

STORY GEOFF SEDDON
PHOTOS CHRIS THOROGOOD



WINNERS ARE GRINNERS

Melbourne's Sevag Parseghian is the 2011 Snap-on Apprentice Of The Year

TWENTY-THREE-year-old Sevag Parseghian always knew he wanted to work on cars. "When I was a kid I'd go up to Sydney and spend my school holidays with my uncle who has a workshop," he says. "I'd go for two weeks and spend every day in the workshop and watch them build cars and hot-up Camaros. They do quite a bit of custom work."

"So I've always been around motor vehicles – anything with an engine. When I was a kid, I'd go and find old lawnmowers to muck around with; I've always had a knack for working on engines and fixing them."

Initially, his passion took him to RMIT University where he studied engineering. "I found it wasn't where I wanted to be," Sevag admits. "I was on a high distinction average but I thought: 'What am I going to do when I finish?' I didn't want to end up sitting behind a desk; it wasn't where I wanted to be."

"So I talked to my mum – we're very close – and I spoke to my uncle and my cousin with the workshop in Sydney. They said it could be a hard trade but Mum said: 'You know what? You're going to do well whatever you do and if you do what you love, then you will succeed!' So I decided I'd do what I enjoyed and make the most of it. I deferred my uni course, went on to Seek and saw an ad to work with prestige vehicles."

The ad was for an apprenticeship via training organisation





ABOVE (l-r): Snap-on Sales Development Manager Ben Moore, Lou Pedevski, Sevag, Snap-on franchisee Alan Bampton

SURPRISE, SURPRISE

THIS year we interviewed seven finalists for the Snap-on Apprentice of the Year, who all then endured three long months of anticipation as we presented each finalist in the pages of *Street Machine*. The judges knew who the winner was but no-one else.

"I've been very eager reading about the other finalists each month in *Street Machine*," Sev says. "Obviously there were some very competitive candidates. I thought I had a good shot at it; it wasn't going to be my results that let me down. But this isn't a performance shop, it's a new car dealership, and I thought that might have made a difference."

Workshop manager Lou Pedevski was brought in on the secret and made sure Sev was out road-testing a high-end Merc as we unloaded the custom-painted Snap-on

tool chest from franchisee Alan Bampton's truck and gathered Sev's workmates in the workshop for the presentation.

"It was the last thing I expected to see when I came into the workshop," Sev admits. "I saw everyone standing there and thought it was a workshop meeting."

"Then I saw the tool box, and Seddo standing there, and my heart stopped. I realised what was going on and couldn't believe it was actually happening. It was an unbelievable feeling."

"I'd like to say thanks to my family for being so supportive and to my workplace for looking after me. I love doing this and they gave me the chance. And thanks to *Street Machine* and Snap-on, this is the most amazing thing that's ever happened to me."



The right workplace is important.
You need to want to go to work

WPC Group at Mercedes Benz Melbourne, the largest Merc dealership in the southern hemisphere. It was a good match.

"Finding the right workplace is very important," Sevag says. "You have to find somewhere where you enjoy the people you work with. You need to want to go to work every day. I know if I don't go to work, I just don't feel right."

Mercedes Benz Melbourne is itself an award-winning company when it comes to training apprentices, hiring four or five newbies every year. They have many quality young men and women on their books, but Sevag is a standout.

"Sev completed all his TAFE training in his first year," workshop manager Lou Pedevski says. "He won awards for best first-year apprentice and also outstanding achievement at TAFE, and was nominated for Victorian Apprentice of the Year in 2010."

"Sevag achieved 100 per cent in all his training modules in the Mercedes Benz national apprentice training scheme [taking out the award for outstanding apprentice two years running] and was selected in the AMG technical team for Mercedes Benz AMG drive days at the Albert Park GP course and at Phillip Island."

"I was the only apprentice to be part of the team," Sev adds. "Our customers get the chance to drive AMG cars around the track, with a racing driver in the passenger seat. We had 40 AMGs, all 6.3-litre V8s imported from Germany. It shows that as well as building luxury vehicles, we also do performance cars."

"Sevag fully understands where the motor industry is heading," Lou continues, "hence his approach and commitment to his role. He has reaped his many rewards because of his commitment and attitude. His passion is second to none, and his ability and willingness to learn are outstanding."

As is the case with many apprenticeships these days, Sev is actually employed by a broader training organisation, in this case WPC Group, and then contracted out to his host employer. Mark D'Aversa is WPC's manager of traineeships and apprenticeships.

"Mercedes Benz has very high standards for its team members," Mark says, "with a strong focus on technically sound, brand loyal, self-motivated technicians who are reliant, customer-focused and take pride in their workmanship."

"As one of Sevag's mentors, I can say he has always exceeded our expectations of an apprentice, with his attitude, application and passion to learn. Sevag consistently performs work at the level of a qualified technician and displays maturity beyond his



VICTORY SPOILS

TO FILL the custom-painted Classic 78 roll cab, Snap-on included a half-inch electronic torque wrench; a 14.4-volt 3/8-drive cordless impact wrench; 7.2-volt screwdriver; 3/8-drive metric impact socket set; 17-piece, 3/8-drive metric socket set; 10-19mm combination wrench set; and a Gold Pass Extreme ticket to Summernats – all up, worth more than \$9000!

ABOVE (l-r): Mercedes Benz Melbourne workshop manager Lou Pedevski; Sevag; WPC Group manager, traineeships and apprenticeships, Mark D'Aversa

If employers see you have **passion and drive, they'll give you a go**



Sevag, aged five, in his parents' VC Commodore

years, which is an outcome any dealership would want.

"Sevag is an ideal role-model for new apprentices commencing a career. I have no doubt he will be one of the very best technicians at Mercedes Benz Melbourne and in the automotive industry."

"If your employer sees you have passion and drive, they'll give you a go," Sev explains. "I rarely say no to anything and I put my heart into everything I do. And I've had some amazing opportunities – I was rebuilding automatic gearboxes by the end of my first year."

Life isn't all about work for Sev. He owns a couple of cars – a VN SS Commodore and a Subaru WRX – as well as a Honda CBR1000 motorbike, and hankers to build up something special.

"I wouldn't mind getting into something older than the VN. I'd love to build up a 350 and put it into something when I have the time and space."

He relaxes by waterskiing with friends or playing guitar. But it's not all beer and skittles for an apprentice in 2011.

"It's lousy money but you just have to deal with it," he says. "First year is hard. I'm fourth year now and I still live at home. I can't do a real lot and I've got to pay three regos and three insurances."

"But it doesn't bother me because I know I'm going to be somewhere, someday. I'm very open on the future. What keeps me going is always learning, I like to keep pushing. When I come to a dead end, that's when my interest comes to stop."

"Up until this point, I've had an incredible run. People have said whatever I want, it's all there. I just have to decide where I want to go." 