



Taken in early 1964 this photograph shows Les Green in the doorway of the partnership's service station in the suburb of Fairy Meadow.
Note the Lukey Muffler stand to the left of the doorway to the sales area.

Part 1: Continual innovation over 50 years embraces specialist service philosophy



By Noel Wynn
Managing Editor *Undercar Review*

After serving their apprenticeships together 50 years ago two young motor mechanics formed a business partnership venture for a foray into the automotive service industry in the New South Wales city of Wollongong.

Starting out with a Shell service station in the early '60s, which included a general repair workshop, the speciality influence was already evident in this early period of trading with the addition of a dedicated wheel-service bay for wheel alignment and balancing plus tyre fitting and servicing. Attached to this bay was a tyre storage area where they specialised in selling the very first Bridgestone tyres on the market in Australia which were purchased directly from an independent importer.

This part of their business supported a full-time specialist suspension technician besides several mechanics employed to do general repairs. They also built up a thriving trade in fitting reconditioned shock absorbers supplied by Pedders Shock Absorbers in Melbourne.

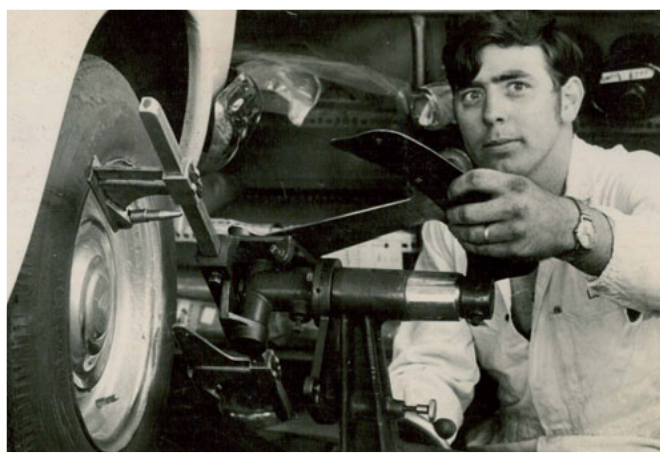
The lube-bay also had a full-time lubrication specialist who also handled routine maintenance such a tyre rotations and safety inspections. Plus, they also specialised in brake and clutch repairs through a close relationship with John

Joseph (cousin to Disc Brakes Australia's Phillip Joseph) who ran a clutch and brake reconditioning workshop in Wollongong.

What they had created all those years ago was what we now take for granted as the modern-day 'undercar' service shop!

Within a short space of time the fuel dispensing, parts and accessories sales also had dedicated staff to run this side of the business over its seven days a week operations.

The owners, Les Green and if you haven't already guessed, myself, continually invested in new service equipment and technology and always took time to 'look at the business' as much as 'work in the business'.



Wheel alignment and balancing services were a speciality at the Green & Wynn service station in the '60s. Note the muffler rack in the background.



A young Noel Wynn performs an engine tune-up on a 1960s Holden sedan using the latest tuning equipment available at the time.

Many after-hours discussions centred around finding something that they could specialise in with little or no competition.



Yes, this exhaust bender does work and served for many years to launch what was probably Australia's first muffler shop. In more recent times it was utilised to bend frames for motorcycle speedway sidecars which were raced by long-time Rapid employee, Terry Gunter. It now serves as a showroom display highlighting the company's heritage.

They struck upon exhaust systems as the way to go and started to stock, sell and install Lukey mufflers and Multi-fit stainless steel silencers plus Sonic extractors. For exhaust repairs a rudimentary plumbers-style draw-bender served to bend and form sections of tube that could be used to replace rusted sections in pipes by welding them in place. This bender was then modified, motorised and mounted on a frame to allow multiple bends to be formed to make a complete exhaust pipe. Sizing and flanging the ends were carried out by heating the pipe and hammering dollies or plugs into the pipe.

