

VAN BEERS MOTORS' FIRST 25 YEARS



The smaller photograph, on the left, shows Mr Tom van Beers' first business venture — a small service station at Ede, in Holland. The garage was an official refuelling and repair centre for the Dutch Army, besides serving the public.

On the right is the latest — but probably not the last — of the Van Beers family's enterprises: the refurbished service station at Fitzroy, New Plymouth. The oldish house framed in the canopy pillars is shortly to be removed, and the section will then be terealed for use as a car sales yard.



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special feature

Another service station

The Van Beers are celebrating their first quarter-century of business in New Plymouth in typical fashion — by opening yet another service station.

The latest venture of this enterprising Dutch migrant family is in Fitzroy, ideally placed near a busy shopping centre in the middle of a populous suburb, and on the main highway north.

Bought last year, the premises have been virtually rebuilt. A new forecourt canopy has gone up. The front showroom has been extended. The workshop at the rear is bigger, and better appointed. Improvements have been made to office, rest rooms and staff accommodation.

The policy seems to have been: "If it moves, shift it. If it doesn't move, paint it".

Adjoining property has been acquired, and will shortly become a car sales yard.

The new service station is managed by one of the four Van Beers brothers, Will. (That's not his real Christian name, which we are assured is unpronounceable by dinkum Kiwis).

The workshop foreman is Allan Lawrence, and there is a staff of four.

On the next couple of pages we tell you more about this remarkable family. Read on.

HATS OFF TO YOU! VAN BEERS MOTORS

It's a fine achievement and we know you can look back over the past 25 years with pride.

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24 HOUR CENTURY OF PROGRESS

The Van Beers have been in the motor industry in Holland almost since there was a motor industry; and for the past quarter of a century they've been in the same business here.

Antonius van Beers (old hands in the motor trade will remember him as Tom) was born in 1906, in Rotterdam. By the time he was 15 he was working on his father's service station in Renkum, then a rural township smaller than Inglewood.

He had a spell as a chauffeur, went to Italy and spent a couple of years working for Lancia before returning home. In 1933 he married Juliana (now there's a good Dutch name) and in 1938 the young couple set up business on their own with a service station and workshop that carried the Chevrolet franchise.

The new venture was in Ede, like Renkum a small town, near Utrecht. They'd been in business just over a year when the war came. This isn't the place to write about Holland under Nazi occupation; that's been done. The direct effect on Van Beers' garage was damage to their almost new brick and tile building. Although it was repaired with typical Dutch craftsmanship, the scars still show.

When the war was over, the business and the family were damaged to their even more than the first. By 1952 Tom and Juliana had 11 children — but in a small community there was a limit beyond which a small service station could not expand. By now they had the Volkswagen franchise, but even that didn't give them much scope.

The family included four sons. The business simply didn't have the potential to absorb them.

So Tom van Beers (they didn't use a capital V in the name until they came here) decided to migrate.

Holland in 1952 was not the rich country it is today. The war had left the nation impoverished, and there were rigid restrictions on the export of capital. The van Beers could bring their furniture and two cars, but not much money.

They came to New Plymouth, and for three years rented a house in Smart Road, Fitzroy, while Tom worked at the Waikakaho fertilizer works, and repaired cars in the evenings.

Getting established in a

new country, even one as friendly as New Zealand, isn't always easy. There were initial language difficulties; cultural differences; not enough money; not enough room for 13 people in the rented house.

A dispensation from the Customs Department allowed them to sell the two imported cars, a Packard and a Wolseley, so that they could put down the money on a property in Westown — a big, oldish house on two acres, and with stables that could be converted. That was in 1955.

Although the big house suited a large family, the location was less than ideal for a service station; it wasn't on a main highway. But in spite of that factor, it thrived. Tom Van Beers, as he was now known, was getting a reputation as a fine mechanic and a straight businessman.

So he prospered. The Westown Service Station was the first in New Plymouth, and, we understand, in Taranaki — to offer 24-hour service. Father and sons got the Automobile Association breakdown contract, and operated with two elderly Chevrolet coupes.

The business improved they saved a bit of capital and branched out into rental cars.

But Tom Van Beers wasn't really happy about

the Westown site; too far off the beaten track. His chance came late in 1959, when the family's present headquarters at Moturoa became available.

And that was more like it. The property was on the main Port-to-City highway, right in a shopping centre, and there was at least a possibility of expansion. Tom Van Beers bought it. When the place had been virtually rebuilt there was an official opening — all the usual palaver of balloons and streamers, plus some unusual touches, like the little girls in Dutch costume, caps and starched winged caps, passing round the trays.

When the bit of land to the west of them came on the market, that too was acquired, and Van Beers Car Sales was established.

Since then the Van Beers' story is of modest but steady expansion. In 1967 they bought the Leach St Service Station, now Central Motors. Seven years later they had another branch down by the New Plymouth railway station (though that was operated for only two years); and last year they bought the service station in Fitzroy described on the previous page.

Future plans? Harry Van Beers, who became the company's managing director on the death of his father, is quite explicit. "More expansion," he says.



The upper picture shows the first Van Beers venture in New Plymouth taking shape, in Westown. On the right is the roof of the big house, of which the service station had been the stables.

The lower picture shows another Van Beers business, Central Motors, run by Hans Van Beers.



The headquarters of the Van Beers' growing empire is this service station at Moturoa, first opened in 1960.



The late Mr. Antonius (Tom) van Beers, who founded the group of businesses that bear his name.

Mrs Juliana Van Beers, still a director of the family's group of companies.



Four of the Van Beers daughters (one dressed as a boy, left) at the official opening of the Moturoa Service Station in October of 1960.

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