

SHACKS REV UP FOR THE FUTURE

Family-owned Fremantle dealership looks to EVs as it celebrates 100 years in the auto industry

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The automotive industry is on the precipice of seismic change, with the rapid take-up of electric vehicles set to transform the car market and supply chains.

But for the family-owned Shacks Motoring Group — which is celebrating 100 years since founder “Andy” Charles Shack opened a small repair shop in Fremantle — the challenges are just another bump in the road.

In the past two years alone, the longstanding WA Holden dealer has farewelled its biggest brand and expanded into a new franchise with the acquisition of Mandurah Volkswagen.

That followed the addition of Rockingham Mazda to its motoring portfolio in 2016.

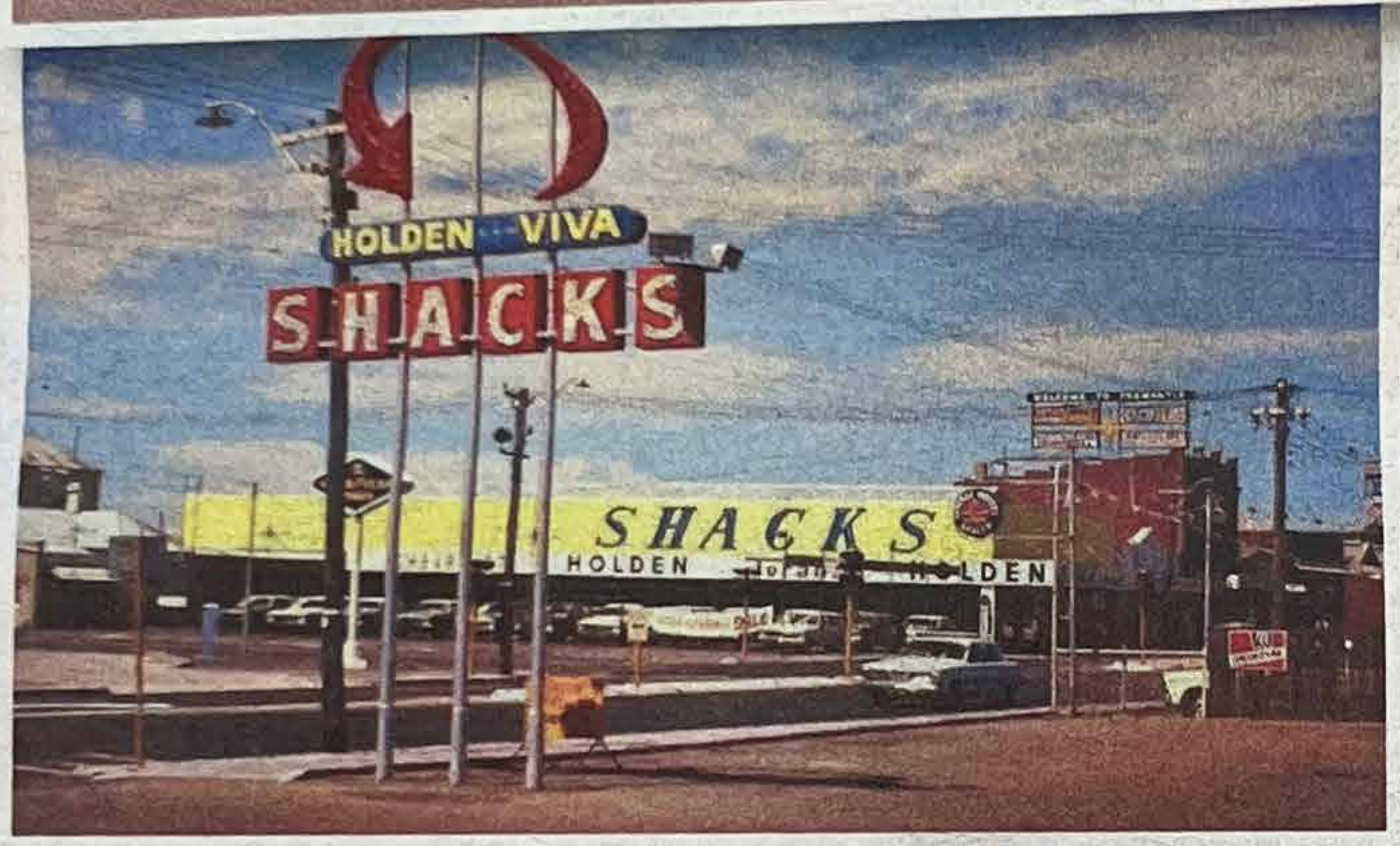
The changes, also made against the backdrop of the coronavirus crisis and ensuing supply chain chaos, have been fast and furious.