A lean-to-roof was added to the rear of the service station building and presto – one of Australia's first



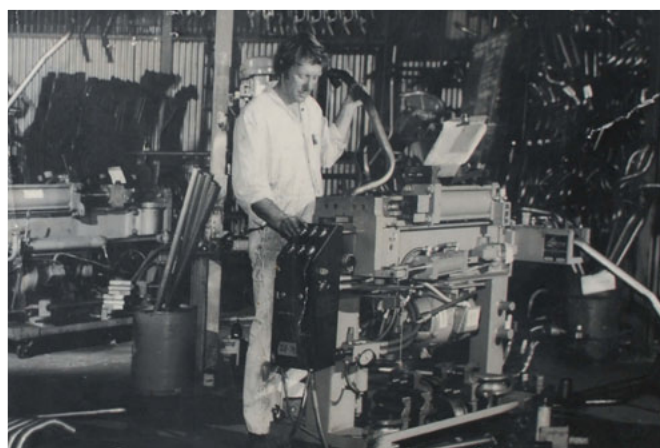
From the outset Les Green and Noel Wynn have supported community projects and sporting bodies. Pictured here are Les and Noel with representatives from the local soccer club following the signing of a sponsorship deal. Both Rapid and Automedia continue to sponsor local soccer teams today.



Sponsorship of the Wollongong area's first surf rescue boat attracted lasting community interest as the boat was stored and on display at the business premises in Fairy Meadow when not in use.

full-time specialist muffler shops. There wasn't even a special classification in the Yellow Pages directory to advertise their specialist exhaust services but very soon word-of-mouth had motorists travelling from hundreds of miles around for exhaust repairs.

After discussions with Ernie Walker in Sydney, who had already engineered the specialist tube benders used by Sonic Speed Equipment to make extractors, a tube bender which also included a swager/expander was built by Ernie and it is still in use today for some specialised requirements.



Rapid's original press bender is at the rear in this early photograph with a new Huth bender imported from the USA being used by Les Green in the foreground.



Seen here are two of the Koni hoists in operation. At the rear is long-term employee Peter Wilson who started as a petrol pump attendant then progressed to lube operator then motor mechanic then exhaust fitter and eventually manager of the muffler shop division of Rapid Exhaust for many years.

After years of working under cars using jacks and safety stands the invention of the above-ground vehicle hoist (lift) was a blessing from heaven for those doing repairs on exhaust systems.

The area at the rear of the service station was never designed to accommodate vehicle hoists so this necessitated the next stage of the exhaust businesses' development with a move into a stand-alone building in Chapman Street, Fairy Meadow in New South Wales where three of the new two-post above-ground 'Koni' brand hoists were installed and in the same street where the shop still operates today.

After 10 years in the making and now with its own trading name and exhaust repair specialist identity the next stage was to expand into manufacturing some of its own specialist products and exhaust components that were not readily available and also to wholesale them to the now expanding number of muffler shop outlets in Australia.

To individualise the products that they manufactured the Rapid Exhaust Systems brand was introduced as a trademark and a trading name.

With service stations moving to 24-hour trading at the pumps the service station and general repair side of the business was sacrificed for an all out push into exhausts.



This computer controlled press bender was supplied by Rapid Equipment for Rapid's manufacturing division. Note the large capacity oil pump and tank and the electronic rotation gauge.

But shortly after a new dimension was added and Rapid Equipment was formed to supply exhaust benders and other muffler shop equipment and supplies nationally. This business pioneered many new techniques in tube bending with the first computer controlled benders and bending programs. They even constructed their own compact computer hard-drives and circuit boards through an associated technical company.



Rapid was prominent when it played a major role in the organising and staging of the first dedicated exhaust industry show held in conjunction with Neil Thomas's Motor Trade Equipment exhibition in Sydney.

Where expert knowledge and skills were required people such as tube-bender guru Bob Crowe and exhaust specialist Paul Peak (one of the foundation members of ESPA in Australia) all played an import role at Rapid.

Also around this time Rapid was using an ever-increasing amount of mufflers manufactured by a Brisbane, Queensland, based company, Supaflow Mufflers, and to secure their continuing supply line for these products they purchased the company and merged the muffler manufacturing equipment into their existing Rapid Exhaust operations.

This muffler manufacturing equipment still operates today in filling an important market need for short-run specialist mufflers and exhaust components.

Always looking for new market opportunities Rapid Cycles was created to manufacture BMX bicycles and a group of franchise muffler shops trading under the 'Muffler Men' banner was established to service the growing market for Rapid's products.

