

Honesty is the best policy

Ryding Auto Body has built a loyal following by being courteous and fair.

By Cindy Macdonald, editor

Ryding Auto Body is proving there's still a place for old-fashioned values in the collision repair industry. While many companies pay lip service to the business fundamentals of high quality, good service and a fair price, Ryding truly puts those principles to work.

Ryding has been the top performer in terms of customer satisfaction among CAA-approved facilities in Ontario for three years straight. It's a small, family-owned business that is more substance than style.

"We're very community oriented," says Mark Delorenzo. "And we have a very diverse clientele." Currently, the shop has 12 employees, including Rocky Delorenzo, the founder, and his son Mark, who manages the business.

Rick Black, a long time commercial client, speaks highly of the Delorenzo business. As a service manager with experience at various new car dealerships in and around Toronto, Black has sent many repairs to Ryding. "I've

worked at two dealerships which had in-house bodyshops, and even there I've never received the same level of service that I get at Ryding."

"Their prices have always been fair. I know they won't gouge me," says Black. "And they are honest, which is one thing I've always appreciated."

"Excellent customer service is one of our priorities," explains Mark. "Being in a car accident or damaging the car is stressful for anybody. We always try to put ourselves in our client's shoes, and we do our best to make our client's experience at Ryding as easy and smooth as possible." Ryding offers shuttle service to anywhere in GTA, as well as pick up or delivery, and has rental cars readily available.

"We want our clients to come back and to refer us to their family and friends. And they do," says Mark.

Keeping costs down

"In our business we keep three points in mind with every customer:

quality of the repair, service and price. We understand that it is sometimes difficult for customers to pay, so our goal is to keep prices as low as possible. We work with the customer to determine what type of the repair would be most appropriate to lower cost without compromising the quality of the repair," explains Mark. For example, he encourages repair versus replacement whenever feasible.

The Delorenzos also keep costs down by being self-sufficient and industrious. When Ryding moved to its present location a year ago, Mark and his father enlisted the help of family members and were able to make many of the building modifications themselves.

"Over the course of a summer, we did everything, from the concrete, to the plumbing, to the electrical," recalls Mark.

The new shop has a bright front office and well laid-out, spacious back work area. It has two downdraft spray booths, one Nova Verta, the other a



Ryding Auto Body is a customer-focused, family-owned body shop in Toronto. Rocky Delorenzo founded the business in 1965, and his son Mark now manages the 12-person shop.



The shop has two downdraft spray booths and two prep stations.

Crossing, from China. The paint supplier is DuPont.

Mark has officially worked for Ryding for about 20 years, "but I've been sanding cars here since I was knee-high," he jokes. He became a partner in the business a few years ago.

Father and son handle the estimating, and Mark's wife does the front-office work.

Mark uses traditional local marketing methods to make Ryding a recognizable name in the neighborhood. He advertises in the Yellow Pages, and maintains a web site. He attends insurance industry events for the networking benefits, and sponsors local teams. He is also a CAA-approved facility.

Part of the CAA package is a customer satisfaction monitoring tool. Mail-in service evaluation cards which are placed in each repaired vehicle allow clients to provide feedback to CAA regarding their repair experience. By this evaluation, Ryding was ranked first in Ontario for customer service in 2003, 2004 and 2005.

Like any "stamp of approval", the CAA program requires that shops meet a certain standard with regard to equipment and environmental policies, and requires references from clients. There is a small annual fee for participation.

"I think there will always be room

for the small businesses to survive in this industry," says Rocky. "We've been in business for 40 years. We must be doing something right."

Rick Black agrees. "There's more (opportunity for independent repair shops) than people realize. With some dealerships closing their in-house collision facilities, and other smaller shops closing, there will be opportunities for the mid-level shops that continue to invest in equipment and training."

Rocky finds his niche

Rocky Delorenzo emigrated to Canada from Italy in 1957, at the age of 21. He had already worked in weld-

ing and apprenticed as a construction mechanic, as well as being a member of the Italian Navy.

Upon arriving in Canada, his interest in welding and mechanics eventually led him to work in an auto body shop which catered to large trucks.

In 1965 he founded Ryding Auto Body in a garage attached to a house. A year later, the shop had expanded to fill the whole lot.

"We used to work on a lot of trucks," says Rocky. "I had a deal with the local International Harvester dealer. I'd paint a complete dump truck for \$125."

Eventually he moved to a larger location in Etobicoke, and expanded that space too. "But the grass always looks greener on the other side of the fence," he recalls. He owned an import car dealership in Hamilton, ON, for a few years, and then returned to the autobody industry.

He repurchased Ryding Auto Body in the early '80s.

Rocky is 71, and still cheerfully coming to work every day. "I feel I have accomplished something good here."

bodyshop

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