



MTA | Q&A

The 'postie' bike is a mobility icon - a small, rugged motorcycle used for decades by postal workers across the nation to deliver mail. In Caboolture, Brisbane, Michael O'Neill has built a thriving business refurbishing, and supplying and manufacturing parts for, these iconic machines. In this month's Q&A, Michael shares his journey & the story of the evolution of Lambda Motorcycles.

WHAT PRODUCTS AND SERVICES DO YOU OFFER AT LAMBDA MOTORCYCLES & WHO ARE YOUR MAIN CUSTOMERS?

MO'N: Our core business is supplying parts for postie bikes to Australia Post contractors. That ranges from fully reconditioned bikes we've rebuilt in-house,

to engines we send out for customers to fit themselves, and on to racks, bags, lights—basically every single part you can imagine on a postie bike. We manufacture most of those parts.

Australia Post contractors bring us tired bikes with 80,000–90,000 km on them, and we completely refresh them so they leave

with a bike that looks and feels brand new.

We also supply parts to small shops and dealerships if they can't source something.

HOW DID YOU COME TO MANUFACTURE YOUR OWN PARTS, INCLUDING ENGINES?

MO'N: It started small. My first product was a rectifier regulator for a Yamaha XT600. The original overheated, so I had one made overseas with a heatsink on. I then had a batch of 50 made with the whole order coming to about \$US900 and I sold them for \$50 each.

From there, I made speedometers, reflectors, rubber parts, plastics - you name it - for the NBC110, the CT110 and CT110X.

When I was working on the NBC, I realised I needed to make an engine available for it. That took me a long time. I had to start from scratch and it took two-and-a-half years of back-and-forth prototyping and eventually we nailed it.

Our Lambda engines have improved clutches, oil pumps, tensioners, and are

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really reliable. Some customers have run them for years without needing a new clutch - that's unheard of.

WHAT'S YOUR BACKGROUND IN THE INDUSTRY? WHY MOTORCYCLES AND POSTIE BIKES?

MO'N: I grew up on a farm in New Zealand where we had lots of postie bikes. If something broke, like the horn or the indicators, I just figured it out myself. I was self-taught.

I moved to Australia when I was 17 and was working in a supermarket. I gave myself six to nine months to figure out ▶



what I really wanted to do. Then, one day, I saw a postie bike being used to deliver mail.

I chased the postie down, bent his ear, asked lots of questions, and learned I could buy the bikes from auctions. I knew, before I even had talked to him really, that this was what I had been looking for.

The first two bikes I bought, I stuck out on busy roads with 'for sale' signs and my phone rang off the hook! That's when I knew there was a business there.

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I started Lambda Motorcycles around 2007 – at the time I called it *Post Postie* because the bikes came from Australia Post – and was working on it on the side. I needed training, so I made a decision to get into the industry and start from the ground up.

I looked to see if anyone else was doing what I wanted to do, and I came across Joe Hanssen at One Ten Motorcycles in Caboolture. He gave me some advice, and I would hang out around the workshop and, eventually, he hired me.

YOU WOULD THEN GET YOUR MOTORCYCLE TECHNICIAN QUALIFICATION WITH THE MTA INSTITUTE?

MO'N: That was in 2013, when I was in my late 20s. At the time, the government was encouraging mature-age apprentices and there were incentives for employers, which worked in my favour. I'd already been running my business on the side since 2007, so when I spoke to MTA Queensland about the qualification, they said that if you've got a business, you can do it through that. ▶



The Lambda engine, built to be a replacement part for 'postie' bikes and to power the future Lambda motorcycle



It was around then that I changed the name of the business to Lambda Motorcycles. I found that name after going through the MTA Institute training books and saw the Lambda symbol and wondered what it was. It turned out the symbol referred to the correct amount of fuel and air into a combustion engine – it meant perfect combustion. So, Lambda Motorcycles means perfect motorcycles!

“AGE IS NO BARRIER. I COMPLETED MY EDUCATION AND STUDYING WHEN I WAS A BIT OLDER, I DID MY APPRENTICESHIP WHEN I WAS A LITTLE BIT OLDER, AND HERE WE ARE.”

It was around that time that things really took off, and we began doing big export orders of postie bikes to places like Nauru. I bought acreage, built a commercial building out the back, hired staff, and we were all guns blazing doing exports of reconditioned bikes for five or six years.

Eventually, I realised the focus should be on keeping the bikes in circulation in Australia. That thinking aligned with market changes which were seeing Chinese bikes and Yamaha scooters arriving in those markets and the demand for second-hand postie bikes falling. So, we pivoted to focus on Australia.

HOW DO YOU THINK THE ELECTRIFICATION OF THE INDUSTRY WILL IMPACT YOUR BUSINESS?

MO’N: It will have an impact and we are moving to be involved in that market. For example, we have done around 60 of our Lambda engines so far, with another 100 on order. Initially, we planned 500, but I’ve been watching the electric bike market closely.



Some customers might skip a petrol engine rebuild and go straight to electric and that’s why we’re now dealers for UBCO electric bikes.

We are also moving forward with a plan to build our own petrol-powered Lambda bike. So, soon, our customers will have three choices: a refurbished postie bike, a brand-new Lambda petrol bike, or a UBCO electric bike.

WHO IS IN YOUR TEAM?

MO’N: It’s myself, my partner Sally, our

Lambda Motorcycles will soon be offering the UBCO electric bike as an option to its customers



mechanic Darren, and a part-time secretary, Kim. We run a tight crew, and it works well.

LOOKING BACK, WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE YOUR YOUNGER SELF OR OTHERS STARTING OUT?

MO’N: Number one: study business. Even a short course. When I came here, I realised I wanted to do something in business. I arrived in the country in 1999 with \$20 in my pocket, but I was so excited you couldn’t hold the smiles back. I went back to school to

finish my education, got my Year 10, 11, and 12, and finished when I was 20.

I then studied business office administration and business marketing administration. I studied computers too and learned a bit about the internet and so on. And I used those tools and applied them much later when I became qualified and was building the business. So, I highly recommend studying business.

Also, I would say that age is no barrier. I completed my education and studying when I was a bit older, I did my apprenticeship when I was a little bit older, and here we are.

And, lastly, of course, if you’re going to do something in life, do something you want to do . . . Follow your heart!

DO YOU USE SOCIAL MEDIA & OTHER TECHNOLOGIES TO CONNECT WITH CUSTOMERS?

MO’N: Absolutely. I started a Facebook group some time ago called *Postie Club CT110 NBC110 Lambda Motorcycle Australia* which now has 20,000 members, and we also have an app which customers can download and use to order parts directly. It keeps everything simple and fast.

WHAT ARE YOUR FUTURE PLANS FOR LAMBDA MOTORCYCLES?

MO’N: I want to keep offering the products and services our customers need, expand into a bigger facility, hire and train more staff, and grow the petrol and electric bike options.

I’ve also recently joined MTA Queensland as a member and I’d like to get more involved there, including in helping others coming into the industry and sharing what I’ve learned over the years. I’m excited about getting involved there. 🍷

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