Promoting and marketing these products opened up new avenues for the duo and from a humble newsletter to promote Rapid's products to the trade grew Automedia, the publisher of *Undercar Review* - the formation of the Exhaust Systems Professional Association (ESPA) in Australia - the pioneering of the aftermarket catalytic converter market in Australia - the establishment of its own in-house independent technical training centre and many other unique ideas and products.



Paul Peak (then Rapid's sales manager and who now has his own bender supply business in Sydney) explains technical aspects in muffler designs to an eager group of trainees. A dedicated lecture room at the original Rapid Exhaust building was also used for meetings during the formation of the Exhaust Systems Professional Association in Australia.

Unusual to say the least, this special tailpipe is not designed for underwater motoring but allowed the vehicle's engine to run during outdoor demonstrations at shows and events without 'gassing' onlookers.





In past years Rapid has been called upon to design and manufacture special exhaust systems such as this example.

Key strategic alliances were established across Australia, the USA and New Zealand with companies, organisations and trade media operations with many personal friendships ensuing along the way.

Over the years the company has employed, mentored and trained many exhaust specialists, some now running their own businesses, some retired, some are still working for Rapid.

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The current Rapid Exhaust premises in Chapman Street, Fairy Meadow.

Part 2: Maintaining an exhaust-only specialist operation into the future

Following on from Part 1 of the Rapid Exhaust story by Noel Wynn:

Today, my publishing and trade association responsibilities are my only trade involvement and Les Green likes to play golf whenever he can but still manages to work part-time at Rapid Exhaust.

The ownership and running of Rapid Exhaust is now in the hands of Les's son Darren Green and while Darren is committed to upholding many of the traditional features that the company traded on in the past he is very much aware of the problems now facing the rapidly changing exhaust system market at all levels from manufacturing, distribution to retail sales and product installation.



Darren Green, the managing director of Rapid Exhausts, is hands-on and handles most customer enquiries in person.

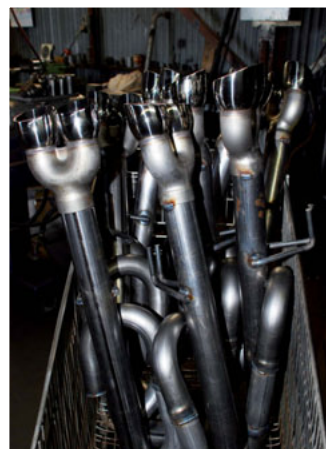
"My early training at Rapid Exhaust gave me the necessary technical and business skills to open my own muffler shop in Queensland which really set me on the right path," said Darren Green. "Marriage and the decision to return home and open another muffler shop there led to me eventually taking over Rapid."

Besides its extensive exhaust repair operations Rapid still has the equipment and staff necessary to produce many of the products that Rapid became famous for but since taking over the company many of his own new and innovative exhaust products have also been added to the list.

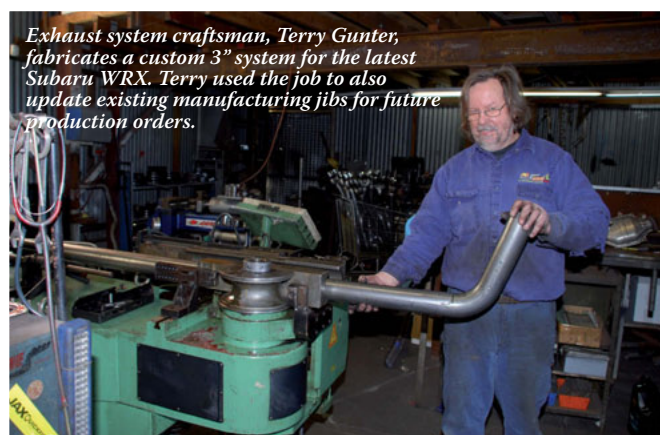
The latest being an innovative pipe design that drastically reduces the droning noise associated with sports exhaust systems on VE Commodore V8s (the Australian built Pontiac for the USA readers).

Other unique products include: Rapid's Baffled Bullet mufflers, extractors and headers to replace cracked cast-iron manifolds. Plus, sports exhaust systems and speciality mufflers are also included in the company's offerings.

While the original service station on the Princes Highway and Rapid Exhaust building in Chapman Street have been demolished the current premises at the far end of Chapman Street in a cul-de-sac adjoining the



Soon to be dispatched to customers around Australia are VE Commodore sports pipes prior to final finishing and packaging.



