

In conversation with...



Mike Bewsey, Moove Lubricants and President, UKLA

In September, Mike Bewsey, Moove Lubricants, started his two-year tenure as president of the UKLA. Tina Reading talks to him about his life and career.

Tell us a bit about your early years. Where/when were you born, and what is your family background?

Born in Egham, Surrey. Born, on the day Sir Winston Churchill died, 24th Jan 1965, (hence middle name "Winston" ... Father was a big fan). Middle child of three.

The same year I was born, my father set up his first business, Camberley Auto Factors, one of the early automotive aftermarket distributors, which as we know "Motor Factors" have gone on to dominate the automotive aftermarket for parts and lubricant sales across Europe. However, this meant us kids didn't see a great deal of our father due to business pressure in the early years.

Once the family business was secured, we did spend a great deal of time together travelling the world which was a passion for my parents.

What did you want to be growing up?

Not so much a job/profession but I was obsessed with "Planes, Trains and Automobiles" ... Not necessarily in that order. A primary passion for cars meant I was always interested in motorsport, engineering and statistics.

Where did you go to school, and what subjects did you choose and why?

My parents were self-made people, my father left school at 13 to become a porter at Smithfield's meat market. Consequently, this had a big impact on my education. So, once they could afford it, I was sent to boarding school at the age of 11. Yateley Manor, a short stop over at Bearwood Merchant Naval College before spending most of my formative years at Allhallows School on the Dorset coast.

Spending much of my time playing rugby and dinghy sailing I learnt a lot about being an inclusive team player.

What was your path to higher education?

I decided to take a year out before higher education. To fund my travels around Europe I took a number of short-term jobs with one at ICL mainframe computing. The most interesting job, seeing the advent of PC's, and one that gave me taste of large corporates.

I went to Nottingham Trent University doing Business Studies. This included a 1-year placement working for ICI Plastics & Petrochemicals at Wilton Middlesbrough. Working in the newly formed Personal Computer Support team.

I also spent 1 year on exchange to Onianta State University in New York State. Another great experience and further justification to skip off and travel the USA when we could.

What was your first job? What did you like about it and what did you not?

There was pressure to join the family business but I wanted to try my own path. I joined Allied Dunbar to access their renowned financial services training programmes.

I quickly learnt I did not relish the cold calling sales tactics but did admire their clever and innovative marketing programmes and how they motivated their agents. From then on, I enjoyed focusing on marketing, market mapping, delivering brand support programmes and how to build teams to deliver on the promise.

How has career mapping led to where you are now?

I finally succumbed to joining the family business. After several years of system investments and new marketing activities I realised there was limited expansion opportunities and little appetite from the family to invest due to personal health issues with my mother.

I subsequently found a buyer for the business which would also secure my parents future. Consequently, I had sold myself to a larger corporate, Unipart International and started a new chapter, learning skills in their Business Development team. My automotive distribution experience continued; this included the rapid growth of lubricants. I was then approached by Comma Oil, recently acquired by Esso Petroleum Company Ltd. Esso were looking for someone with experience of a family run business culture and that of a larger corporate shareholder to help with the transition. Comma, as an arm's length affiliate of Esso, I engaged in a number of Esso and subsequent ExxonMobil international projects primarily automotive lubricants and chemicals based on a global reach.

In 2012 ExxonMobil sold Comma Oil to the Brazilian organisation, Cosan Lubricants, later renamed Moove Lubricants. Exxon Mobil was in the process of consolidating all brands and clearly "Comma" and its distributor brands did not fit. Having pushed our shareholder to release the business we then accelerated our growth with Moove's investment and support to grow our business model internationally.

Are you a lifer? If yes, how do you see your career panning out over the next 20/30/40 years?

Having spent over 28 years working on the commercial elements of Comma/Moove Lubricants I retired from full time directorship at Moove last year. Moove have generously agreed to support my aspiration to deliver on my role as Chairman of the VLS and now the Presidency of the UKLA. I keep my hand in by doing some consultancy and enjoy sharing knowledge and experience for several regular customers/friends.

How has the industry changed since you started?

Most of my lubricants career has been spent in the Passenger Vehicle Lubricants and Commercial Vehicle Lubricants and Lubricating Oil Base Stocks across many new and emerging markets, from Russia in the mid 1990's to South-East Asia and China in the 2000's.

The swift evolution of the technology to meet market, consumer and legislative demands has been a challenge for many. The complexity and proliferation of the offer has required new and innovative tools to assist the manufacturers, distributors and consumers. Clarity of selection via application, quality standards policed by the VLS are just a couple of examples of how we have met the continued evolution.

What do you like about the industry? And what would you change if you could?

The industry is highly competitive and as such means innovation and competitive advantages ebb and flow fast.

That said there is a sense of "standards & morality" in the UK market. Nearly all the people I have encountered are aiming to ensure the highest standards. Support for the UKLA and VLS means we are an association admired internationally and willing to assist others to ensure consumers receive what they expect.

What challenges do you think the industry faces? In your role and as a whole?

Disrupted supply chains – COVID and International conflicts.

Sanction busting activities are with the laundering of products is proving to be hard to identify for the governing bodies who enforce their rules and look to the UKLA for help. Maintaining an even playing field and delivering on the consumer promise is always a challenge

How do you balance work life with home life?

Post-COVID means more home working which means more dog walking in the mornings rather than M25 commuting. I am fortunate to live in the Surrey Hills so have plenty of space and countryside to enjoy... whilst being close to London and airports when business requires.

What is your perfect weekend?

A bit of home time, having spent so many years traveling I missed a lot of my family growing up. I enjoy pottering, chopping logs followed by a BBQ with one or all three of our boys visiting.

If you could meet anyone famous (dead or alive) who would that be and why?

Colin Chapman of Lotus. So many questions to ask around his engineering genius in F1 and motorsport, but also his business decisions... some possibly not so smart.

Favourite quote?

"Attitude is a little thing that makes a big difference"
Sir Winston Churchill.

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