

Case Study:

East Bilney Coachworks



As the Thatcham BSI Kitemark® passes its first birthday, the impressive level of support from all sides of the industry has ensured that the scheme is here to stay.

Designed to recognise and address the complexities of modern vehicle manufacture and repair, the scheme has clear benefits for body repairers and insurers in particular.

This is borne out as the UK's largest automotive insurers work with their own approved bodyshops to embrace the scheme...

Thatcham



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We spoke to one repairer, who quickly saw the advantages of the scheme and whose business was amongst the first to achieve the standard, having been awarded the Kitemark® alongside two other repair businesses at the scheme launch in February 2007.



Mark Baldwin is a partner at East Bilney Coachworks, an independent bodyshop based in Norfolk employing amongst its 40 staff over 22 Body Repair Technicians including 6 Apprentices.

East Bilney
Coachworks

Paint & Body
Centre

Having been one of the first three bodyshops to be awarded the Kitemark®, you are clearly an advocate, but what was it that made you decide to go for it in the first place?

Our business has a long standing reputation for quality and so when the opportunity came to link ourselves with the one symbol, which for me above anything else denotes quality, we had to go for it. We saw it as an opportunity to align ourselves with all the positive aspects that the Kitemark® symbol conjures up in terms of quality and it matched well with how we are positioning ourselves within the industry.

What changes did you see in the short term?

The first thing we did when we learnt that we had achieved the Kitemark® standard was to put a large sign above the door so that everyone walking through it – customers and

staff – knew exactly the kind of business and culture that they were entering.

It was a pleasant surprise to see the number of people who commented straight away, customers in particular who weren't aware of the scheme, but were keen to find out more. The Kitemark® symbol has a massive recognition level with the man in the street and just being able to display the sign immediately enabled us to demonstrate the positive reputation that the business has been building.

Twelve months on, what other benefits has gaining the Kitemark® brought to the business?

I was always keen on the adage that as a business owner you should be 'working on the business, not in it' and buying into the Kitemark® scheme is a great example of this. Having an external evaluation of all of our procedures and controls has been immensely valuable in setting us up for

the long term. Yes, there are associated costs, but the Kitemark® is a commitment and whilst incurring expense to meet the standard, you at least have the certainty that what you are doing is investing for the future of the business and ensuring sustainability. I believe that the Kitemark® will help us immensely in securing future work as a seal of approval in terms of the capability of the business.

Having the correct equipment and using the recognised methods is promoting smarter working practices and driving efficiency in the business and in my experience, efficiency leads to profit. My philosophy has been to try and look beyond complaining about the hourly rate that we receive and to concentrate on the extra that could be made within the current rate through improving our efficiency.

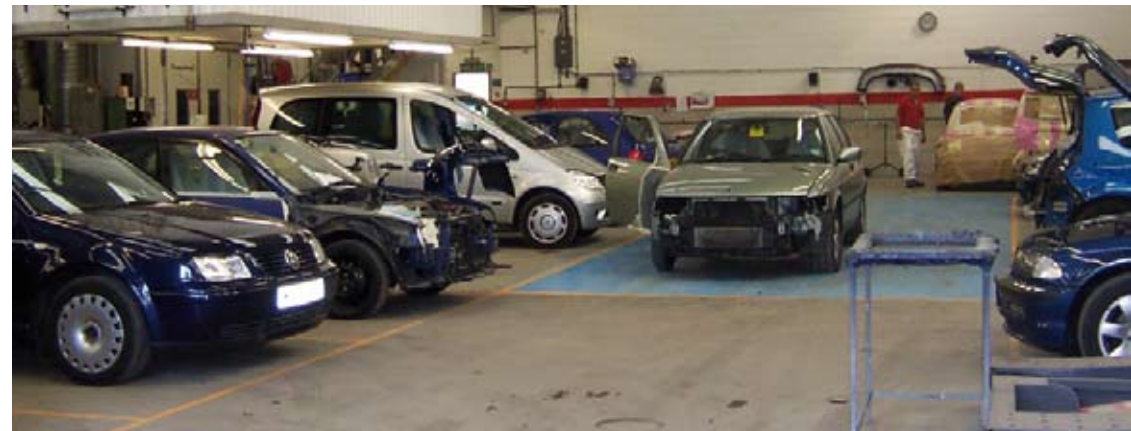
A good bodyshop will have kept pace with advances in the latest technology and therefore in my experience the investment required is not that great. Businesses that haven't kept up to date are going to find that serious investment in equipment will be required, but it will be worth it. Those that are not investing now should make themselves familiar with the term corporate manslaughter.

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What's been the reaction amongst your employees?

One of the biggest surprises has been that the principal sceptics of the scheme have now become the greatest advocates – in general though our staff have been very positive. As I say, there were a few doubters, with a scheme that is going to fundamentally change some of our working practices that is totally understandable. I have to say though that there were certain people who I expected to be cynical, but their willingness to adapt their working practices and embrace change has really surprised me and made me even more positive about what we are doing. Everyone is incentivised on the efficiency of the business and they all quickly realised that Kitemark® best practices such as working to recognised methods were going to bring even greater efficiencies.

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The majority of our staff are also keen to continually develop their own skills. We've always invested in our staff with 75% having trained with us from school – working towards the Kitemark® has meant even more investment in them through a more formalised staff development programme. The opportunity to become ATA qualified is something that has true value for the individual as well as the business – as a mark of individual competency it is a great fit with the Kitemark®, which demonstrates the competency of the business as a whole. We are rolling ATA out to our staff above and beyond the ratios demanded by the Kitemark® – staff are our most valuable assets and we want to show our appreciation and also to ensure that everyone is conversant with latest technologies. The way I see it, the more people who get ATA, the better it will be for the industry as a whole – it will eventually become a standard that all technicians need and will allow people to move between jobs and business, giving employers a benchmark and a minimum standard against which they can compare candidates.

In our business, investment in staff has created a real 'feel good' factor, our staff feel valued and this is beginning to positively impact on retention and recruitment – I'm getting job applications without even having advertised from people in the industry who are keen to get on board with a quality repair business.

What does the future hold?

The business is doing really well – our existing work providers are sending us more and more work. Consequently, we expanded our East Bilney operation during 2007 and have now opened up a second operation in Norwich to cope with demand.

Gaining the Kitemark® has certainly been a factor in our success with East Bilney and so even as we first looked around the potential new site, I was assessing the possibilities of the business with the Kitemark® framework and the East Bilney model at the forefront of my thinking and absolutely key to whether we would invest. If I didn't think the new operation could be pulled round and quickly put in to shape in readiness for gaining the Kitemark®, then we wouldn't have bought it – simple as that. It really was a part of the due diligence process and if I didn't feel that the Kitemark® was critical to the success of the operation, then why would we bother going through the whole process again?

In my opinion, investing in the Kitemark® is as important as buying the right repair equipment – it just wouldn't be possible to set up and run a crash repair business without both being in place.



For further information on the Kitemark®, please contact either Thatcham or BSI Product Services:
Thatcham – 01635 868855 www.thatcham.org
BSI Product Services – 08450 765610 www.kitemark.com

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