Shacks managing director Jodi Kerr took up her post at the height of the turmoil in June 2020 and remembers what a taxing time it was.

Working alongside her father, Shacks chairman Doug Kerr, both pictured far right, the pair juggled the fallout from General Motors announcing the end of the Holden brand in Australia and relocated the Volkswagen franchise from Mandurah into the Rockingham Holden facility.

“There was a huge amount to do from a company restructuring perspective,” Ms Kerr, who is third-generation on the car side of the partnership, recalled.

“We have 100 staff and we were really keen to ensure we still had a job for them the next day... so to come into the business and work alongside Dad to ensure we could embed a very strong future into what was a very small window of opportunity, we really had to move



quickly. Then there was COVID and what that’s done to supply chains, to staff availability and closures, the ability to access affordable and quality used cars.”

It was a trying time for the business, but also one that helped Shacks become more agile and positioned it well for future upheaval.

“We’ve seen and gone through so many changes that I think we’ve got the skill set to adapt and change reasonably quickly,” Mr Kerr said.

“We’ve had to make changes, and we’re capable of doing that. So all the challenges that are in front of us, I think we can handle that maybe better than most.”

His daughter agrees: “I don’t think you last 100 years without embracing change and being innovative,” she said.

HUMBLE ORIGINS

Shacks Garage was born out of Andy Shack’s automotive repair shop in Adelaide Street, Fremantle, which opened in April 1922. However it wasn’t long before Fremantle council complained he was doing too much repair work in the street and the shop moved to 59 Queen Victoria Street — the opposite corner to where it is today.

It was around 1924 that Andy started to sell and service Overland and Willys-Knight vehicles from Perth’s Adam Motors Ltd. His reputation as a “Mr Fix-it” who could solve even the toughest problems saw him become known as the “Knight of the Blue Dungarees”.

The business’ big break came in 1934, when Shacks Garage signed a formal written agreement with General Motors Holden Ltd. It was also the year that

Pat Kerr — the father of Doug Kerr — joined Andy as a mechanic, marking the start of a close relationship between the Shack and Kerr families.

Andy was later joined by his sons Drew and Don Shack.

The three Shacks and Pat Kerr became formal partners in 1946, when the company name was changed to Shack Motors.

The name was revised again — to Shacks Holden — in 1948, when Sydney Aitkinson Motors became the WA distributors for Holden and Shacks obtained the Fremantle franchise.

There is a strong sense of pride in the fact the business has intergenerational relationships with customers, clients and staff.

“Some people bought their first (Holden) cars in the ‘70s and then they bought their kids’ cars. We still have a lot of those people coming back to the business. Some of them haven’t even sold their original cars they bought,” Ms Kerr said.

“We’ve got salesmen who have been with the business for a long period of time as well who have dealt with these intergenerational clients, as well as mechanics.”

While it no longer stocks Holden vehicles, Shacks continues to sell General Motors and GMSV cars, and its service department still specialises in servicing GM, Holden cars and other makes. “Those loyal customers, they’re orphan owners now because they don’t have the prospects of replacing the Holden, so we’re very happy to steer them to the Mazda or Volkswagen and that works well,” said Mr Kerr, who joined the business in 1969.

HOLDEN EXIT

General Motors announced the end of the of the iconic Holden brand in Australia on February 17, 2020, after more than 160 years in operation.

The American car giant at

the time blamed “significant change globally and locally” for the decision to exit the market, which was tipped to cost north of \$US1 billion.

