

DUSTINS AUTOS



Lauren Warthold and husband Dustin Warthold

BIGGER AND BETTER

BY ROBERT LAIDLAW

Dustins Autos in Darwin has expanded and moved into bigger and better premises, which is an amazing accomplishment considering the restrictions and disruptions created by COVID-19.

The new premises at 544 Stuart Highway, Winnellie also has a huge showroom, which provides excellent views for potential customers.

“Purchasing a commercial property during a pandemic was always going to cause a lot of stress on the entire family, but it was a case of now or never,” Lauren Warthold said, of her and husband Dustin’s move.

“Having rented a commercial property for the past nine years, Dustins Autos was provided with great support from our accountant and bank, which allowed the business to purchase a commercial property already previously functioning as a vehicle dealership – for BMW and Hyundai.

“The biggest challenge we faced in 2020 was getting our customers to understand that we were not responsible for the rise in vehicle pricing.

“With stock levels throughout the year getting down as low as 60%, many customers wanted discounts where they were just not possible, given the situation that COVID-19 brought to the industry.”

Dustin Warthold has worked in the car industry since the

90s, when he detailed vehicles for his cousin Dave, and when his cousin put the business up for sale, he was encouraged to start his own business by his dad, Geoff.

Early in the new business, Dustin concentrated on cheaper cars, catering for backpackers and people in need of a ‘quick fix’ vehicle. Dustin Autos gradually increased the quality of stock and his volume of vehicles from around 40 to 100, which is when he moved to Berrimah in 2012.

“The location in Berrimah, situated in the business and trade area of the Top End, was a great move. It has Stuart Highway frontage and a larger shed for mechanics and detailing, and it was the right time to increase staffing,” Lauren said, who has joined the business as office manager.

“When I came on board, we didn’t have vehicles recorded on any form of database. Everything was still on paper, so I came in to initially set up a system to streamline work processes. While the plan was to return to my previous role as a mum, working in the family business provided flexibility, and with two young children, it worked well.”

The secret to Dustin’s success was and is hard work. In Darwin, businesses such as Dustins Autos need to be able to survive not only through the busy dry season, which brings many travellers to the Top End, but also in the wet season through the ‘slower’ months.

The ability to plan ahead and look forward, to move with

Dustins Autos ↻



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the ever-changing online business presence are keys in being able to be seen when someone is searching for a vehicle.

And for Dustin, finding vehicles to sell is always a challenge, and the business searches across the country to source cars.

“Taking great care of our customers has been a focus for us,” Lauren said. “Darwin is like a small country town, so word of mouth goes a long way.

“Last week we purchased a vehicle from a defence force staff member and he commented positively on how great our reputation was amongst the whole defence force in the Top End.

“It’s always busy and I enjoy the challenge. Every sale is different, every customer is unique. We don’t believe that one car fits all, so we make it our business to ensure every customer leaves with a vehicle suited to their needs.”

Services provided by Dustins Autos vary. Vehicles available predominately are diesel 4WDs but there is also a range of quality cars. In-house finance is available, as are trade-in valuations, warranties and insurance.

Dustins Autos is always on the lookout for more stock, so fast and easy valuations are offered, and payments are processed on the same day.

“Our customers always find selling their vehicles very

easy when they come to us,” Lauren said. “Once a price is finalised with a customer, they can be out the door with the money clear in their account within 15 minutes.

“The whole process of selling your vehicle to Dustins Autos is simple, stress free and fast. We also offer a lift home in most cases if we have staff available.”

A community-minded business, Dustin’s sponsor or makes donations to a range of clubs and organisations, including Tiwi Bombers Football Club, Banks Bulldogs Junior Football Club, Banks Bulldogs Netball Club, Starlight Foundation, Heart Research Institution, Lions Club NT and the Special Children’s Christmas Party.

As for their membership of the MTA, Lauren said they appreciate the support membership offers within the industry, while also helping to ensure the business is up to date with current legislation.

“I would like to thank Darwin for the support we have received over the past 20 years,” she said.

“We aim to continue providing the Northern Territory with the best product possible going forward now, and in the long term.”

“Our team is passionate about helping our customers find the right used vehicle for the right price. Our team is well trained in all aspects of the company, ensuring they can assist everyone with all of their automotive needs.”