

'A genuine sense of appreciation and kinship'



NICK LARKIN

A dealer's birthday bash has Nick looking back in time

Chatting to Quentin Willson surrounded by railway carriages on a Saturday night in Yorkshire does seem like a strange dream sequence from the darkest inroads of the Larkin mind, but it's true. You might even want to know why. Quentin was a speaker and I was a guest at a dinner marking 25 years of a North Yorkshire-based dealer – the Classic & Sportscar Centre. Long-term customers, suppliers, friends and family were among the invitees. The venue was the National Railway Museum, and it was a black tie event.

A world away from the time I first visited the new business in Huddersfield, to borrow some Jowetts for a *Popular Classics* feature. MD Nick Szkiler and I have kept in touch ever since, and he has even come out of the depot as a classic bus enthusiast and owner as well as a Christian and orchestrator of charitable work in Sri Lanka.

Now based near Malton and run by Nick's son James, the dealership has now sold around 5000 classic cars to the value of £50 million. That is right. Fifty million pounds.

None of this could have been predicted when 23 years ago the Jowett trip included my first visit to a branch of then regional supermarket Morrisons, on the site of the famed Bradford manufacturer.

New beginnings

Nick, who had a collection of classics before, as the 'stressed out dealer principal of a Jaguar Land Rover dealership I attended a classic auction and thought there could be something there,' had an Aston Martin DB5 sold in 1993. It sold for £22,500.

Changes, but Nick really has stuck to traditional principles. 'We make no apology for saying that we try to be a Christian company. We try to deal righteously with people...' he told the audience.



Star vehicular attendee was this 1947 Bentley MkVI, once owned by the Szkiler family, but sold to raise capital to set up the dealership.

'The company does its share by employing 30 people'

'Do not let what you do define who you are but let what you are define what you do.'

Deep, but whatever your views on religion that's a brave statement in 2016. It might also explain why the Classic & Sportscar Centre is believed to have the highest amount of repeat business of any classic dealership. I have never heard anyone complain.

As Quentin Willson revealed, this industry contributes £15 billion annually to the combined GDP of Britain, mainland Europe and the US.

I wonder what it was when I took Nick's Jowett out? The company does its share by employing nearly 30 people, many in its own bodyshop. Even Quentin Willson was moved to comment: 'You do not get dealers or classic car dealers managing to fill a room with this many people who as far as I can tell are uniformly happy and delighted. This is unprecedented.'

Okay, other classic sales specialists also make their contribution, there were nice things to eat and Quentin is an extremely accomplished after dinner speaker, but a genuine sense of appreciation and kinship filled the air. Yes, for a car dealership, and the people behind it! Congratulations, and thanks.

This all shows better than anything just how much has happened in the past 25 years. Surely the gap between now and the 50th anniversary bash which, if able to attend I will probably spend rocking in a chair, dribbling and repeatedly reciting the word 'Daewoo' cannot possibly include so many changes. Or can it? ■



Nick Szkiler (left) spoke of his Christian values while Quentin Willson (right) gave words of wisdom and surprise.

Nick Larkin has appeared in many classic car (and a few bus) publications since 1989. He joined *Practical Classics* in 1996, and remains a regular contributor.