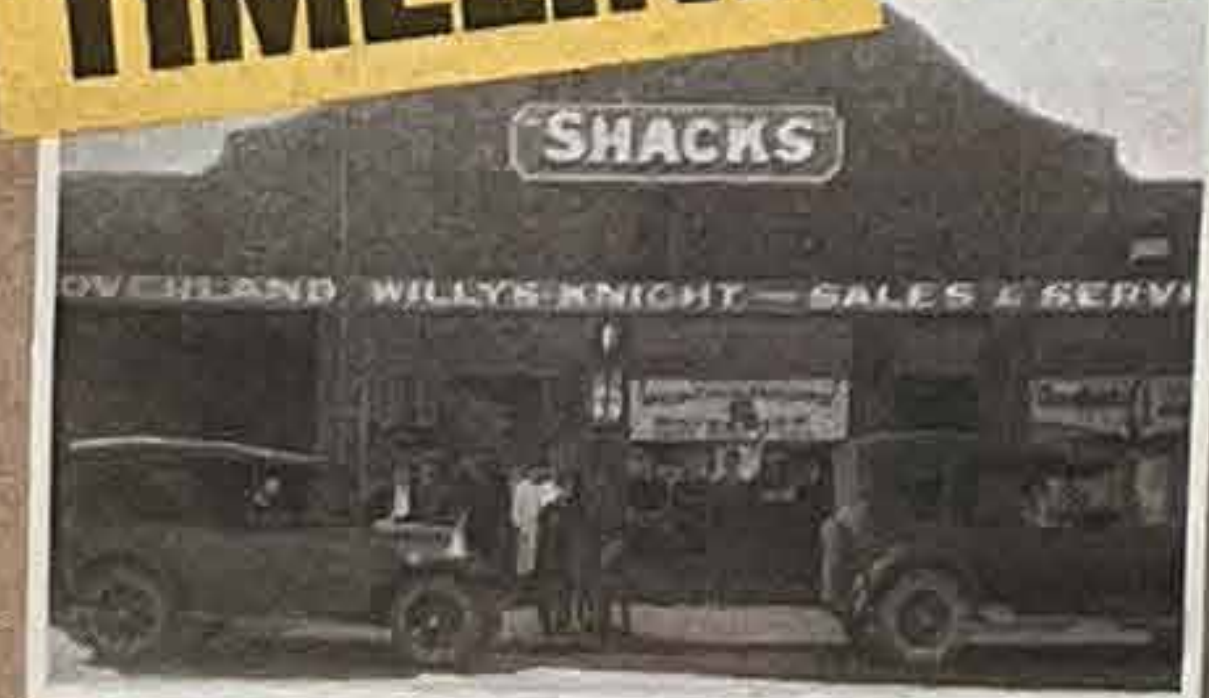
Mr Kerr remembers it as a “bitter blow” for Shacks, whose almost 90-year partnership with Holden was one of the most successful in Australia.

Shacks Holden was the largest Holden dealership south of the Swan River and one of the first Holden dealers nationally to win the prestigious “master level service award” in 1988.

Towards the end of the life of the HSV, Mr Kerr said Shacks had experienced “something like 20 years of being the largest volume seller of HSVs in Australia”.

“When you’ve got such a long history of association with Hol-

TIMELINE



1922: Andy Shack opens a small automotive repair shop, Shacks Garage, in Adelaide St, Fremantle.

1924: The business moves to 59 Queen Victoria St. Andy obtains agency for Overland

and Willys-Knight vehicles.

