Unsplash

With the market dramatically improving over the last couple of years – due to claims frequency spiking after the pandemic – insurers recovered in Q4 2024, posted record profits in 2025, and are now hungry for growth in 2026. However, it is expected to be a softer market this year and in 2027, which will heat up competition.

industry during the pandemic, leaving lingering shortages.

### IMPACT OF COMPLEXITY

The changing vehicle landscape has impacted the industry in several ways.

In terms of parts prices, the average price per claim has increased from 8.9 parts in 2013 to about 13 parts in 2025. The average labour hour per claim rose from 23 in 2013 to 26.7 in 2025.

“These cars are far more complicated to repair and they take longer,” said Sullivan.

Photo estimating, which Sullivan said was all the rage a decade ago, has been found by many to be less effective than anticipated due to changes in how cars are manufactured.

Supplements have also been affected. “At one time, they were viewed as mistakes in the initial estimate,” Sullivan recalled. “Now, with more than half of claims having supplements, they are more like updates.”

More than half of the claims include a supplement. “A lot of calibrations end up in supplements and I think carriers are starting to realise they need to treat supplements as something they need to respond to quickly,” said Sullivan. “Not only will they have a better claim experience with the customer, but also with the shop.”

With the average cost of calibration about US\$500 per vehicle, Sullivan said it is expensive, critical to functionality and requires specialisation “All the tech

**“The addition of accident-avoidance technology and the complexity that accompanies it is not offsetting severity or frequency.”**

said drivers were driving at much higher speeds. There was also less enforcement and more distracted driving.

“The response from carriers was to push rates really hard to try and get back to profitability,” he explained.

Following the pandemic, traffic increased but people didn’t change their driving behaviour. “They kept driving at faster speeds and being distracted,” said Sullivan. “They kept ignoring good, safe driving and crashing at a much higher rate.”

Meanwhile, a shortage of parts and technicians led to increased cycle times.

In response, insurance rate increases were being pushed very aggressively, particularly in 2023. While rates rose 12 per cent in 2022, they increased 16.9 per cent in 2023. By 2025, they tapered off, with only 0.5 per cent from the top 10 carriers.

“They needed to raise rates because they had to be able to pay claims and they had to have enough money to do so, particularly in an increased severity environment,” he pointed out.

Sullivan said the carriers that raised rates were those that noticed frequency rising and the impact of severity.

“[The insurers] will not hit the record profits they hit last year and they’re going to try and control for that and save money,” said Sullivan.

### CHANGING SHOP LANDSCAPE

Since the pandemic, Sullivan said that shop consolidation has increased. As a result, repairers have realised that specialisation and certification are key.

“The days of the generalist shop are numbered,” he said. “The infrastructure costs alone are going to force that.”

There is substantial investment required in equipment and facilities, especially for electric vehicle technology, as well as training, which can be costly. “All of that technology requires someone who is really well educated to fix it,” he said.

Many skilled technicians exited the

**Repairers have realised that specialisation and certification are key. “The days of the generalist shop are numbered. The infrastructure costs alone are going to force that.”**



stuff doesn't work if it's not calibrated appropriately," he emphasised. "Over time, calibration is going to become essential for the repair and maintenance of a vehicle."

### 2026 FORECASTS

Sullivan discussed some trends the industry can expect this year.

- **Tariffs:** The uncertainty of tariffs complicates parts and repair costs. Rather than pre-emptively raising rates, Sullivan observed that insurers and OEMs have waited to see how things shake out. "They're going to have to adjust their pricing once they know what to do," he said.
- **Consumer Trends:** Research shows that car purchases increased from the end of 2024 to 2025. The group shopping the most were those with high credit insurance scores. "Customers are looking

**Photo estimating, all the rage a decade ago, has been found by many to be less effective than anticipated due to changes in how cars are manufactured.**

don't want their rates to go up or be non-renewed or cancelled.

Sullivan talked about the changes in claim frequency associated with ADAS.

According to research from the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS), there is approximately a 33 per cent reduction in claims for physical property damage and injury frequency associated with cars equipped with ADAS. This is partly due to automatic emergency braking and low-severity claims.

