



Ari Shaw and Vince Howell.

Beep, Beep! It's the Road Runner and Coyote show

It wasn't the love of the deep south that spurred Vince Howell to move from Northland to Southland but the love for his childhood sweetheart, Ari Shaw.

Vince couldn't live without her and almost 20 years on, the move has paid dividends with a trio of thriving auto businesses in Invercargill.

With a busy panel repair shop called Road Runner, a rental car business and a recently added mechanical workshop named, naturally, Coyote, they have grown their business beyond what they ever imagined.

"We have been together since we were 15," Vince says.

"We are very different and almost opposites and what she thinks about I don't have to, and what I think about she doesn't have to, so there is no crossover in our roles, and it all works well."

Getting started

Also pivotal to their success was buying an Invercargill panel shop seven years ago.

Vince had been working for Road Runner Panel and Paint for a few years and was offered the opportunity to buy it. With Ari's encouragement and with the help of the previous owner, they took the leap into business ownership.

"It was just a little business and

Vince was working there as their sole panel beater and he was almost running it so when the opportunity arose to take it over, it made sense," Ari says.

"And I jumped into it because I had the faith in Vince that he could make it work."

Ari had been working for the local District Health Board and took a year off to help Vince with the business, only expecting to be there a year.

"I headed up the childhood immunisation programme and it was a big call leaving. I told my boss I would be back in a year, she called me a year later and I said 'sorry, I'm staying'."

"We thought we would probably kill each other working together, but it has just worked, and I haven't gone anywhere," Ari says.

"There is no way I could have done this without Ari," Vince says.

Adding to the business

With insurance work a large portion of their business, they saw there was a demand for rental cars, so they bought a small rental fleet to add to the business.

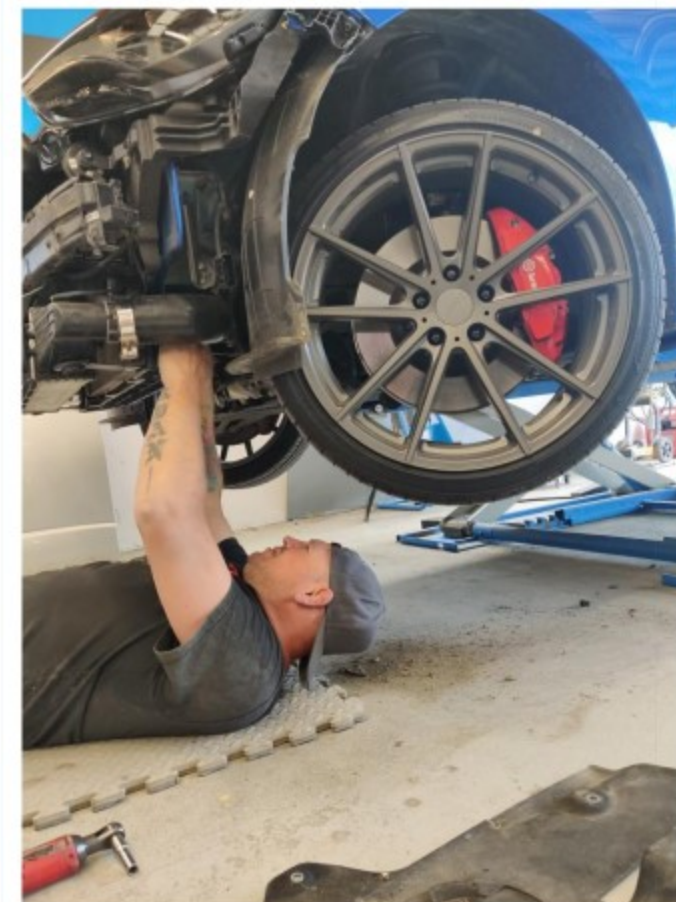
Next came the auto repair shop, Coyote.

Buying the workshop was an obvious move too, Ari says; they were outsourcing mechanical repairs on the insurance work and the local mechanic they were using suggested it would be a good idea and he would help run it.

"The cogs started turning and it was a no-brainer to have our own workshop.

"We have kind of fallen into this and I don't know if it's because we are suckers for punishment, but we keep adding more to the business and it seems to work," Ari says.

They now have around 14 employees, and the biggest learning curve for Ari has been dealing with staff.



"We are very different and almost opposites"



What's in a name?

Ari says for some unknown reason the panel shop was called Road Runner, so taking inspiration from the Looney Tunes cartoon character Wile E. Coyote, they decided to change the name of the automotive workshop from John McKenzie Automotive to Coyote. It's a cute fit with Road Runner, and pretty recognisable to most generations. "We wanted something that would link the two businesses and that's how the name came along," Vince says. "Not everybody makes the connection when they see the names; when we bought Road Runner seven years ago it was already named that, and we don't know why or what the connection is."



Sponsorship and supporting the local community have all been part and parcel of the business for Vince and Ari which includes all motorsport and kids rugby.



The fleet looks striking with the company graphics.

Changing focus

Going forward, they are changing the focus of the business from insurance work to private work aimed at enthusiasts keen on performance cars. "We sponsor a car show, HPTO Fest, down here that is growing and people who are involved in it love their cars and love to spend money on them and that's the stuff that excites Vince," Ari says. "It's very different work to fixing a cracked bumper and a chance for Vince to be creative." Vince adds: "Because of the car show we have got a following as a business that will do that type of work, where a lot of businesses won't touch them, and we are into our cars also." In their downtime, Vince and the family enjoy the outdoors, he's a keen spear fisherman and with great diving spots handy to home they won't be going anywhere soon. "I have to pinch myself sometimes, this all wouldn't have been possible if we had stayed up north as the cost of owning a commercial property would have been too high," he says.



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