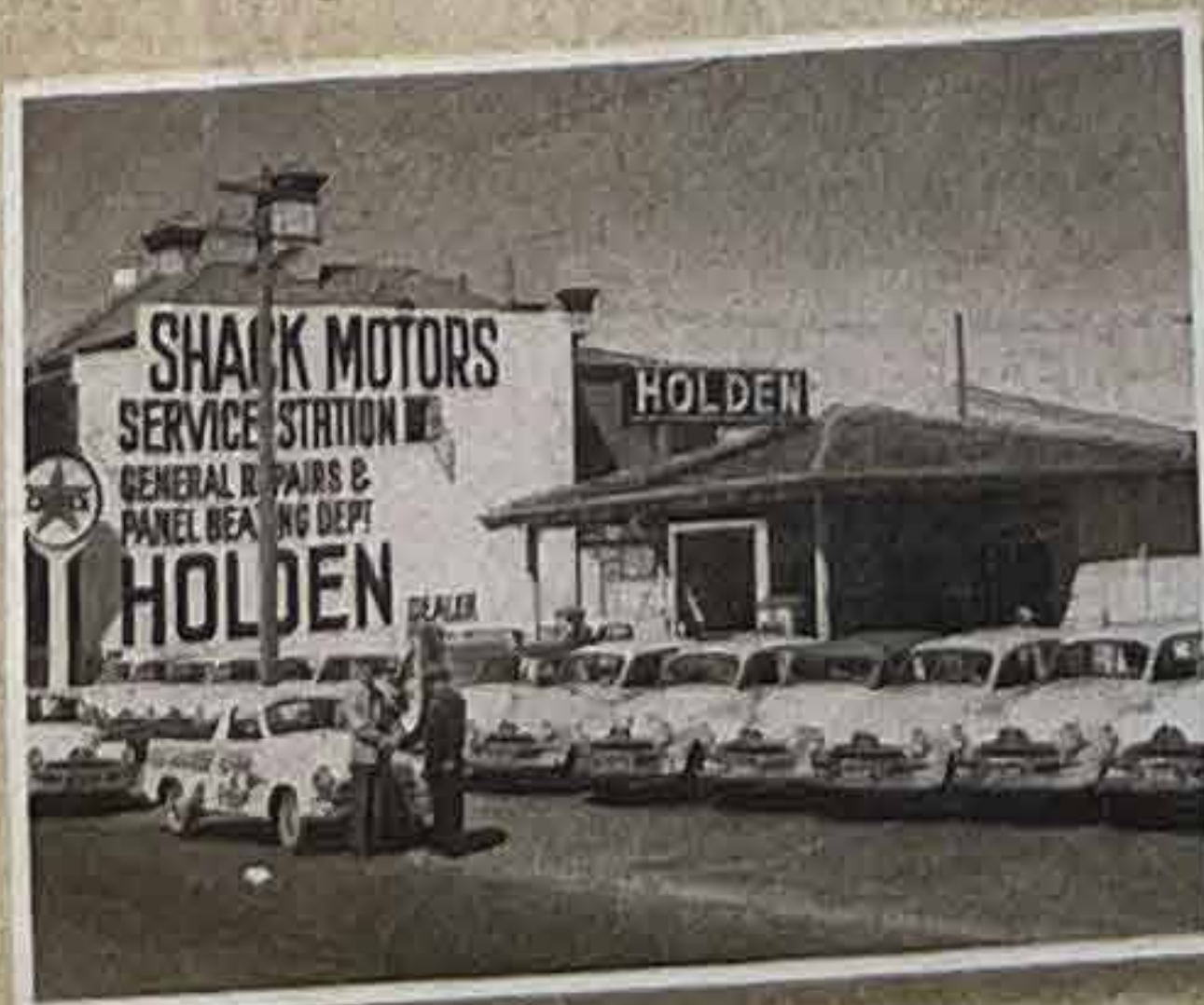
1932: Andy becomes Fremantle sub-dealer for Chevrolet.

1934: Shacks strikes a formal deal with General Motors Holden Ltd. Pat Kerr joins the business.

1939-40: The business is declared a “protected industry” after the war and suffers from staff shortages and a lack of parts.

1941-43: Andy’s sons Drew and Don Shack join the business. Shacks moves to 64 Queen Victoria St, its current location.

1946-48: The three Shacks and Pat Kerr become partners in 1946 and the company name is changed to Shacks Motors.



1948: Sydney Aitkinson Motors becomes the WA distributors for Holden and Shacks obtains the Fremantle franchise, becoming Shacks Holden.

1951: Andy constructs a new showroom at the original Shacks site. The workshop behind becomes a Holden service and delivery centre.