Looking at ADAS's impact on the bottom

feels like we're 10 to 15 years away," said Sullivan. Although there are robotaxi deployments in certain municipalities, the technology is still in its infancy and mainly focused on commercial vehicles.

"Taking the steering wheel out of the hands of Americans is going to take time," said Sullivan. Not only are there cultural and regulatory barriers to overcome, but there are also commercial and product liability legal issues.

Sullivan said that ADAS, which currently tops out at about 30 mph (48 km/h), helps reduce low-cost claims and avoid catastrophic accidents. However, there are still challenges with safety-related technology, often resulting in strange,

unpredictable accidents.

"These accidents don't impact Vision Zero but they do impact claims costs," he said.

Sullivan also discussed the total cost of ownership. "If OEMs want to drive down the cost of ownership, they need to consider repair in auto design," he emphasised.

To help manage the changes taking place, Sullivan stressed the need for standardisation and ensuring safety procedures are up to par. "Safety may be number one, but people can't be safe if they can't afford the car or insurance," he said.

To help address these challenges, Sullivan said it requires OEMs and insurers to interact. "These groups have little to no relationship at the senior level," he pointed out. "They haven't needed to have a relationship like this in the past but with the way cars are behaving today, they kind of do."

**"Safety may be number one, but people can't be safe if they can't afford the car or insurance."**

for a better deal, in large part because their rates just went up tremendously and they're trying to save some money," he said.

- **Economic Headwinds:** In his conversations with economists, Sullivan found an abundance of uncertainty, whether it's related to job reports, tariffs or imports. That instability is leading people to make cost-saving choices, such as raising their deductible from US\$500 to US\$1,000.
- **Claims Frequency:** Sullivan commented on the "masking of frequency" in the industry. While there are fewer claims, it's not attributed to fewer accidents. This is resulting in more out-of-pocket spend for repairs because drivers

line, Sullivan noted a one-third decline in physical damage and body injury frequency, and a significant reduction of low-severity claims. In addition, a third of the fleet is outfitted with a full ADAS package, according to IIHS.

Sullivan said this hasn't yet impacted insurance pricing. "It just hasn't penetrated enough of the fleet to make a difference when it comes to how pricing functions for auto insurance," he said. "It will. There will be a snowball effect as older cars come off the market and they're replaced with cars with the most advanced tech."

### THE ROAD AHEAD

In 2013, Sullivan recalled how Waymo founder Anthony Levandowski forecast that autonomous vehicles were 10 to 15 years away. "Thirteen years later, it still

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



## New Certification Scheme, EV Battery Repair Blueprint, Boosting Recruitment, AI Estimating, And EVs Declared Eco-Unfriendly In UK

### NEW CERTIFICATION SCHEME

Body shops are being urged to sign up to SERMI – Security-related Repair and Maintenance Information – a new European certification scheme designed to create a trusted, secure route for independent garages and body shops to access security-related repair and maintenance information. The scheme, which will become a key requirement, aims to help reduce the need for multiple vehicle manufacturer accreditations.

SERMI will enable legitimate independent body shops and technicians to access vehicle manufacturer data such as vehicle security systems, key programming and ADAS-related security functions. It means that certified businesses can prove their integrity, competence and security compliance, and that appropriate processes are in place to handle sensitive vehicle security information.

The Independent Garage Association has achieved full approval to be the certifying body for the SERMI scheme in the UK. Stuart James, Chief Executive Officer of the Independent Garage Association, said: "This has been a 17-year journey and the scale of this achievement cannot be underestimated. Independent garages have long faced barriers accessing vital security-related vehicle information, and SERMI now provides a recognised, trusted route to that access."

### THATCHAM'S BLUEPRINT FOR EV BATTERY REPAIR

Thatcham Research has launched a new blueprint to address the growing



challenge of electric vehicle insurability and repair costs, aiming to prevent a growing number of EVs from being unnecessarily written off each year.

The EV Blueprint establishes eight critical requirements for the automotive industry, designed to ensure battery electric vehicles can be safely assessed, efficiently repaired and economically maintained throughout their lifecycle.

