

Family behind Sharpe's success

Michael Sharpe, managing director of Sharpe Bros, comes from a family of innovators writes John Moreton.

MICHAEL Sharpe believes that there are no secrets to his company's success. "It's simply innovation and family," says the managing director of Sharpe Bros. "It is wonderful to be able to draw upon a rich family history of knowledge and community involvement. Our family have always been innovators. If we see a problem, we draw on all our family and company resources to solve it."

Sharpe Bros was founded 57 years ago by Doug Sharpe, Michael's grandfather, and is now operated by brothers Michael, Richard and Hayden Sharpe (as joint managing directors). The company has grown from humble beginnings to become one of Australia's leading civil contracting and asphalt paving companies. "In 1950," Michael explains, "our grandfather started his own business building cottages and small shops." While on one of these jobs he met a grazier from

Boggabri who asked him to build him a home. Doug Sharpe, his wife and two children moved to the country NSW town of Boggabri and stayed for seven years, during which time, he built many homes as well as the Methodist Church, the Bowling Club and Catholic Church.

In 1958 the family moved to Gosford, where Doug started his own developments and his workers continued to build homes, churches and shopping centres for the growing area. In the late 1960s Doug's teenage sons, including the current managing director's father, Ron, joined the family business and started doing their own earth moving works. Sharpe Bros expanded into asphaltting after completing construction of a drive through chemists shop in the seventies. Around this time the distinctive green of their trucks, plant, equipment, and signage was adopted as a way of dis-

tinguishing the company and creating an individual and easily recognisable identity.

At the time, the company used an ERF brand truck, and the others in the trade nicknamed the Sharpe truck God's Green ERF. However, the branding was a good idea and even today, although many might not instantly recall the name, many can recall having seen the green machines on road surfacing, building and construction projects around the country. Innovation within the company has been a constant influence, and it is clear that this is one of the reasons for Sharpe Bros longevity. The company has recently invested a significant amount of money in developing a series of unique road edge repair technologies called Sidewinder. "The development of this technology started when we looked at the traditional methods of road repair and thought 'there must be a better way'. My brothers and me put some

thought into it and came up with the Sidewinder idea, which we then turned into reality by building it in our own workshop," says Michael.

Decaying road edges that result in narrowed pavements and hazardous edge drop-offs have for a long time posed a danger to motorists. According to the Federal Office of Road Safety, when traffic

Others in the trade nicknamed the Sharpe truck 'God's Green ERF'.

lanes are widened by just one metre, the rate of head-on and run-off road crashes can fall by 20 per cent. "Our patented and patent pending Sidewinder technologies provide unique processes which extend the life of the pavement without the need to dig up large sections of road or cause major disruptions to



Sharpe Bros have invested heavily in developing a series of unique road edge repair technologies called Sidewinder. Pictured above are joint managing directors, Michael Sharpe (L) and his brother Hayden.

traffic,” says Michael. The Sidewinder process involves using a profiler machine which cuts a neat one metre wide trench at 100 mm depth along the road edge without the need to dig up a wider section of road. This is followed by the purpose built machinery for pouring hot-mix asphalt into the excavated trench. The hot-mix asphalt has been found to provide a strong road edge quickly and efficiently. Jobs which would normally take at least a week, from digging up the road to the final bitumen sealing, can be completed in a day at a much lower cost. When a greater depth is required, the profiler can excavate to 300 mm and Michael and his team can rebuild the road edge using gravel or even recycled materials to make the base at the road edge stronger.

“Over the years occupational health and safety issues have become paramount,” says Michael. Sharpe Bros

developed the Safety Bro mascot, a fun character with a bold way of promoting workplace safety program and website. Safety Bro is the workplace mascot for health, safety and the environment. The character is featured extensively on the cover of all safety induction handbooks, daily work sheets, coffee mugs, message boards, work stations, in the lunch room, in the board room and as a sticker on all plant, equipment and vehicles. “The Safety Bro program is an addition to our OHS&E systems and procedures,” says Michael.

Last year Michael’s father, Ron, was awarded the Order of Australia Medal and in 2005, was given the Citizen of the Year award for Gosford City for his services to the community. Perhaps, a measure of a company’s success is not how much money they make, or how vast their projects are, but how they are best able to benefit the community in which they operate.