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You don't have to excel in academia to flourish in automotive, but what you do need is a passion to succeed. It's helped Dean Lomas make his independent business a success, and it hasn't stopped growing yet



INDUSTRIAL ESTATES can be soulless places, but the businesses they're home to are often built on incredible hard work and determination, with stories masked by the uninspiring location.

Drive into Winsford Industrial Estate, Cheshire, and you'll see the usual suspects of Screwfix, The Bathroom Showroom and other well-known names. But tucked away among them is DC Lomas Limited, an independent garage that has succeeded where others have failed thanks to the resolve of its owner, Dean Lomas.

Lomas readily admits that he's a practical problem solver not a bookworm, and it took a lot of grit for him to succeed in the automotive industry. But knowing his strengths and weaknesses has given him a foundation to develop a company with a solid business model and a plan for the future. This is proof that automotive is a path for anyone and everyone.

How did your automotive career start?

I came out of school with no qualifications and then had to go to college for a special interview because they said I needed qualifications to get into motor vehicles.

They accepted me onto the course. I did a few weeks full-time at college but couldn't do the classroom work. So every Friday afternoon I took my CV and a cover letter around every single garage. A service manager at one company got sick to death of seeing me, and he said, "Just turn up on Monday."

The guy was called Paul Moores – what an incredible guy. He was a diesel fitter and taught me how to build cranks and gearboxes, the full works. After I passed my driving test he said, "You pick me up every day."

I had to pick him up in the morning. I then had to make his brew and he'd stand next to his toolbox and say, "I'll show you once and once only." And that was where it all started for me, because if I went back for help, he wouldn't give it. I had to find a solution.

After two years of one day at college and four days at work, I didn't have any qualifications in motor vehicles because I couldn't do the college work. I had

no inclination for words, but I decided to put myself on a night course. Every Wednesday for a year, I'd turn up at college after work and spend two hours learning words like vehicle, warranty and repair so I was able to structure a sentence and write the coursework. Within 18 months I'd reached Level One, then Two and Three because I could do the work.

When I was 18, I got headhunted by a Chrysler-Jeep garage. They offered me double my wages to build gearboxes and diffs. I'd run two ramps at the same time at the garage. I'd start two full services in the morning and by dinnertime, I'd have stripped out two rear discs, two front discs, the sump on a gearbox and 16 spark plugs. I wasn't slow.

How did you make the leap from apprentice to developing your skills and taking the next step on the career ladder?

When I was nearly 21, I went to my boss and said I needed to progress financially. He said no, so I went for an interview at a local truck garage and they put me on a semi-skilled rate. I just flourished. I spent 10 and a half years there, working on everything from lawnmowers all the way up to 200-ton heavy plant machinery.

Dean Lomas built a successful business despite leaving school with no qualifications



It takes courage to branch out on your own and start a business. How did you make the shift?

I started helping friends out, doing jobs here and there for them. I used to ring up my boss and say, “I can’t come in today because I’ve got a job on.” And he’d ask if I could come in early. That’s why I like my early mornings. I could go in at 5 o’clock in the morning, smash the day out at work, and then do six or seven hours after work, finishing at 10 o’clock at night.

In the end I went to my boss and said I need to grow but I can’t here. Then I spoke to a few friends about starting up on my own. I had a VW campervan that I sold, went on the Company’s House website to buy my name, DC Lomas Limited, for £92, and that’s when the business started, August 2011.

How difficult was running the business at the start?

I had enough income for 12 months from selling my campervan, so I knew that if I didn’t earn any money I could at least feed my family. I was mobile at first, working out of a van. I remember my first ever job was a set of springs on a Ford Fiesta; I had to go and buy a really good spring clamp so I didn’t take my face off doing the job.

From there, I worked out that I had to put all my money back into the business. Every single penny of profit went back into the business because I only had my toolbox in my van, so I needed to invest to make sure I could succeed.

How quickly did DC Lomas grow?

I have a real passion and drive for fixing stuff, but soon realised I couldn’t do it by myself. So I contacted the local college, the guys who trained me up 15 years before, and asked who the best lad was. They said they had one young lad, he’d had a troubled past but he’s got what it takes. Within a year he’s putting bottom-end shelves and

clutches in by himself. He was with me for three years.

I was desperately looking for a building because my body was hurting – working outside was glorious but it’s bloody hard work. In 2016, I met the landlord of this building and we got the keys on the 16th of December. The problem was that I was using my tools and a scissor lift in a four-bay workshop, so I had to work all the hours I could to get the money to invest back into the business.

But by April 2017 I had a full ATL lane for Class I-VII. Six months later I had a five-ton ramp, and six months after that I bought a two poster.

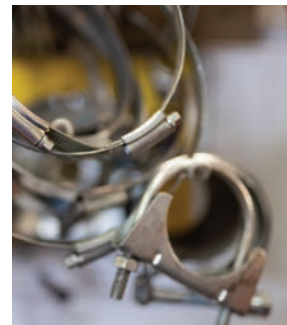
You’ve been incredibly determined throughout your career, but where do you want your business to go next?

We’re building an app, and I’ve got a team of guys who are good friends of mine working on it to make motoring less of a financial burden for our customers. I can’t say too much now, but I want to sell a warranty, breakdown cover, the full package to my customers.

We’ve bought the web domains EV Cheshire, EV Service Cheshire, and Cheshire EV as we’re getting EV-ready. I’m Level Three EV, the Master Technician is Level Three, and so is our youngest lad. So we have the equipment, the training and the competence to work on the electric and hybrid vehicles we’re now seeing coming into the business.

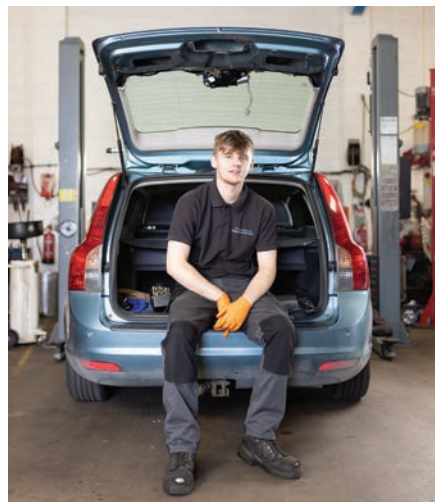
For those looking at automotive as a career destination, what would you say to entice them into the industry?

Do you want to wake up happy every day in a job you can absolutely love? If the answer is yes, I’d say, well, turn some spanners. And that’s really it, because you see thousands of people around who are unhappy every single day because they’re doing a job they don’t like. ■



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DC Lomas Ltd is a thriving garage thanks to Dean’s passion and resilience