The automotive industry has made significant progress over the past five years in understanding EVs, said Thatcham Research. Repair centres across the UK can readily identify electric vehicles and understand the fundamental safety requirements to protect technicians working on high-voltage systems. The industry has gained confidence in handling EVs, and the focus has shifted from basic safety awareness

to the need for more efficient recovery, assessment and repair processes that make economic sense.

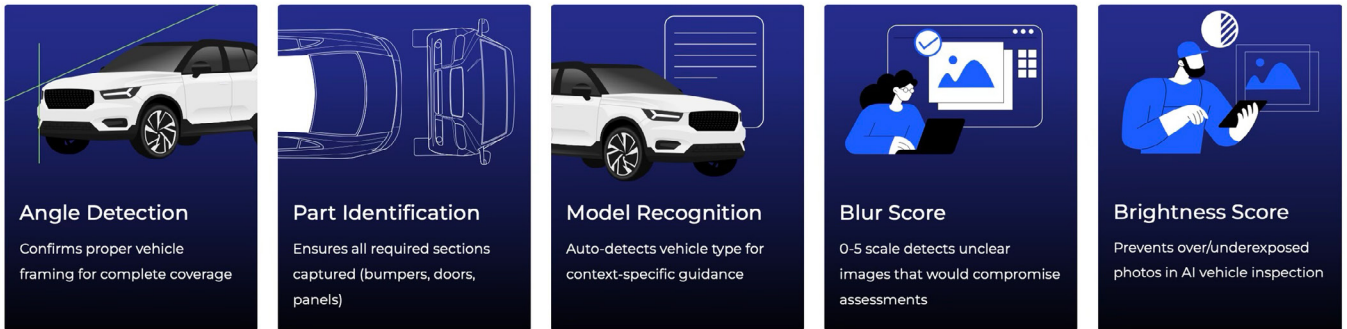
However, to achieve increased efficiency, some operational challenges remain. A recent Thatcham Research survey, conducted in partnership with the Centre for Economics and Business Research, reveals that battery-related issues remain the primary concern for 44.6 per cent of insurers and 41.7 per cent of repair professionals. With batteries accounting for up to 40 per cent of a vehicle's total value, even minor collision damage can result in total loss determinations, particularly as vehicles depreciate over time.

The framework addresses two fundamental challenges – post-collision diagnosis and assessment, and post-collision repair execution. By tackling these issues, the blueprint aims to reduce total loss rates, improve salvage and residual values and ultimately influence insurance premium structures.

The initiative calls on vehicle manufacturers, battery manufacturers,

**Battery-related issues remain the primary concern for 44.6 per cent of insurers and 41.7 per cent of repair professionals.**

## Real-Time Quality Validation



repairers, insurers and training providers to adopt these recommendations, ensuring the electrification transition remains economically sustainable for industry and consumers.

### ENCOURAGING NEW AUTOMOTIVE RECRUITMENT

The Automotive 30% Club recently launched a new initiative to encourage automotive recruitment during National Careers Week (2 to 6 March 2026). The campaign featured those working in automotive to share why they chose a career in the car industry to help inspire others to follow in their footsteps.

**“Most young women don’t realise they are welcome in our industry and that women are thriving in all our roles.”**

Julia Muir, Founder and Leader of the Automotive 30% Club, said: “There are nearly one million unemployed 16 to 25s in the UK, from school leavers to graduates – many of them unfairly rejected by AI screening tools or low calibre recruiters who can’t spot potential, or rejected by employers who mistake confidence for competence, or confuse experience for expertise, or are ignoring their technical and technology skills or strategic thinking skills due to having social skills that are different to their own. Many apply for hundreds of jobs and rarely even get a reply.

“Many of the young people don’t know the automotive sector has thousands of different job vacancies because nobody tells them. Most young women don’t realise they are welcome in our industry and that women are thriving in all our roles.”

