

The Opposite of ORDINARY

The face of Maserati is changing dramatically as it ups its game in the prestige vehicle segment across Australia, New Zealand, and beyond.

Images by Scott Ehler

Over the past few years, Maserati has been undergoing a significant transformation.

Large investments have been made into its facilities and models, its annual sales have increased, and it has expanded internationally. The luxury label's presence has been growing enormously in this region and it is constantly evolving under the direction of COO Glen Sealey.

In charge of Maserati's operations in Australia, New Zealand, and most recently South Africa, Glen is focused on moving the brand from the 'exotic' to 'exclusive' category, while keeping it authentic and true to its traditional roots. European Automotive Imports, a wholly owned subsidiary of Ateco Group, took over the distribution of Maserati in late 2005, and an investment of more than \$100 million was poured into the dealer

network facilities soon after. The aim was to lift and stabilise the brand in the local marketplace.

"We took the business pretty much straight away from an average of 60 sales a year to an average of 150 sales a year, which is a great increase," Glen says. "We averaged 150 a year all the way through to 2013, and that's no mean feat considering what was happening in the market over that period of time, and the fact we had a limited model range as well. But providing that stability enabled us to set ourselves a platform from which we could grow further."

From that point, the business was able to determine its future—how much expenditure was needed, where the brand sat in the market, and what hurdles needed to be overcome to continue on a positive growth trajectory going forward. "In doing that, it allowed us to

plan well for the next stage, which was to take the business from 150 sales a year to 500 sales a year," Glen explains. "We knew that was going to happen in a very short period of time and that it would be led by a product offensive; however, we had to make sure our brand was right. And we've done that now."

Maserati has seen benefits from the large investments into its retail premises, opening new facilities in Sydney and Melbourne as well as renovating existing stores in Brisbane, Adelaide, and Perth. It also has plans to update its operations in New Zealand to cater for the predicted influx in sales. "That sets us up with a solid foundation for around 500 sales a year. To continue that base and to keep it steady is then important because we will be preparing for another leapfrog towards the next stage of growth, doubling that >



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volume again to 1,000 sales per year. Once we get to that level, that's about where we want to stay.

"We are still an exclusive brand. Maserati globally has said that they wish to do 75,000 cars a year. That's less than 0.1 per cent of the global automotive production, so it's a very exclusive brand. You won't see Maserati with \$30,000 or \$40,000 cars. We will remain at the top tier of where we are. At 60 cars a year pre-2005, that's very exotic; and 1,000 or more cars a year in this marketplace, that's very exclusive. That's really the transition of the brand that you're seeing today."

Glen says the reason behind Maserati's recent spurt of

phenomenal growth has been largely thanks to good planning and preparation. A lot of work was done behind the scenes to expand the team of staff in the national office and in the retail dealerships, and significant time was also spent on getting the positioning and pricing right. "It doesn't just come by fluke," he notes. While the Australian retail environment as a whole is experiencing tough times at the moment, Maserati appears to be defying that trend with ease and thriving in its environment. Glen says his number one tip throughout the process has been to get the basics right. "Once you know the basics, then you do them over and over again, and you do them well. The market will fluctuate, but if you do those things well and you do them over and over again, it will come good."

Furthermore, Maserati recently expanded its operations into South Africa after recognising a demand for sports cars in those markets. The first South African dealership was opened in Johannesburg in June this year. "There's a lot of potential that's sitting there for us," Glen says. "We've almost reached last year's volume in two months, so you'll see Cape Town open in the next few months, you'll see Durban open, and you'll also see Mauritius open very shortly, within

the next eight months. We see a very positive future in South Africa, and for us it's an opportunity that we just couldn't pass up."

The Maserati portfolio consists of the Ghibli, Quattroporte, GranTurismo, and GranCabrio. To complement this range, it is also releasing a selection of new models in coming months, including the highly anticipated Levante. Still distinctively a Maserati in terms of design and performance, the vehicle is the brand's foray into the luxury SUV market and is set to debut at the 2016 Detroit Auto Show in January.

The new model Quattroporte also arrived in stores this October and is a more accessible version of the original with modern updates such as blind-spot technology and superior entertainment units to make everyday driving a little bit easier. "The Quattroporte is certainly not losing the fundamental core of what Maserati is, which is great balance, beautiful sound, and the craftsmanship of the interior," Glen notes. "So you're getting a little bit more of a user-friendly ride without sacrificing what Maserati stands for."

