



John Scetta moved from rental car management to an apprenticeship in body repair to collision repair management.

By Mike Davey

Reimagining Performance

For John Scetta and the crew at Performance Collision & Restyling, every day is a chance to do something great.

We've seen the numbers of dealer owned collision repair facilities shrink in recent years. Every case is different, but the smart money says that dealers rarely close a part of the business that's acting as a profit centre.

However, the tide may be turning. Dealers are looking at collision with fresh eyes, and the drive within the industry towards greater efficiency is making the business a more attractive proposition. Today's dealers know that profit can only be realized if the management and staff are top-notch.

Enter John Scetta, General Manager of Performance Collision & Restyling in St. Catharines, Ont. Performance Collision & Restyling is part of the Performance Auto Group, a group of dealerships representing brands such as Acura, BMW, MINI, Chrysler, Dodge Jeep, RAM, FIAT, Hyundai, EQUUS, Lexus, Toyota, Scion, Mercedes-Benz, Sprinter and smart. The group is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year. The collision business has been part of the group for the last 42 years.

Scetta was an experienced location manager before he ever picked up a hammer.

"I was a location manager with Advantage Car Rentals," says Scetta. "We were always dealing with shops, for obvious reasons. One day I went into an office at a collision centre and found that I liked it and wanted to learn more."

Scetta didn't want to just learn collision solely from the business side. He wanted to get his hands dirty. He enrolled at Mohawk College and started an apprenticeship.

His experience as a manager on the rental side led directly to his first experience managing a collision repair facility. While apprenticing at a Ford store, the manager of the dealership's collision facility went on maternity leave. The owner knew Scetta had management experience, and moved him into the manager role on a temporary basis.

"I got a taste for collision management," says Scetta. "After the regular manager came back, another opportunity opened up to sharpen my management skills."

Scetta moved to Budds' Collision Services, where he worked for 12 years before making the move to the Performance Auto Group.

"It was an opportunity both to grow myself and to grow a business," says Scetta. "By moving here, I have the opportunity to run my own ship, and possibly move into ownership one day."

Scetta's previous employer is well-known for its affiliation with high-end brands such as BMW and is part of a multi-dealer organization. Performance Auto Group is a multi-dealer organization, also known for its many high-end brands. Scetta was able to leverage the experience he already gained in the new facility.

Collision repair has not been an attractive proposition for dealers in recent years, with many of them closing down their facilities in favour of building relationships with local high-quality repairers. However, some dealers are still willing to invest, if they can be shown a good return on investment.

"The rest of the group supports us 100 percent," says Scetta. "We've shown that there's value to be had in the collision centre if it's run correctly. We're taking every possible step to do that, including taking whatever education we can get our hands on. Whether



A lot of design went into building the new shop, down to the design of individual bays that gives techs ready access to equipment without bumping elbows.



The team at Performance Collision & Restyling. A captain is only as good as his crew.

it's Swav Pietras, our assistant manager, taking training, myself at the 20 group to learn from others or our technicians upgrading their skills, we're always learning."

The dedication to training and improved process has paid off in renewed investment from the group. Performance Collision & Restyling recently moved to a new, larger location.

"We really needed the room," says Scetta. "We've been aggressively growing the business over the last few years, and our old facility simply couldn't handle more volume."

The new facility is certainly larger—18,000 sq. ft. vs. 7,000 sq. ft.—but the differences are not just a matter of size.

Design, layout and process are geared for maximum efficiency, and new top-of-the-line equipment has been installed.

"BASF has been extremely helpful in helping us to achieve the best process, and by bringing out new products to keep us moving fast," says Scetta. "We're spraying their Onyx HD system. It meets the VOC regulations, but you can put in an additive and it acts like solventborne. Put in a different additive and it acts like waterborne. It's saved us a lot of time."

The facility is now located at 342 Ontario St. in St. Catharines, Ont., just down the street from its previous location.

The expanded collision centre is a sure sign that the group's management considers Performance Collision & Restyling a valuable part of its offering and a profit centre in its own right.

"We took the opportunity to put in equipment that's really top of the line," says Scetta. "The most obvious is our new Wolf Taifuno spray booth. They've got an excel-

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lent reputation in Europe. We expect it to increase production and efficiency."

The new booth has a number of technologically advanced features, but one of its most striking advantages is relatively simple. When the car enters the booth, it is placed on special rollers riding on tracks. When the car is ready to cure, the rollers activate and slide along the tracks resting in the floor, moving the vehicle to the attached bake oven. When the cure is complete, the rollers activate again, depositing the vehicle outside the booth.

The layout of the new facility is likewise designed with efficiency in mind. Brand new prep stations, also from Wolf, line the wall opposite the spray booth. This means as short a trip as possible from prep to paint.

Repair bays are well-equipped, including a lift in each and enough space for techs to work without bumping into each other.

The parts department occupies a very large top floor mezzanine area. Everything is set up for efficient product and continuous flow, with parts carts brought down to the floor by an elevator when they're needed.

In addition, the facility includes a dedicated restyling area, offering a full line of 3M products including tint, paint protection film and 1080 vehicle wrap material.

"We offer paint protection film in a variety of sizes, but what is taking the market by storm is full front end wraps with paint protection film," says Scetta. "We're fully equipped to

handle this trend. With our expel software and 65-inch plotter, there's nothing we can't cut or handle."

It's not just restyling. There seems to be almost nothing the facility can't handle. Performance Collision & Restyling is the only BMW Canada Certified Collision Repair Centre in the Niagara region, and the facility is also certified under the Toyota, Lexus and Scion programs.

"Mercedes-Benz manufacturer approval isn't too far off. We just have a few things left to accomplish to meet their strict program," says Scetta. "As soon as Acura completes their program, we'll work with them to attain that certification as well."

As the name suggests, it's not just collision at Performance Collision & Restyling. While the restyling business is certainly smaller than the collision side, significant business comes in from the new car sales side at Performance Group.

"They've been great at showing our customers the value of 3M products like paint protection film and vehicle wraps," says Scetta. "Shadow Shield, our distributor, has been great about providing training. It's a different skill set, but our guys picked it up quickly."

Ask John Scetta one way to improve the industry across the board, and he'll say it's education regarding repair standards.

"Certain vehicles with particular damage need a particular repair," says Scetta. "It's really just that simple. You either repair the vehicle properly, or you're taking lives in your hands. It's important for all of us involved in the business to understand this, whether you're involved as a repairer, supplier or insurer."

For more information, please visit performancecollisionandrestyling.ca. CRM