

Evolving a new approach to paint protection

The Supagard name is probably familiar to most car dealers – the paint protection business works with no fewer than 16 manufacturers, as well as a host of AM100 dealer groups, including Glyn Hopkin and Arnold Clark.

It is a far cry from the humble beginnings of the business three decades ago, when the company was founded in Glasgow.

"It was the old story of a family-run business started from the home," said David Paterson, Supagard's marketing director.

"The home was the office and the garage was the warehouse. Then they had to buy premises and then the premises became where we are at the moment."

Today, the company occupies an unassuming warehouse on Gavinton Street, in the Muirend district of Glasgow.

Paterson said it is still very much a family business, with no fewer than nine members of staff who are relatives of the founder.

"We've kept it in the family. I'm part of the family. My wife, Pauline, is the finance director, and the managing director, Jean Quinn, is my mother-in-law."

That tight-knit approach has paid off, said Alan Graham, the company's sales director, who claimed that a penetration rate of 50% is "not uncommon" and that dealers make a profit of "around £250" on every paint protection system sold.

However, Supagard's traditional family-run approach should not be misinterpreted as old-fashioned.

"Our management team of seven has four women," said Graham. "Automotive companies are typically male-dominated, so it's a little bit different. It brings some real diversity into the discussion and the conversation that we have around products and strategy."

Paterson agreed that merit is the key factor in hiring: "I think it's just a case of assessing the situation. Finding out whether one person comes across better than the next and

IT'S AN EVOLUTIONARY RELATIONSHIP. WE CONSTANTLY DEVELOP THE PRODUCTS, THE OFFER, THE MARKETING

ALAN GRAHAM, SUPAGARD

deciding whether they're going to fit. We're open and judging a person as a person, and not a gender."

Alongside the pride it takes in its modern approach to employee diversity, Supagard also puts a lot of effort into keeping its products on the cutting edge.

"The launch of our bionic products in 2017 took our technologically advanced chemistry to a new level," said Paterson.

What does that mean for customers who have the product applied to their vehicles?

"They'll find the paint protection system easier to clean and easier to maintain," said Paterson. He added that paintwork is not the only aspect of the car to benefit from his company's technological advancements.

"Our window products now have a lifespan of up to six months on the road, so that was a major advancement in technology. And in terms of wheel technology, we've brought a product to market that protects against brake dust filings, and offers heat resistance."

"One of the other demonstrable things the customer would see is the lifetime guarantee that we're offering," added Graham. "Pre-Bionic it was three years or five years. Post-Bionic, it's lifetime. So long as the customer has the car, we'll guarantee it."

Research and development is a big part of



the business, and the company works closely with manufacturers to make sure the product stays ahead of the game. The company even undertakes hot- and cold-weather testing to ensure its products suit their market and provide the best possible protection.

"It's an evolutionary relationship that we have with the big customers," said Graham. "We constantly develop the products, the offer, the marketing and the approach in general. It's a really competitive marketplace, so you need to evolve constantly to stay ahead."

But for all this emphasis on product, Supagard sees itself as providing a service rather than merely manufacturing.

"We obviously supply a product, but it's

then about what happens to the product," said Graham. "We're very much more than just a product provider. It's more of a partnership, where we're providing training, support and coaching, so it's a complete package that we offer."

As part of that "complete package", the company designed an app that allows customers to help customers interact with the product and find out more.

"It's something tangible that customers can play with to look through the product and get a feel for it," said Paterson. "The app itself is a very easy platform to use. It's easily replicated for other brands, so if we wanted to white-label it, we can do."

Paterson is keen for the relationship with

the customer to extend beyond the initial protection treatments.

"All these pieces of chemistry that we put in the car are going to benefit the customer, but the customer doesn't see that side of things, because that happens before they take delivery. They also want a tangible aftercare package with some products in it. The products we put in there are just general maintenance products, but they use our products to enhance the car even more."

Supagard has plans for further expansion beyond the UK and has already installed resources in Asia and the Middle East.

"We've got quite an aggressive growth plan over the next four or five years," said Graham. "A big part of that is the interna-

tional markets – both the existing ones and bringing on new markets as well.

"It's an ongoing development, looking at markets and opportunities, which can be quite different at times. We're not chasing 100 different markets where we only sell £5,000 worth of product, just so we can say we supply to 100 different markets. We're happier growing at a slower pace and working properly in those markets."

The Glasgow warehouse, though, is likely to remain the centre of operations for the foreseeable future. According to Graham, the city is Supagard's "spiritual home".

"I think it's very much a British and Scottish company," added Paterson. "I think having a Glasgow hub is quite important."