According to Glen, the brand takes great pride in its vehicles from the design stage right through to the point of sale, and a Maserati looks and drives like nothing else. "When you step back and you go to the factory and you talk to the engineers, and you hear about the process they go through when designing and building a car, it's interesting. In designing and building a car, they have the car done, they go out and they test drive it, and it must have neutral handling, it must be absolutely predictable, and it must be what I would call perfect without any electronic aids. The electronic aids are only overlaid for safety.

"There are other brands that design cars well, and they're terrific vehicles, but they're designed for smaller-output engines; and once you start



putting heavier-weighted engines on the front, they need the electronic interventions to cater for the inherent flaws in the car in the way that it's been designed for more of a volume application. Maserati is not like that. Maserati is designed from the beginning without the electronic interventions, and then putting those interventions in are only for safety. So what you get is a car that just feels fantastic on the road even if the interventions are off."

The Ghibli is one of Maserati's most renowned cars and has been a crucial cog in the business's growth over the past 100 years. Glen says there have been some interesting trends coming out of that model, including an overwhelming number of new people being drawn to the car.

"To see a Ghibli in the showroom, the car looks great; but when you

go out and you see the car on the road, it looks fantastic. Maserati has a great ability to do that. There's no doubt the Ghibli is more accessible and that people can get into the Maserati brand at that level. The important thing for us is that it's still exclusive. The Ghibli is starting at \$139,800—it is not starting at \$80,000—so we're right at the very top end of what we call the E-segment, and we don't apologise for that. We really do see Maserati as a brand where you graduate from the Germans into Maserati. As a strategy, that's working.

"We are also not a brand that can compete with the big German three on their game; we're not a brand that can make a two-litre car and sell it for \$80,000 or \$90,000 en masse. We can't compete in that, nor do we wish to. We wish to be at the high end of the segment, offering something that's unique, something that's tactile and

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experienced based, and something that you engage in to enjoy your life rather than just for transport."

Glen says his personal favourite model to drive is the GranTurismo MC Stradale. "Without question!" he quips. "It distils the essence of Maserati in one model and it's just fantastic. I'm a person who loves to drive. I love the automobile product, I enjoy the brand, and I love the business. That vehicle as a product is just outstanding.

"It delivers on everything it should. From the experience of when you're changing gears high in the rev range to the surge that you get because it's still an electro-actuated single clutch, which is not common in the marketplace really. It's about the only car around like that, and therefore it's the only one that can deliver that experience. Some of the soundproofing has been taken out so that you get that raw experience, and it has an additional human interface that has a race mode which really gives you a lot of play. You know, if you are coming around a corner and you just put on the gas a little bit early, you will feel the rear slide out; now, there's a lot of fun in that. And on a track, that car delivers in spades. So you can hear the enthusiasm. For me, that car is just fantastic." >





Maserati has truly solidified its position in the prestige vehicle market and has a loyal base of customers who stick around thanks to the great after-sales service it delivers and its authenticity as a brand. Glen credits the strong devotion of clients to Maserati's strong heritage, Italian craftsmanship, exclusivity, and the fame that has resulted from the talented drivers in the F1 championships.

"Maserati attracts people who want to enjoy their life," he says. "If you want to just go from A to B, Maserati is not a brand for you. If you want to disengage from the driving experience, we are not in that game. We are in the game of enhancing and experiencing, enjoying everything you have in life. And we are a brand that actually works well, I think, with the Australian social outlook as

well. We are a population of people who love to enjoy ourselves; we are people who appreciate the surroundings we live in. And when we drive, we like that experience.

"Sure, there's a market of people that don't like to drive and, sure, there is a market who see it as transport from A to B and that's all it is. That's not where we are. We do deliver on what we promise in that respect. The product delivers, the brand experience delivers, and I don't think personally there's another brand in the marketplace that has that exact offering. If that's what you're attracted to, there's really nowhere else to go.

"There is such a huge element of the brand that is understated chic, rather than being very flashy, and I think that really fits into the Australian mindset. There's a real appreciation of the craftsmanship

in the design and the sound. Again, it's about delivering an experience, whether it's what you see, what you smell in terms of the leather interior, what you hear with that auditory experience, and even the feeling of that acceleration. It all combines to be something that is terrific when you're in the car every day.

"We have a very loyal owner base, which is terrific. One of the key aspects for us now is that as we're gaining a lot of new customers to the brand with our growth, we need to retain those customers and then move them into the product line as life goes on."

Glen's dream for the future of Maserati is for it to stay true to itself in a way that is financial and viable. "Now, that's not glamorous, but it's necessary," he says. "For Maserati to survive another 100 years—and I want to see that, even though I don't think I'll be around—it has to be commercial. But in being commercial, I don't want it to lose the essence of what it is. We're so lucky today it hasn't lost that. As a brand, we are setting ourselves up really nicely for the next 100 years." •