### THE FIVE-MINUTE AI ESTIMATE

The responsibility placed on a vehicle damage assessor (VDA) in a body shop is enormous. Every minute lost in estimating a vehicle is a minute that delays parts ordering, extends cycle time and reduces throughput. First-time accurate estimates are essential not only because they underpin body

shop profitability, but because they directly influence workshop efficiency, technician productivity and key-to-key times. Overestimating and ordering parts that are not required can be just as damaging as underestimating and missing damage – both scenarios create waste, delays and avoidable cost.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the average estimate to identify structural damage can take around two hours or more to compile, depending on the complexity of the vehicle damage. VDAs must gather evidence, interpret damage, apply OEM repair methods, consider

ADAS implications and ensure a safe repair route, all while working under increasing pressure to reduce cycle time. With that in mind, if AI is available to assist and underpin the technical knowledge required to create a fully costed, safe and consistent repair estimate, why wouldn’t a business take advantage of it?

I have been looking at the Inspektlabs AI-powered estimating system, that from vehicle scan to creating a costed estimate, can be achieved in around five minutes. Since its formation in 2018, Inspektlabs has delivered more than 10 million AI-assisted inspections worldwide and operates in around 23 countries, with customers including insurers, fleet leasing companies and body shops. Alongside speed and consistency, the platform has also been developed to reduce fraud. By analysing images and video, the system can also identify older, unrelated damage or detect potential photo manipulation, helping to protect repairers and insurers from inflated claims and insurance scams.

The Inspektlabs inspection solution can be accessed using either a smartphone or the company’s dedicated 360-degree fixed camera system, installed on pillars or walls.

The fixed scanner is faster, typically taking around two minutes to scan a vehicle, and delivers greater accuracy due to consistently clear, repeatable imaging. Smartphone inspections, by comparison, may miss micro-damage, particularly in poor lighting or where operator angles are inconsistent. However, the smartphone workflow guides the user through each step and prompts retakes if image quality is insufficient.

Both systems capture key vehicle information including marque, odometer reading, VIN and registration number, and can identify damage across bodywork, mechanical and electrical systems, including advanced driver-assistance systems.

Designed to assist the VDA to create an estimate in as little as five minutes, body shops are starting to ask a new question – not whether the technology works, but what it’s costing them to do things the old way?

### EVS ECO-UNFRIENDLY IN UK

Electric vehicles deliver ‘no proven carbon savings’ in the UK, according to a study by researchers from Queen Mary University. Because the UK’s electricity grid hasn’t switched to renewable energy sources, EVs “run almost entirely on fossil fuel burnt at power stations”, according to the team. As a result, the experts claim the most eco-friendly option is a hybrid or efficient diesel car.

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*.

# JOURNEYS INTO THE INDUSTRY

WITH CHRIS VILJOEN

## The Unseen Weight of a Motor Assessor

In the public eye, the role of a motor assessor is often misunderstood. It is commonly reduced to simple assumptions: someone who inspects damaged vehicles and approves or declines repairs. In reality, the profession extends far beyond that narrow perception. Motor assessing is not a transactional task—it is a technical, forensic discipline requiring judgement, composure, and the ability to navigate competing interests with consistency and neutrality.

There is a saying often heard in workshops: “We can fix cars, but we can’t fix people.” While light-hearted, it captures a core truth of the profession. The greatest challenges are rarely mechanical; they are human. Each assessment carries emotional weight. Clients seek resolution, repairers seek approval, insurers seek accuracy. The assessor stands in the middle, interpreting facts without bias and delivering outcomes that are technically sound and commercially reasonable.

Over time, one realises the role is less about vehicles and more about balance.

### EXPERIENCE: THE SILENT REQUIREMENT

Modern vehicles are increasingly complex, incorporating advanced materials, electronics, and integrated safety systems. As a result, assessing has become a highly specialised role. In my view, this is not a profession that can be learned in isolation or through theory alone. It is built on years—often decades—of workshop experience.

Time spent on the tools develops an understanding of failure patterns, repair quality, and component behaviour under stress. Without this foundation, the ability to interpret damage accurately is compromised. A motor assessor does not simply identify what is visible; he interprets what is probable.

Experience teaches pattern recognition.

“We can fix cars, but we can’t fix people.”





