



BUSINESS SENSE by TIM KELLY

Gearing up for the future in NI

Early last month Tim Kelly from Motor Claim Guru attended a new event for the collision repair sector in Northern Ireland which was staged by the region's biggest accident management company, Crash Ltd, and sponsored by JMK Solicitors. Here is his report from Clondeboye Estate near Bangor, County Down.

It was a perfect bright and sunny Saturday on which to stage the premier event of the year for the Northern Ireland collision repair industry. The brainchild of Crash Ltd's Jonathan McKeown, the inaugural CRASH event was held as an all-day function split into six zones that were accessed through a car park dotted with classic cars, including Chitty Chitty Bang Bang.

Zone 1 celebrated 25 years of Crash in Northern Ireland and the work it does assisting motorists and repairers; the Zone 2 fun-zone was where you could "bury the hatchet with insurers" and featured axe throwing and archery; Zone 3 included demonstrations of measuring equipment from Car-O-liner, weld testing and Paint by Rach's Rachel Murray explaining the causes of refinishing paint defects; while Zone 4 showcased the "technology of the future", including what lies in store for powertrains, EVs and hydrogen, high-tech materials such as carbon fibre, Kevlar and aluminium, along with cold-welding, bonding and riveting equipment. Among other things, Zones 5 and 6 including some fabulous demonstrations of PDR glue-pulling.

Mike Monaghan of Auto-Motivate and myself had the pleasure of sharing the stage with guest speaker Tim Shaw from the Discovery Channel's *Car SOS*, while BBC journalist Claire McCollum of *Songs of Praise* fame moderated. A more diverse stage you will not see.

Fair to say we had a healthy debate

about the future of the repair sector. Shaw's passion for the motor industry was very clear to see. He also took time to talk to every person who approached him, which was impressive, especially considering he was called upon at short notice after Fuzz Townsend came down with Covid three days prior.

Shaw said: "What an event! The Crash weekend was great for a couple of reasons; not only was I mixing with the world's most friendly folk, but also hanging out with automotive artisans. In the world of car restoration, it's the bodyshop guys and gals who possess the most impossible skill in my opinion. They're the ones who always leave me thinking 'how on earth did you do that?'"

"The Crash event totally reinforced something I've known for decades; the vehicle repair world is one hell of a rewarding place to work and will be training people to be experts for as long as the wheel continues to exist," he said.

Monaghan added: "A brilliantly executed event, open and engaging, the whole day allowed for a no-pressure environment where people could explore and discuss key aspects of the collision repair industry. The speaker topics provided the platform to showcase the industry's opportunities for current and future staff."

McKeown explained the thinking behind the event was to get people together after Covid, connecting and reconnecting the sector and providing a platform to offer more support for regional repairers.

"Firstly, I want to thank Alan Holden of Fusion Management, who pulled out all the stops to put on this event, and also all of my staff for bringing this event to life in such an amazing way," said McKeown. "The feeling from the day has been that everyone is enthusiastic about the industry, and it was clear there are people who want to stay in the industry and who will bring others into it."

"The repair industry in Northern Ireland is no different to the rest of the UK, but the businesses are a lot smaller and the support they need is greater. There are good resilient bodyshops, but there is an awful lot of information that they need to absorb to keep up to date with new technologies," McKeown concluded.

From my own point of view, the CRASH event was well thought out and superbly organised. By participating on the main stage, I was able to bring some insight into the future of automotive technology, together with business guidance and the need to be making profit and investing in the future.

The atmosphere was warm and friendly, and the staff at Crash (<https://www.crashservices.com/>) did an amazing job to create and stage this superb event. If there is one word to sum it all up, that word is "passion".

For more information about the region's collision repair sector, visit the Northern Ireland Bodyshop Alliance at <https://www.nibodyshop.com>.