



MY FANTASTIC JOURNEY WITH CAPRICORN

by Paul Marinelli

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Paul Marinelli is the Managing Director of Marinelli PR, a Melbourne-based company that specialises in automotive aftermarket industry media communications and marketing services. He started his business in 1995 and over the years has worked with the industry's largest local and global companies. Paul worked with Capricorn to establish and action their first structured PR strategy in 2012 and continues to support Capricorn with communications and engagement activity.

My fantastic Capricorn journey started back in 2012, when I had a discussion with leading automotive aftermarket industry professional and long-term colleague David Fraser at an industry gathering. I had worked with David as his PR consultant during his years at Coventry, so when he made the move to Capricorn – a successful cooperative structured organisation I knew well – I wanted to put our band back together as I believed Capricorn had so much more to talk about.

It started with a very simple question – “Why was Capricorn Australasia’s best-kept secret?” I felt the group wasn’t even touching the sides of its enormous membership potential in Australia and New Zealand, even after nearly 40 years of successful operation. David, who had joined as Automotive CEO, and Capricorn’s remarkable Group CEO Greg Wall shared these sentiments.

One of the first projects I worked on, back in 2014, was to interview individuals for the history book about the events and people of the past 40 years. There could have been no better total oversight of Capricorn and its people – it was a truly magical experience to meet so many interesting, professional and highly dedicated people.

This project provided me with an intrinsic understanding of how different Capricorn is compared to other companies I had worked with over the past three decades. Seeing people become emotional as they discussed Capricorn’s growth and Member support was extraordinary. People even said working at Capricorn completely changed their lives.



Being a lifelong motor racing fan, journalist and, in more recent years, an international motor racing commentator, a highlight of these meetings was the time I spent with Wayne Negus, the former Capricorn Director. Wayne was a former Holden Racing Team driver, who raced with the legendary Peter Brock and John Harvey among others.

So, while our discussion was based on Wayne's important contribution to Capricorn, we drifted into talking about motorsport. Seeing his eyes light up as he reflected on those years, and spending so much time with someone who chased his dreams and achieved them, both in his sporting and his business professions, was extraordinary.

I presented Wayne with a magazine feature a journalist friend of mine had recently done about him. The look on his face was priceless. I still remember him showing it around the office. Following the interview, I was able to watch Wayne be informally presented with the boardroom, which had been named in his honour. Even though he had been retired for some time, I was so glad we were able to capture Wayne's thoughts as we headed towards Capricorn's 40th anniversary, because we sadly lost him in 2016.

I had been told so much over my years with Capricorn about how their conventions were the glue that sealed the close relationship the cooperative shared with its Members. I was lucky enough to be asked to be the MC for Capricorn's first-ever European convention, in Salou in the magnificent Catalonia region of Spain, in 2018.

To say that the Salou Convention was astounding would be a gross understatement. It was incredible. Not just because it was in Europe and some 500+ Members and Preferred Suppliers took part – it was the camaraderie between the Members, the Capricorn team and the Preferred Suppliers. It was something I had never experienced: people getting together because

they wanted to be together and enjoying blending business with fantastic social activities. People whose auto repair businesses had grown strongly with Capricorn. I returned from that convention with an acute understanding of why Capricorn continues to be so successful five decades into its history. You cannot make or construct customer/ Member and supplier relationships like that. They are earned after years of close, dedicated and caring association and mutual success. These are no ordinary business relationships. I describe them as being akin to family.

I have had so many wonderful experiences with Capricorn, but one of the funniest was during one of my regular PR meeting visits to Perth, which just happened to land on 31 October.

So, I roll into the then-new Troode Street offices after flying in from Melbourne and I'm greeted by a building full of ghouls, ghosts, giant spiders and everything else imaginable. The level of effort the team put into costume and make-up was extraordinary, but the best part was walking into David Fraser's office and being confronted with Beetlejuice himself! We were supposed to be discussing a new PR agreement, but I couldn't stop laughing at David trying to be serious in all that get-up. So, we took some memorable pics, which I then posted on my socials with the tag "Important contract negotiations today at Capricorn!". This was one of many times when I walked away from a Capricorn meeting or social event thinking I would never experience that with anyone else.

In an industry that is not always known for care, kindness and customer dedication as its key hallmarks, I have been privileged to enjoy a long-term association with Capricorn. I have always been treated as a valued part of this very special automotive aftermarket industry organisation and I look forward to the future ahead.

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