

VASA has a new leader



Ken Newton,
CEO, VASA

There's someone here I'd like you to meet. His name is Ian Stangroome and he runs a very successful auto air conditioning and electrical workshop in the southern city of Adelaide, Australia.

Ian has just been voted in as the third president of VASA, which has been rebadged as the Automotive Air-conditioning, Electrical and Cooling Technicians of Australasia. The reason for that long-winded title is that, in a country with a population as small as Australia's, if we relied on pure air-conditioning workshops to keep VASA alive, this page would be blank. Air-conditioning specialists have become auto electricians or mechanics, while cooling, or radiator specialists along with auto electricians have become air-conditioning repairers.

When I say 'voted in', that's not strictly correct. No vote was required because his was the only nomination at the recent VASA annual general meeting. The reality of the VASA board of directors is that the positions are shuffled

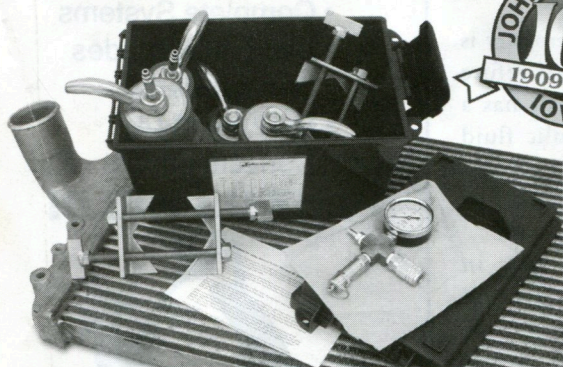
around every now and again, to 'give someone else a go', and ever since the association was formed in 1993, the members who attend the AGM have never had the thrill of putting a tick on a ballot paper.

The board, by some mysterious backroom process, just moves the chairs around and the outcome is usually applauded by all. If your boards and school committees are anything like ours, there's a sudden rush for the toilets when questions like 'who would like to volunteer to be on the board' are raised.

With VASA now led by a retail service centre owner who still works with the tools, it means that VASA has returned to its roots. It has been led by only two people until now – the duo we call Mark I and Mark II. Both are quite famous in the industry in this country because they have been (and continue to be) great leaders.

Mark Mitchell was founder and first president of VASA for a decade, and Mark Padwick has been president for the

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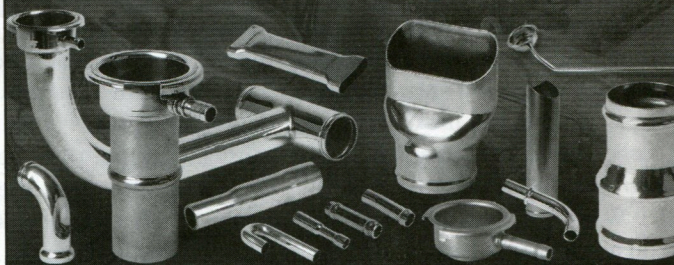
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past five years, and remains as chair of the Australian Refrigeration Council, which administers the nation's licensing program for the Government. Both remain on the VASA board as directors.

When Mark Mitchell became the foundation president of VASA, he was the owner operator of a retail air conditioning workshop in Southport, Queensland. Around 2000, he moved out of retail and became a wholesaler and importer. That means that VASA was led by non-retail members from then until June 2009, because Mark Padwick was, and still is, an executive of an international manufacturer of compressors.

Ian Stangroome's election as president will be well received by the membership. There have been rumblings of discontent in past years, from those who quite mistakenly believed VASA was controlled by the big end of town.

For most of the years since 2000, VASA indeed has had no retail members on the board. It changed slightly in 2005, with one workshop owner elected to the board, and he was joined a year later by an additional two retail directors. But now, to have a retail director as president, VASA has indeed returned to its roots.

Ian Stangroome did his apprenticeship in auto electrical

in a coalmine, and after becoming well qualified, started his first business venture in 1988. He is highly qualified in electrics and air conditioning, and still attends every possible training course. He believes that workshops will survive only if business owners ensure their team members are given every opportunity and encouraged to upgrade existing skills and gain new ones.

He will lead VASA into a critical period of automotive history, with new refrigerants on the horizon, ever more complex vehicle technology, and hybrids and electric vehicles looming large.

As founder Mark Mitchell says, "The workshops of the land are our reason for being. We are a technical, trade based industry so what happens in the workshop dictates how we perform as an association." ❄



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