



Finch gears up for growth

Finch Restorations owners Harbinda and Peter Roberts at their Mt Barker workshop. Picture: Brenton Edwards

GIUSEPPE TAURIELLO

MORE than 1000 classic vehicles will take to the streets this weekend for the Bay to Hindwood, and Peter Roberts will be watching with interest given many would have passed through his workshops in the Adelaide Hills at some time.

Mr Roberts has grown Finch Restorations into one of the country's largest vehicle restoration businesses since he took over the business in 2014 following a 35-year career in the defence industry.

Over that time the company has grown from four staff to almost 30, repairing and restoring vintage, classic and modern cars, trucks and motorcycles across five sites in Mount Barker and Woodside.

Mr Roberts previously held senior roles with the Aus-

tralian Submarine Corporation, playing a leading role in the development of the Osborne Naval Shipyard, and working on the early stages of the air warfare destroyer and future submarines programs.

He said the introduction of hi-tech systems and project management software, inspired by his time in the defence industry, had supported the growth of Finch in recent years.

"Car restoration is a cottage industry and we are the biggest in that cottage industry, in Australia at least," he said.

"We're now doing about 50 projects at a time. When you're pulling a car apart, the car has been turned into 2000 to 4000 constituent pieces, and when you've got 50-odd projects on the go, then the complexity of the business is much greater.

"So bringing in the enterprise resource planning system to manage the huge ongoing projects was important.

"We've about seven times as many staff now as we had when we started, but we also have about seven times as much floor area.

"Growing the infrastructure has been critical."

Mr Roberts and wife Harbinda are the fourth owners of Finch Restorations, which was established by Ray Finch in Mount Gambier in 1965.

A design and engineering division was recently established to deal with the increasing complexity of projects, and hi-tech 3D scanning equipment is increasingly being used to reverse engineer hard-to-find parts.

Projects for interstate customers typically accounted for

about 50 to 80 per cent of Finch's work, Mr Roberts said, including collector vehicles, heirlooms, racing vehicles and high performance cars.

"The biggest part of the business is the restorations we do cars trucks and motorcycles - but we're also currently building a replica of a 1938 SS Jaguar XK which is one of the most beautiful vehicles that has ever graced the mud," he said.

"We're building that for a client in Florida.

"We've got Rolls-Royces, we've got Morgans, Allards, Indians (motorcycles), Harley-Davidsons, Dodges.

"One of our fortes is that while we're doing a lot of modern vehicles, we can also reach right back to pre-World War II through to vintage and veteran era vehicles that are timber

bodied. We've seen a lot of the history and progression of the design of vehicles in what comes through our doors."

Mr Roberts said many car enthusiasts were spending more time and money on vehicles in the wake of Covid 19, but like many industries, the automotive sector was grappling with skills shortages.

"The type of people that we need are old school, who can deal with the older vehicles," he said.

"The average age of our employees is way above the average. For example, the last two employees we hired were 65 and 66, so we certainly cater for the older age bracket of employees."

The Bay to Hindwood will be held on Sunday after last year's event was scrapped due to Covid-19 restrictions.

Finance merger to benefit members

GIUSEPPE TAURIELLO

MUTUAL financial services providers KeyInvest and Australian Friendly Society (AFS) have agreed to a merger that would create a 50,000-member organisation with \$420m in funds under management.

The proposal will be voted on by members of both companies on October 28 and requires the approval of the Australian Prudential Regulatory Authority.

KeyInvest and AFS both issue funeral bonds, providing individuals and families an opportunity to save for future funeral expenses.

The two companies have been in discussions for more than 12 months about a formal tie-up, and KeyInvest

commented providing administrative services to AFS in March this year as part of an outsourcing arrangement.



KeyInvest chair Roger Sexton said the merger would bring together two historic institutions with "common values and complementary businesses", adding "it will also bring benefits to the members of both companies through the economies of scale and wider access to products and services that will result.

"Having weathered the impacts of protracted low bond yields and Covid, we look forward to writing the next chapter in our long history, and a return to growth."

KeyInvest recently exited the retirement village industry, repositioning itself as a pure financial services company.

It launched a new contributory mortgage fund last year and also offers investment bonds. Ex Bendigo and Adelaide Bank executive Craig Brooke, pictured, was recently recruited as the firm's new chief executive.

Two AFS directors will join the KeyInvest board if the merger is approved.