



All-female team changing the garage experience

By John Lawrence

“Some of the places I’ve worked at were awful in the way they treated a woman on the team. They wouldn’t trust you or wouldn’t show you anything. At the worst they were intimidating and bullying.”

So says Laura Kennedy about her experience of making her way in the male-dominated world of garages and car repair workshops. And, yes, there are still plenty of calendars of topless women hanging up in those places.

Good for customers and workers

The way out of this world for Laura and her colleagues Megan and Siobhan has been to set up and run London’s first all-female garage team, called Spanners With Manners. Now they have moved into the site

repairs on all makes and models.

“A lot of our customers have had bad experiences at other garages and feel they have been ripped off because they are women,” says Laura. “When their male partner goes into the same garage to question a price or something, they get a different story. “People who come in to us say it’s a nice environment and it’s friendly. That goes for men and women. And for us, working in an all-female team is good. It makes a difference when you’re working closely alongside someone in tight spaces and have to be in close contact with them.”

Laura started out with an apprenticeship with Porsche 16 years ago and has worked at many places since. “The first five years were horrendous. It was so male dominated,” she says. “One place told me they couldn’t take me on because they didn’t have any toilet facilities for women. Others were totally different, really encouraging and gave me

a great training.”

Inspiring

Tracy Gray is very happy to be handing over the business to Laura and the team. She says: “They are an inspiration for young girls who are mechanically minded and maybe don’t want to pursue the academic route. Although it’s supposed to be a gender-equal world, it’s not really and it’s not easy for girls to find their way into a business like this.

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Under the bonnet: Laura Kennedy at Spanners With Manners. Photo Mike Coles

in Long Lane, N2, previously run by Glen and Tracy Gray as Glen Garage.

Their aim is to offer a workshop where it’s not intimidating for female motorists to bring their vehicles and where male and female customers can expect simple and reliable quotes for any servicing or



Moving on: Glen and Tracy Gray in their last week at their Long Lane garage. Photo John Lawrence.

Garage duo hand over the keys

By John Lawrence

Forty years have passed since Glen Gray first came to work at his garage in East Finchley. Then he rented the site between Long Lane and the Northern line tube tracks from an owner who in turn rented it from London Transport. His wife Tracy joined the business around the year 2000, which is when they expanded beyond a vehicle workshop into the van hire market too.

Now Glen and Tracy have decided it’s time to hang up their keys and make way for the next generation of garage owners. They will be Spanners With Manners, London’s first all-female garage team.

Right time to go

Glen and Tracy have never advertised the workshop side of their business, always thriving and surviving on customer loyalty and word of mouth. “We’ll miss the interaction with the customers. A lot of them have become close friends over the years and we’ve got to know a lot about each other,” says Tracy. Glen signals that it’s the right time for him to be retiring. “The car business years ago was very

simple. You could look under a bonnet and find out what was wrong pretty quickly,” he says. “Now cars are full of electronics and on-board computers, they’re so sophisticated. You need a lot of tools and software and you need to keep up with training every year. The main dealers are making it hard for small garages like us.”

Friendly handover

The couple, who live in Elmfield Road, N2, were aware that their business site, between Chamberlin Road and Manor Cottages Approach, could be a prime target for property developers so they were keen to sell to another garage team. “I heard through our tool man that Spanners With Manners

were losing their lease in North Finchley with just a month’s notice, so we invited them down and we all got on together straightaway,” says Glen. “We decided to share the premises while we went through the handover period and it’s worked out very well.”

Road trip ahead

Retirement won’t mean Glen and Tracy will be entirely off-road. He will continue to polish and tinker with his beloved Jaguar Mark II 3.8 litre, which he’s owned for 25 years, and together they plan a road trip in their camper van visiting their five children, eight grandchildren and other family and friends around the UK.

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By John Dearing

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