1956: General Motors takes over the State distribution of Holden and Shacks Holden is appointed



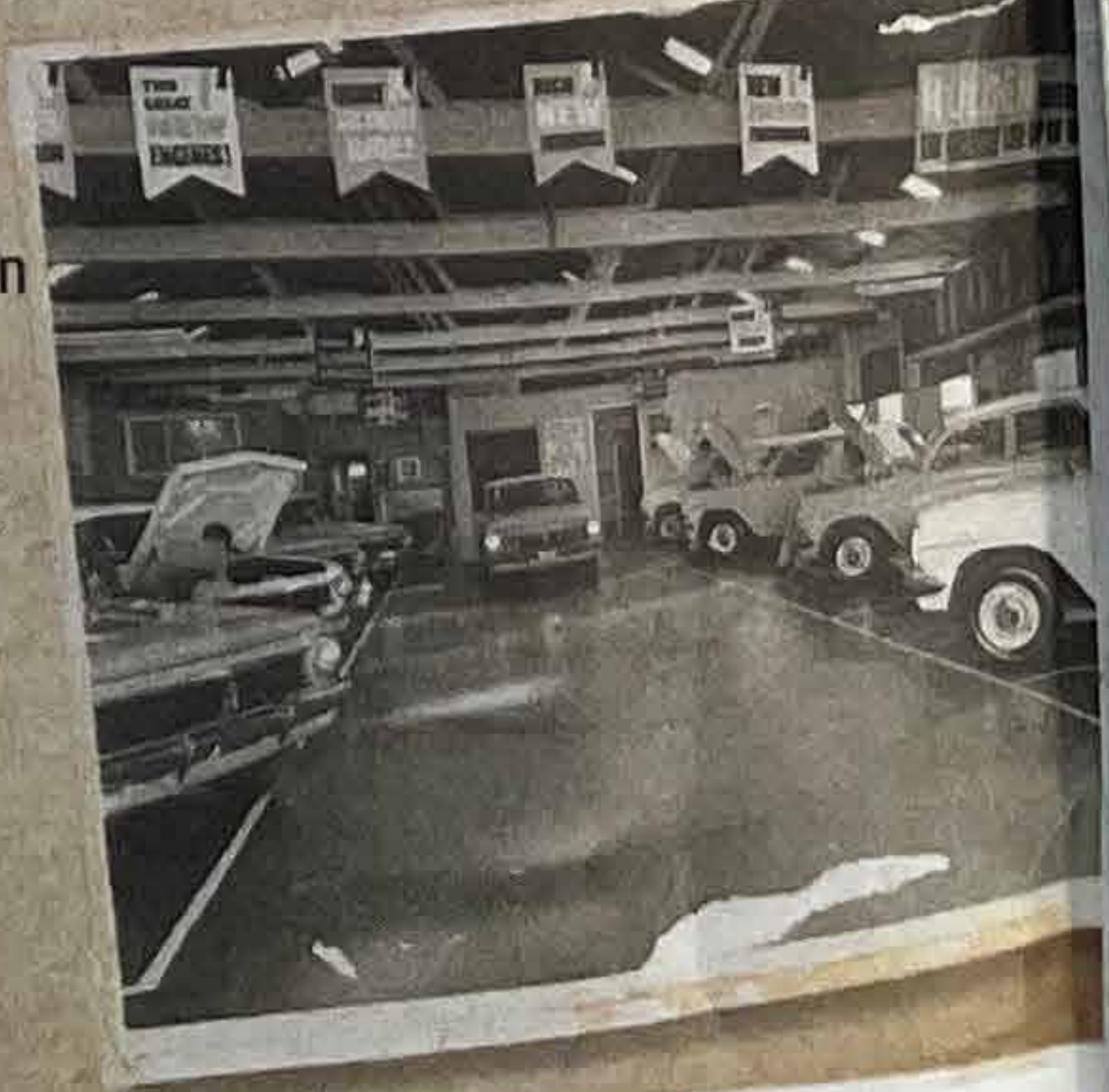
metropolitan dealers. **1969:** Doug Kerr joins his father Pat and the Shacks in the family business as an assistant sales manager.

1972: Shacks buys Nottle Churack, the Holden dealership at Naval Base, renaming it Shacks Cockburn.

1975: Pat Kerr retires from an active role in the business.

1978: Andy Shack passes away.

1982: Shacks rebuilds new



Picture: Justin Benson-Cooper



den, it was disappointing," Mr Kerr said. "It was a sad day for a lot of people. It's interesting our customer base is still very supportive of Holden, even though they're not around.

"They've got products that they come to the dealership for and will take photographs out the front, having bought a car in 1990."

