



A full view of the Bistagne Bros. Body Shop at 1414 East Chevy Chase Drive, Glendale, Calif.

Quality Work Builds Booming Business

When the Bistagne brothers - Tom and George were separated from the service following World War II - Tom as a captain and George a 1st lieutenant in the Air Corps - they opened an auto body shop on Chevy Chase Drive, Glendale Calif. That was in November, 1946.

Their shop was small - just across the street from their present quarters at 1414 Chevy Chase. Both were experienced auto body men and mechanics. At first, they did the work themselves. They specialized in custom work and advertised a quality job. Within three months they added a man to the staff.

In two years, they bought a lot across the street and erected the first unit of what was to be a big shop. Their staff at this time consisted of five, including themselves. They now had 3000 square feet of space. That was in 1950. In '52, they added another 1500 feet. Their business was growing so fast that it seemed that every two years they had to spread out. Till now, 1974, they have 11,500 feet of space, and a staff of 20 - 12 metal men, three painters, a utility man, and four estimators - all experienced craftsmen. Top man is Merritt Cogswell, a veteran of 23 years.

Shortly after they started, they switched from custom work to collision - rebuilding wrecked cars, because of the steadily growing market in the latter.

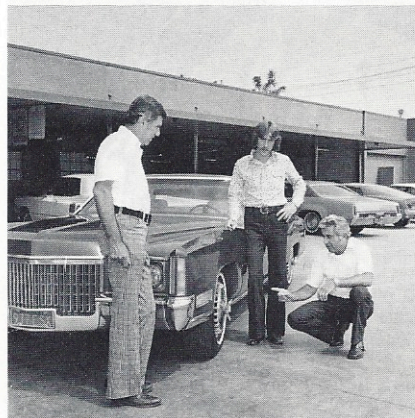
Tom, the older brother, has two sons working full-time in the shop

and another son, still in college, works part-time.

Because they hold to a high standard of workmanship and use only quality material, their business has increased to a point where their volume may be said to consist almost entirely of referral customers.

"Sometimes," explains brother George, "we find ourselves so busy we can't take on new customers."

The brothers attribute this situation to the fact that both of them put in a full day at the shop; and that either they or Tom's two sons wait on customers; estimate the work to be done and follow through on the job.



The Bistagne Bros.--Tom, standing at left, and George, kneeling, show off firm's car that has been "fancied up." Looking on [center] is Tom's oldest son, Bob who has joined the staff.

"It is a matter of carrying through on policy," explains Tom. "It is knowing a customer's little quirks of character, of showing him every courtesy."

Every job has the shop guarantee. If a complaint is made and it does happen sometimes - "We'll do the job over, regardless of where the fault lies," George explains. "You build good will that way."

Except for the yellow pages, their advertising is almost entirely by word of mouth. They do auto painting, color matching, rebuilding of wrecks, body and fender, and wheel alignment.

As it has worked out, the brothers explain, they find themselves doing work for three generations of a family. The grandfather, father, and grandson. Sometimes a representative of each generation will have a car in the shop at the same time.

Because of additions made with the growth of the business, the shop has taken the shape of a sort of "U", with a long wing, a bottom area and a short wing. The center space of the "U" is for parking. There are 10 stalls for specialized car work, and a painting area with room for 12 cars. The latter has an overhead 75-foot swinging door.

Both brothers are past presidents of California Auto Body Association and of the Independent Garage Owners Association.

—Harry M. Nelson