After thousands of assessments, consistencies emerge—in failure modes, in workmanship, and in anomalies that warrant further scrutiny. These insights cannot be replaced by data alone.

### THE RISE OF EXTERNAL INFLUENCE

In recent years, external influence has become more prominent. Digital platforms and artificial intelligence have made technical information widely accessible, and claimants increasingly arrive with pre-formed conclusions about what is wrong with a vehicle and how it should be repaired.

Sometimes these insights are helpful. Often, they are incomplete or misapplied. This adds another layer to the assessor's role: not only conducting a technical evaluation but also contextualising and, where necessary, correcting external interpretations—without dismissiveness and without compromising professional integrity.

While technology can assist, it does not replace experience. Judgement remains central to the process.

### RED FLAGS AND RESPONSIBILITY

With experience comes responsibility. Identifying inconsistencies or irregularities is part of the assessor's professional duty. These may relate to damage patterns, documentation, repair histories, or timelines. Raising such concerns is not adversarial; it is an obligation.

There are times when these observations are pursued, and times when they are set aside for broader considerations. This can be quietly demoralising. Considerable effort may go into identifying and articulating concerns, only for them not to influence the final outcome.

Yet professional discipline requires acceptance of this reality. The assessor's role is not to control the outcome, but to ensure that his input is accurate, defensible, and clearly communicated.

### A PROFESSION WORTH STANDING BEHIND

I was once reminded of this by a colleague who, when asked what he did, answered simply and confidently: "I am a motor assessor." There was no qualification or explanation—just clarity and pride.

That moment stayed with me. In a profession often underestimated, there is value in standing firmly behind one's role. Motor assessing is not incidental work. It is a critical function within the automotive and insurance ecosystem, operating at the intersection of technical evaluation, financial accountability, and stakeholder alignment.

### THE BRIDGE BETWEEN WORLDS

At its core, the assessor acts as a bridge. Between repairers and insurers. Between expectation and feasibility. Between cost and value.

Every assessment has a single objective: to arrive at a fair and reasonable repair outcome. This is not about minimising cost or maximising scope; it is about accuracy. Correct assessment ensures vehicles are repaired properly, insurers are advised responsibly, and process integrity is preserved.

The assessor also plays a role in protecting vehicle value. Poor assessments and incorrect repairs carry long-term implications for safety, market perception, and resale viability.

### THE HUMAN ELEMENT

Beyond the technical aspects lies a human dimension that often goes unnoticed. Assessors engage daily with people under stress—clients dealing with disruption, repairers under pressure, and insurers managing risk. Emotional responses are common, sometimes intense.

Professional composure and respect go a long way. While emotion should never influence outcomes, a measured and courteous approach often diffuses tension and allows the process

to progress more effectively than confrontation ever could.

There are moments that quietly define the profession. Sharing a drink with a farmer grateful for clarity after a loss, or accepting tea and biscuits from an elderly woman reluctant to let you leave—these moments never appear in reports, yet they remain part of the fabric of the work.

They are reminders that behind every vehicle and every figure is a person navigating uncertainty.

### CLOSING REFLECTION

Motor assessing is an unseen profession. Much of the work happens behind the scenes—in reports, conversations, and decisions that shape outcomes without recognition.

But it is work that matters.

It requires diligence, experience, and a commitment to correctness, even when that effort goes unnoticed. At the end of each day, the objective remains unchanged: to deliver a quality, defensible assessment; to advise with clarity; and to contribute to a process that is fair, balanced, and technically sound.

And when asked again what I do, the answer can remain simple:

"I am a motor assessor."

Chris Viljoen has over three decades of experience in the autobody repair industry, having established himself as a seasoned forensic motor assessor based in Johannesburg, South Africa. With a background as a qualified Autobody Repairer, Chris has dedicated the past five years to developing a comprehensive training programme tailored for estimators and motor assessors. He conducts frequent training sessions across South Africa, engaging with autobody repairers to elevate industry standards. He is often a guest on television shows owing to his active involvement in the legal aspects of claims and disputes.

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### CORDLESS POLISHER

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