



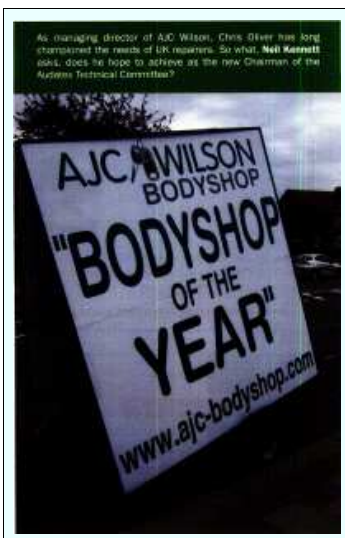
Oliver Helps Audatex to Help Repairers

"Our brief is to help resolve technical issues relating to Audatex systems," he says. "Members of the Committee sit at the sharp end of the motor claims and repair business, and tackle the more challenging issues that need to be referred beyond the Service Desk. We are exploring the systemic causes of recurring incidents – system speed and estimating efficiency being two examples."

The Audatex Technical Committee provides a transparent, objective

examination of technical questions raised by Audatex customers. To get the most out of the system, Chris advises: *"All users should report incidents and use the information that we make available following our investigations."*

In terms of adopting new technology Chris certainly practices what he preaches. Dagenham-based AJC Wilson was the first to gain the BS1 Kitemark for Vehicle Body Repairs, and has won more





Chris Oliter

industry awards than you can shake a stick at.

Skills Chasm

However, Chris is realistic about the challenges facing the sector. Questioning whether the educational establishments are supporting the core skills, he says: "We are not facing a skills gap, it is a skills chasm. I struggle to understand

some of the estimating practices in the industry – people are failing the ATA, yet this is what we do day-in day-out. Get that wrong and it is wrong all the way through."

He continues: "There is a lack of profitability for everyone involved – suppliers, insurers and repairers – and there is no easy answer to that."

Consumers understand the cost of everything and the value of nothing, and that is a problem when you start commoditising complex products like motor insurance. That said, we are in an industry not dissimilar to any other – most goods are getting cheaper so we have to find ways to work smarter."

Change of Focus

In order to drum up their own business rather than relying on the insurance companies, AJC Wilson has recently embarked on a major marketing campaign. It has invested in a new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system and contacted local companies operating more than five vehicles.

Chris says: "We now generate about 20% of our own business whereas a year ago it was only about 4%. These companies come directly to us and then we deal with the insurance company. That is the way we should be going across the industry."

Workshop is Lean

The workshop at AJC







Wilson is designed as a circular roadway with distinct work areas marked in blue and a central facilities area in the middle.

Chris explains: *"The design is based on lean principles – it is all about eliminating waste. There are separate areas for stripping, panel, preparation, painting and refitting, and we do not have a bodyshop manager – the guys run the workshop by themselves. The vehicle gets fed in at one end and comes out at the other, and there is quality control between each stage – not a quick look in the car park afterwards!"*

To enhance profitability the company has also invested in additional revenue streams such as four wheel alignment, air conditioning, SMART repairs and valeting.

The latest move is into car restoration, which Chris says is a great training ground. He comments: *"We take practical classics like VW camper vans and get the apprentices to restore them to a standard equivalent to the day they came off the production line. It is a fantastic way to develop their craft skills, which the industry lacks. It also gives them a great sense of satisfaction and makes us more proficient."*

The Audatex Technical Committee findings are reported on the Audatex website; latest available updates are from April 2009. The link is via the Audatex Industry Forum Minutes, May 2009 meeting.



