

# How the Clarkes became big wheels

TWELVE years ago Peter and Colin Clarke began a business selling car parts from a small terraced house in Henrietta Street.

They were armed with a few pounds borrowed and saved, a lot of determination and a common interest in cars. They also had a simple sound belief that all motor vehicles receive a high degree of wear and tear, so replacement parts and components would always be in demand.

In 1974 their business was so successful that they had to purchase premises in nearby Cromac Street to cope with the demand. Then, four years later, the brothers expanded their operation, moving into the commercial vehicle sector when they set up another shop at 135 Cromac Street to complement the auto-factors shop at 161-165, just down the road.

Last month the finishing touches were put on £50,000 worth of renovations and improvements to the two premises, a clear demonstration that their early faith was justified.

Good service, both brothers agree, has been a

key to their success. This means keeping items in stock, maintaining an efficient stock control system and putting the customer first.

"At the highest demand from customers is for fast moving replacement components — items which wear out quickly such as silencers, plugs, points and brakes and clutches, we ensure that there are large stocks of those always available," said Colin Clarke.

"When someone wants something and you haven't got it in stock they will naturally go elsewhere, so you must establish a reputation for holding items.

"We have one or two different suppliers for most parts and carry a massive range. Our main customers are garages in the Belfast area," he added.

## Maintain

Every item stocked in the auto-factors shop is noted down on its card. These cards are filed so that the stock situation on any item may be discovered at a glance and two girls work full-time on stock control.

"Flexibility is essential when there is such a turnover of parts and

components," said Colin. "It is important to set up stock, maintain an efficient stock control system and this is why we have two staff working at it."

Clarke Bros. (Auto-Factors) are sole distributors in Northern Ireland for Boge shock absorbers, which are used on many continental manufactured cars, and LUK clutches.

Two vehicles are on the road full-time delivering parts and components

with a third driver available as a back-up to ensure fast service should there be any extra pressure.

Peter Clarke stressed the value of a good delivery service.

"When we first started in Henrietta Street we made a point of operating a delivery service. We promised customers who wanted basic car parts that we would deliver them within hours of being contacted," he said.



John McManus, manager of Clarke Bros. (Auto-Factors), is well known in the Belfast motor trade.

## Brothers team up for success

COLIN and Peter Clarke are partners in business but often rivals in sport. The two brothers have been rally enthusiasts for some years and compete against each other when they rally together.

Last year, however, they dropped their friendly rivalry to join up with Langley Humphries, entering three Ford Escorts as Team Clarke Brothers in the testing Circuit of Ireland rally.

The two men not only experienced the flavour and atmosphere of the event as participants, rubbing shoulders with the world's top rally drivers, but managed to enjoy the taste of success. Team Clarke Brothers carried off the team prize in their debut run.

## Bonus

Colin admitted that they competed mainly for the fun and challenge. He said: "Winning was great, but for private entrants like ourselves it was a bonus. So many things can put you out of the race that you really set your sights on simply completing the circuit."

"In an event like the Circuit good mechanics to provide a back-up are essential. Our success last year certainly owed a lot to our back-up crew. At one point they managed to change a clutch in 23 minutes," Colin added.

With Kieran Humphries navigating for his brother Langley, two sets of brothers were in the winning team.

This Easter Colin and Peter will be defending the team prize. They have been working hard during the past few months tuning up their Ford Escorts along with Belfast dentist David McAuley, who will drive the third team car.

As well as being a sporting interest for Colin and Peter, rallying also has business spin-offs for the brothers. It publicises their name and the auto-factors shop in Cromac Street is well known by local rally enthusiasts.

"Rallying is an expensive and time-consuming



Team Clarke Bros. all set for the Circuit of Ireland at Easter: (from left) Peter Clarke, Brendan Montgomery, Colin Clarke, Paul Taylor and David McAuley.

hobby," said Colin, "but it does help to promote the business."

And Peter joked: "The Circuit of Ireland is a

tough, tiring event. It gives both cars and drivers a lot of punishment, not to mention crews, but if

you are in the business of selling parts and components there is no better way of testing them out!"

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