



UNIQUE BUSINESS FOR LONG-TIME TURNERS MANAGER

I should make full disclosure to start this story. The interview was done as I collected a van purchased from Butler Motors **Blair Butler** – the deal done over the internet from 1200km away. Deals like this are not unusual for Butler, relatively new as a trader in his own right, but with a long history moving used cars in his past. The same week another vehicle had been collected by a fellow Northlander.

With an internet-led marketing strategy, unique dealership situation and an unusual mix of stock, Butler's business deserved a little more attention.

Butler began in the industry in his teenage years as a spray painter, then moved into sales before working for Turners. With the used car giant he had a range of roles including in damaged vehicles, general

goods, as an operations manager, before returning to Christchurch to lead the local vehicle branch.

Butler began in the industry in his teenage years as a spray painter, then moved into sales before working for Turners.

And before that his family background is in vehicle sales. His father **Murray** was a successful motorcycle racer. The family business, Murray Butler Motors, ended up in car sales but had more humble origins.

"Murray Butler Motors was a service station and workshop back in the proper 'service

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station' days. And then he became a vehicle trader, same as what we are doing now." His dad was in business for 30 years, up until he exited the game around 1990. The decision to become a trader himself came from a want to slow down and reduce responsibility, partially so he can spend more time with his young family. "I have gone from being responsible for 75 staff to two, myself and my sister." He takes care of most of the day-to-day operations, while his sister, who has her own business, assists with logistics. He says he is still busy. "But I feel more productive, that I am able to offer a high level of customer service, and I don't have to worry about making too much margin on everything," he explains. "We sell lots, and make sure the customers are happy." In a rare move for the used car industry, Butler does not deal in fresh import stock, focusing on local inventory,



particularly the slightly unusual and classic cars. That vehicle also heading to Northland was an Austin A30.

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Just nothing, classics aside, European. "Our stock is mainly

Japanese; we do a lot of small cars. From \$2000 to \$10,000 is our perfect pitch." Butler puts a lot of effort into his internet listings – high numbers of quality photos and enthusiastic descriptions. This is teamed with characterful and personal social media. "[The listing quality] makes the sales process easier, and reduces the number of questions to answer," he says. "The social media side of it gives a bit more 'soul' to what we are doing. It is quite easy to do, take a cool photo and bang it on Instagram, which feeds it over to Facebook. Takes two seconds. "And people love it! Quite often we will get an inquiry

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from a customer, and if I don't sell them something, they will like us on social media – join the following."

Butler sources a lot of his stock from his former employer Turners, some ex-leased, and a lot are private purchasers.

Butler works from a stylish central-Christchurch warehouse unit shared with two other complementary to the trade. It's decorated with automotive memorabilia and houses some tasty classics and future classics.

Most stock is prepared and held offsite, brought in for viewing if required - another advantage of the extensive photography on listings.

Sharing the office are **Gary Lloyd** of Gary Lloyd Wholesale, and **Michael Payne** of New Zealand Vehicle Valuations. Butler sources some stock from



Lloyd and works with Payne as well. Butler acknowledges working and sharing with the others make being a small trader more viable. Handling only second-hand stock means Butler is

expecting to be relatively untouched by next year's final stage of electronic stability control implementation. "It will be interesting, but it won't affect us too much. We will roll with it really – there is

always stuff to buy and sell. The number of cars bought and sold in Christchurch is huge; what we do is only a small percentage." As for the vehicle I purchase, I am delighted. ■

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