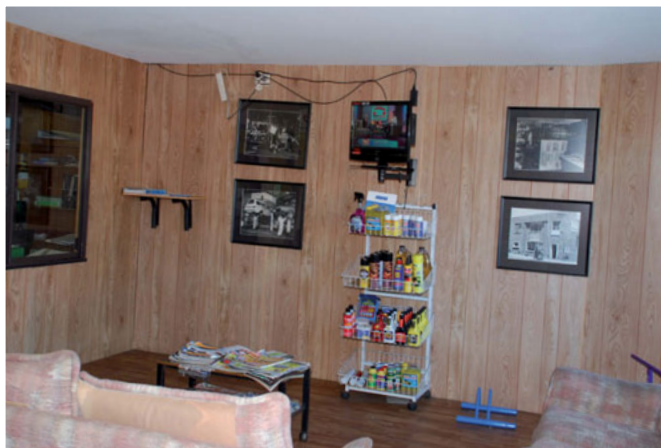
Exhaust system craftsman, Terry Gunter, fabricates a custom 3" system for the latest Subaru WRX. Terry used the job to also update existing manufacturing jigs for future production orders.

busy Northern Distributor from Wollongong provides great exposure to passing traffic.

Ample parking is provided right at the entrance to a spacious, well appointed customer reception area and walk-in showroom where an extensive array of stock is shelved.



Customers can browse over the large range of exhausts in stock before making a purchase selection.



A comfortable customer waiting area features photos from the early years of Rapid Exhaust to promote the company's long history as an exhaust systems specialist.

"It's surprising what you can sell if customers are allowed to browse and handle products themselves," Darren commented. "For safety reasons the fitting and manufacturing areas are off-limits unless we escort the customer into the workshop which quite often you have to do so that the customer fully understands what repairs are required."

The workshop area includes three hoists for cars and light-commercial vehicles with a heavy vehicle hoist in its own work bay which provides easy access for larger vehicles.

The repair workshop has its own equipment necessary to carry out exhaust repairs without interfering with any manufacturing processes.

All staff members employed at Rapid are multi-skilled and capable in handling all facets of the businesses' day-by-day operations except for an accounts clerk who works only in the office and Les Green who these days sticks to the internet sales but still enjoys doing deliveries to their trade customers in the area.

"I'm very lucky to have employees that have been with the company for many years and are very good at their job," said Darren. "Likewise, we still have customers and their family



Rapid's claim of exhausts for every vehicle from a Mini to a Mack is clearly evident of these recent photos taken by Undercar Review while compiling this article.

members coming in to the shop that date back to the Rapid's early years. They really enjoy looking at the old photographs I now have on display in the customer waiting area and this also provides first-time customers with the knowledge that they are dealing with a reputable business that has survived for many years just specialising in exhausts."

The capacity to manufacture its own components in-house also opens up additional capabilities for the workshop in repairing vintage and rare vehicle's exhaust systems. Plus, small volume components are crafted for car dealers and repairers specialising in certain makes of vehicles where genuine parts are either unobtainable and/or very expensive.

The dedicated heavy vehicle service bay and hoist also adds to range of vehicles that can be repaired at Rapid Exhaust, thus enabling the company to survive as a single-line exhaust shop.

"Having the capacity to supply parts and repairs to everything from a lawnmower to a truck or motor-home has its advantages," says Darren. "We even supply exhaust components for light-aircrafts!"

"By being located in a steel-making and coal-mining area means we also have a lot of industrial clients. And being on the coast also attracts a fair amount of marine work both on recreational and commercial vessels."

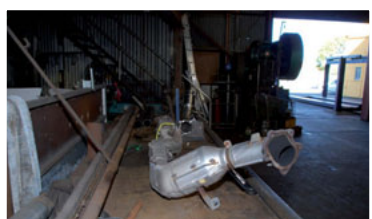
Darren now serves on the advisory panel of the Exhaust Systems Professional Association (ESPA) as he recognises the importance of being up-to-date on regulations and industry trends. Much of the information contained in ESPA's recently released Muffler Shop Manual stems from Rapid's data

PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

The vast array of specialist equipment at Rapid Exhaust enables it to carry out specialist manufacturing processes beyond the reach of many organisations. The following photos depict the development stages of an updated sports system kit for Subaru WRXs:



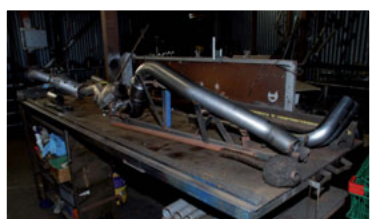
STAGE 1:
The development vehicle on the vehicle hoist located in Rapid's manufacturing section and the old exhaust is being removed.



