

Brian MacDonald - Fairfax Industries

Brian MacDonald is a Howick boy and a trained motor mechanic. An opportunist and an ambitious fellow, Brian then became a truck salesman for Panmure Motors and later moved to Domett Truck & Trailers. During that time, he was selling steel chassis frames to Fairfax Fibreglass in Penrose for them to put in their moulded bodies.

In the early 70's Brian won a trip to the Sydney Truck show and one of the side tours was to Fridgemobile, one of Australia's largest refrigerated transport operators of the time. Being ever the opportunist, the seed was sown for Brian.

Some years later, over a few beers, Brian and his accountant friend, Bob Dorling, discussed the idea of combining their skills and forming a company. Fibreglass bodies for refrigeration was discussed and after some research it was revealed that there was nothing like that in NZ other than the fibreglass bodies made by Fairfax. In 1973 Brian and Bob became the proud owners of Fairfax Fibreglass and a license agreement with Reinforced Plastics in Melbourne.



Transport operators had little faith in fibreglass, most of them had fibreglass boats and most of them had cracks. However, Brian had a good reputation as a straight shooter and string of loyal customers. With a name change to Fairfax Industries and some success with 7.3m semis for Refrigerated Freightlines, they started exporting to Hong Kong. Domett were still supplying the Steel chassis and running gear.

With the help of a Development Finance loan, they shifted to Takanini in 1977 and shared their premises with Domett. Not long after, Domett moved out and Fairfax had the full site and a change of manufacturing process – monocoque fibreglass construction.

There was still some scepticism around the chassis-less trailers but the salesman in Brian was able to win over a number of believers, one of the first being Neil Otway. They shared a long relationship and Neil was loyal to the end when Otways closed down.

Fairfax extended the process into furniture vans, rail wagons, ambulances, buses and stock trailers.

Brian was another cornerstone pioneer of the trailer building industry. He joined TTMF in 1981 and served as President from 1986 until 1989, and remained a member until he sold his business in 2011. He is still a Howick boy, married to Raewyn and father to Joanne and Michael. He is an avid golfer and we have shared many a post-match beer over the last 30 years. He was present when I won my first hole in one!

I have known Brian as a colleague and a friend and am very proud to award him Life membership of the Federation.

Kate Bucknell, Executive Secretary, 2017

