

# Women make their mark

*Although only a few women work in the car repair industry, their influence appears to be great. Their role has often been behind the scenes, as managers in car repair shops around the country. More recently, women are leading influential industry bodies and taking part in key policy decisions. Dawn Adams spoke to a selection of women in the industry.*

### Have a question? Try asking the female boss

Years ago, customers could not believe that young Cheryl Wayman could answer their repair queries. Instead, they regularly asked to speak to an engineer, a man. But times have changed at Town and Country Engine Reconditioning in Hornsby, Sydney.

Loyal clients now ask to speak to Cheryl and instead of being surprised when she answers their questions, they expect nothing less.

Cheryl made an effort, early in her career, to rid the workshop of the atti-



**Cheryl Wayman, the first woman appointed as chairman of the Engine Reconditioners Association.**

tude that only men knew about cars.

When customers asked to speak to an engineer, Cheryl would also pose a question. What did the customer need to know? Gradually, she convinced clients that she knew their answers or could easily find out by consulting with other workshop employees.

Since that time, she has gradually gained trust and confidence from customers and peers.

Cheryl is the first woman ever

### Industry misses out on half the workforce

A TAFE expert claims he can count on one hand the number of female panel beating apprentices who attended a Sydney college during the past 13 years.

It's a sign of how few women gain a hands-on role in this predominantly male industry.

Transport Training Division's Barry Palmer said that although more girls chose vehicle painting, their numbers were still minuscule.

"There has been a move to attract more females into the trade and we have pursued that with the same vigour as encouraging male entry, but with nowhere near the same results," Palmer said.

Motor Traders Association of NSW executive director Tony Selmes said economic influences would force car repair shop owners to employ more women.

"If the industry picks up and continues to do well, there will be economic pressures to take on more female staff," he said.

"That will probably be the type of pressure to bring about change."

Selmes said there was a great dearth of females participating in the hands-on work of a body repair shop.

"We are denying ourselves a range of talents which the industry sorely needs," he said.

"We are denying ourselves half the workforce."

But Selmes stressed there were a lot of entrenched values which needed to be overcome.

"Practical problems can be compounded by other matters, not the least of which being some aspects of the sexual discrimination legislation mixed in with attitudes which are not of the 1990s on the part of males," he said.

"There must be a progressive attitudinal change."

Selmes pointed to stereotypical attitudes such as claims that girls cannot lift an engine block.

"I couldn't lift one either and I wouldn't pretend that I could," he said.

"Nobody does that by themselves."

"We must be realistic about what can and can't be done. We won't change attitudes in one swoop, there will need to be an education process."

appointed as chairman of the Engine Reconditioners Association of NSW, an elected post bringing power and influence over top industry representatives in Canberra.

"At first, some people in the association were skeptical about having me as chairman, but after I'd passed on my knowledge, they accepted me," Cheryl said.

And why is it that more women are not a part of the industry?

Cheryl said girls and their parents often did not recognise the smash repair industry as an attractive option.

She first got involved in the industry 10 years ago when she and her husband Rowland bought the business.

"I mainly do the office work dealing with debtors, creditors, quoting and ordering parts," Cheryl said.

"But I will also put on the overalls and go into the workshop, dismantle engines and analyse components for a job."

Cheryl is also working on the Engine Reconditioners Association conference, ERA Tech '94 to be held from October 26 to 28 at the National Convention Centre in Canberra.

### Woman in VACC chair

More than 600 body repair shop owners in Victoria are represented by one of the few, yet powerful women in the industry.

This Pic please