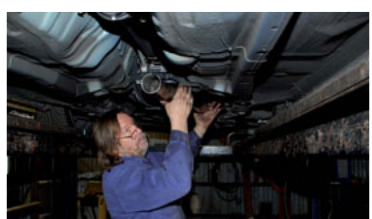
STAGE 2:
The exhaust system is checked against an existing production jig and measurements taken.



STAGE 3:
Bending commences using patterns and checked against measurements.



STAGE 4:
The bent pipe is checked in the production jig.



STAGE 5:
The bent pipe is then checked on the car for correct fitment.



STAGE 6:
The flanges, catalytic converters and hangers are welded into the system.



STAGE 7:
The completed system fitted to the car prior to painting.

compiled over its many years of involvement in the exhaust industry. Darren sees this sharing of information amongst members as the key to ensuring the exhaust industry's future.

"We carry out a lot of noise level testing at Rapid and the new EPA manual has proven to be a handy reference tool," says Darren. "If you want to survive in the exhaust industry today you need to have a quality noise level testing meter and calibrator and know how to use it properly. EPA is leading the way in this regard."

Rapid were leaders in recognising and establishing a market in the early '80s for aftermarket catalytic converters in Australia through their alliance with the then USA market leader in aftermarket catalytic converters, Products For Power (PFP). While the market is now dominated by other players the lessons learnt then have helped Rapid over the years in coping with this technology based and continually growing part of the exhaust industry.

"If you don't understand emission controls you won't last long in the exhaust service field today," warns Darren.

Upon talking over the reins at Rapid one of Darren's first objectives was for the company to have an active and ongoing presence on the internet through an updated website and product sales through eBay.



Computer based sales now play an important role in providing a ready market for Rapid exhaust products and here Les Green scans the many enquiries he receives through the internet.

"When Automedia moved out of Rapid's offices this enabled me to have a dedicated area to house my internet activities without interfering with the day-by-day running of the retail and trade operations of the business," Darren explained. "And luckily dad was available to man the computer terminal for me on a part-time basis as over the years he has built up a vast wealth of exhaust industry knowledge."

"Because we have so many products unique to Rapid to offer on eBay we get enquires, not just from around Australia, but around the world!"



These early VW Beetle and Kombi Rapid extractors are ready for freight pickup and still sell like hotcakes on eBay and through trade customers. "How many old VWs are still on the road?" asks a bewildered Les Green. "I thought the market would have dried up years ago!"

Where to from here, *Undercar Review* asked Darren?

"During my time in the exhaust industry I've seen a massive swing away from installing standard replacement exhaust systems to performance based sports systems and with wide-spread internet use has come a more product and performance aware clientele.

"Customers don't just enquire about mandrel-bent systems – they now demand it! So, I've now taken the next major step forward by purchasing a three-inch capacity mandrel bender.



The future direction for Rapid to be able to continue as an exhaust-only specialist is now clear with the installation of advanced mandrel bending technology.



Local trade customers of Rapid Exhaust are serviced regularly by two delivery vehicles.

"While this might normally be a daunting, if not impossible task for most muffler specialists, we have the skills and production experience with our long-term staff at Rapid to ensure the competent-operation of such expensive equipment.

"Rapid Exhaust has come this far in 50 years by being forward thinkers and leaders in the exhaust service field and I intend to carry this on by remaining a dedicated exhaust service specialist," Darren emphasised.

Darren says he is happy to accept enquiries about Rapid's specialist exhaust products which he stresses are designed by exhaust specialists for exhaust specialists!

You can contact Rapid Exhaust using the following:

Rapid Exhaust Pty. Ltd.
 2-4 Chapman Street, Fairy Meadow NSW 2519
 WEBSITE: www.rapidexhaust.com.au
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