EV MARKET

Electric vehicles are in unprecedented demand across Australia as the price of fuel soars and green-minded consumers seek to curb their emissions.

Car dealers are under no illusions that huge change is coming and many, including Shacks, are already seeing the benefits.

Ms Kerr said she saw the Fre-

mantle dealership becoming a leader in EVs, noting the environmentally-conscious location and the dealership's history made it a good fit.

Fremantle was the first Holden dealership in Australia to embrace the Volt — the first plug-in hybrid from the brand to be sold in the country — and is currently the only service centre for the Volt across WA and the Northern Territory.

One dedicated customer recently trucked their Volt almost 4000km from Darwin to Fremantle to have it serviced, before trucking it back again.

"I think EV for Fremantle is a fantastic fit," Ms Kerr said.

"I think we have the relationships, we have the staff to embrace the technology that are familiar with it, but also the

demographic around Fremantle as one of the early adopters of the technology as well.

"This industry is on the tip of some fairly disruptive change with EVs starting to hit, and over the next few years there will be an increasing number of brands and technologies coming into the Australian market . . . that will change the way dealerships operate."

Volkswagen — which is set to launch its first two fully-electric vehicles in Australia next year — is particularly promising for the EV market, Ms Kerr said.

KEY TO SUCCESS

Shacks' longevity can be attributed to a combination of some shrewd business decisions, a willingness to "sit down and

tackle the tough problems" and enduring dedication to customers and staff, according to Ms Kerr.

"I think a lot of it is what Dad has bought to the business. He's spent a long time building those relationships," she explained.

"Customers are really important to him, industry itself is very important and the contribution he's made to the industry and those supplier relationships are important.

"There are very few stand-alone family businesses left across Australia. I think you have to embrace why you're different and ensure you keep to those values that are important to you and that your staff are aligned to."

Mr Kerr's commitment to the industry — and Fremantle

more broadly — is unquestioned. He is a past president of the Australian Automobile Dealers' Association (WA), a life member of the Motor Vehicle Industry Board and a past president and trustee of the Fremantle Chamber of Commerce.

Mr Kerr was also instrumental in arranging a Holden sponsorship for the Dockers when Fremantle became an AFL team.

Asked about stand-out moments over his career, Mr Kerr said: "The whole 53 years I've been in the business has been a highlight".

"I've made some fantastic lifelong friends in my association with the motor industry . . . and that's been very rewarding."



car showroom at 64 Queen Victoria St with the launch of the Holden World Car.
1982: Shacks approaches Mitsubishi Motors for the Fremantle franchise. Drew Shack becomes dealer principal at Fremantle Mitsubishi.
1984: Don Shack passes away. Doug Kerr takes over as dealer principal of Shacks Holden, managing director and chairman of Shacks Motor Group.
1985: Shacks starts selling Peter Brocks' Holden dealer team

modified Holden HDT V8s.
1987: Shacks appointed HSV Dealers, marking the beginning of its relationship with performance vehicles.
1987: The Fremantle Mitsubishi franchise is relinquished. Drew retires but continues as a director of Shacks Motor Group.
1988: Shacks Holden becomes one of the first Holden dealers nationally to win prestigious "Master Level Service Award".
1994: Shacks Holden becomes the

first dealer to achieve General Motors Quality Assurance Accreditation.
1997: Doug Kerr purchases almost 13,000sqm of real estate at 20 Smeaton Way to relocate Shacks Cockburn to Rockingham.
1999: Shacks Fremantle appointed GM Suburban dealers.
2003: Smeaton Way building is completed and Holden dealership relocates from Cockburn to Rockingham.
2006: Doug Kerr acquires a further 6,127sqm of adjoining real estate to



the rear of the existing Rockingham facility.
2016: Mazda added to Shacks' motoring portfolio after it

successfully applies for a "green field" Mazda franchise in Rockingham.
2020: General Motors announces the end of the Holden brand in Australia. Shacks continues to sell General Motors and GMSV cars.
2020: Volkswagen added to Shacks' portfolio after it acquires the Mandurah franchise, which is relocated to Rockingham.
2022: Shacks Fremantle adds American automotive parts brand ACDelco to car servicing portfolio