WELCOME TO ROADWAY
THE VOICE OF ROAD HAULAGE

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NOVEMBER 2010 £3.00

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ROADWAY profile

APG HOLDINGS

Road to success

A stone's throw away from one of the UK's most popular motorcycling routes, in the leafy Hampshire village of Lower Farringdon, is the HQ of one of the RHA's more untypical members. ROADWAY paid them a visit

APG Holdings is the property and bodybuild of Irish-born Adrian Greene. Like many good success stories, Greene started his business from the back of his car. Loading his Ford Granada estate with some tools and bags of tarmac he got into the pothole-filling business. His range of services grew and in 1986 AP Greene (Civil Works) was born. Working for local councils, Greene installed kerbs, footways, drainage replacement systems, continued to carry out pothole repairs, and undertook any other general infrastructure repairs that were required around the local area.

In 1992, understanding the implications of the new Streetworks Act that was to come into force the following year, Greene attended a training course as he could comply with the new legislation. He quickly realised there would be a requirement for setting out warning signs and cones as part of a job, and the works themselves would in many cases become the secondary part of the overall procedure. So in 1994 Greene decided to cut down the civil engineering work and formed AP Greene Traffic Management. By 1997 the company had grown and was no longer involved in civil engineering work.

Below: Adrian Greene (left) with James Hampton who runs the scaffolding business 3Borders

National network

In 1997 APG Traffic Ltd was formed and the company moved forward as a dedicated traffic management provider. Gaining Highways Agency (HA) Assured Sector Scheme accreditation, national network work followed and the company is approved to operate in HA Area 4 and Area 3 in addition to undertaking County Council work. Greene explains: "We soon out-grew our starting base and sought larger storage and better access to the networks, so we moved into the Farringdon Business Park in 2007.

"APG Traffic holds national Quality Assurance ISO 9001 certification and with our other accreditations this allows us to undertake all levels of traffic management schemes from basic stop/ go operations up to full controllables and narrow-lane schemes on any of the UK's motorways and trunk route networks. Our experienced team is LANTRA (the sector skills council for environmental industries) qualified and we also provide lane closures, IPV (main-carriage) protection, road closures, diversions and multi-head phased traffic lights."

APG has come to the aid of royalty. Framed on Greene's office wall are copies of two cheques. One was remittance for supplying traffic cones to the Sultan of Oman. The other, which takes pride of place, is a cheque from the British royal household in payment for putting a traffic management scheme in place to protect repair work to a wall on the Windsor estate that was damaged in a road traffic accident.

In addition to its Farringdon HQ, APG Traffic Ltd has a depot at Newington Business Park in Kent. Managed by Kevin Taylor, Greene says that is the busier site of the two.

Champion of quality

Until recently, APG operated its fleet on a restricted Operator Licence. Greene is a champion of quality, professionalism and compliance and this extends to his fleet. In 2008 he put all his businesses into RHA membership following a speculative visit from area manager Paul Lyon and now operates his vehicles on a national O-licence. As most of his work is own-account we were curious to find out why. He explains: "We were being asked to move equipment for other contractors. As this is not legal under a restricted licence we applied for a national licence. Since then we have added two 8x4 Hiab vehicles to the fleet and we move containers for the Scotia Gas Network and also hire containers out. It also means we can take on other hire-and-reward work if required, such as moving machinery."

APG Traffic's services are not entirely restricted to roads. The company also provides emergency response for Network Rail and attends bridge strikes or damage to road/rail infrastructure such as level crossings, providing protection in the form of concrete block barriers and traffic management schemes.

In 2007 Greene formed APG (Holdings) Ltd. Acutely aware of a need to grow through diversification, a chance conversation in his local over a beer led to the birth of another business, 3Borders Scaffolding. Greene continues: "I had known scaffolder James Hampton socially for a while. He had just returned from an expedition to climb Everest and one evening in our local he said that he would dearly love to start up his own scaffolding company and could I give him some advice. My advice was, 'the safest way was to get someone else to start it up and you to run it'. James and I launched 3Borders in 2007 and initially used the old Hampshire Commercials site on Mill Lane in Alton.

"As the financier I had full confidence in his abilities and enabled him to start up with one 7.5-tonner and some brand new kit. In the early days he knocked on doors and posted flyers. Then he won a major contract in London and this work gained people's attention and got the business off the ground.

Above and below right: Traffic is managed using cones, barriers and concrete block barriers

3Borders' staff wear smart protective clothing with the company logo on it. The company uses new equipment and provides good-quality, safe jobs. This gets it noticed. Thanks to James' hard work and vision 3Borders now operates three 7.5-tonners, three 18-tonners and a Transit van. It currently has scaffold up at over 50 residential sites in addition to some big-office block jobs. Now the large companies regularly ask 3Borders to tender for work.

"We are never the cheapest, and none of my businesses go out to win contracts on price. We will not send a vehicle out of our yard if it isn't going to make a profit," APG Traffic recently walked away from a contract when its customer told the company it had to reduce its prices by 25%. Greene says: "What we offer and what wins us the business is quality, safety, reliability and service. If the customer wants those things then they have to pay for it."

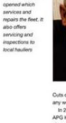
Infrastructure expenditure

The scaffolding business continued to grow during the recession and now that the local housing market is picking up this growth has accelerated. But his reliance on government money to keep the traffic management business going is a concern. He explains: "The HA and county councils have cut right back on infrastructure expenditure and this means business is slow. 2010 has not been a very good year so we are consolidating.

ROADWAY profile

APG HOLDINGS

Left: Traffic operations manager Jon Spur chats with the day-to-day running of APG



Above: Last year Farringdon Commercials was opened which services and repairs the fleet. It also offers servicing and inspections to local hauliers

Cuts on roads budgets cannot get any worse so I hope it will pick up."

In 2009 he added a third string to APG Holding's bow. Following the closure of Hampshire Commercials, Greene decided to launch Farringdon Commercials. Based on the Farringdon Business Park site, he now services and repairs his own fleet and offers commercial vehicle servicing and inspection to local haulage firms. His nearest MoT centre is 20 miles away at the VOSA site in Guildford so we asked if he has any plans to apply for Authorised Testing Facility status. The reply was a conclusive 'no'.

"It would take far too much investment," he says. "We prop the vehicles here and take them to Guildford for test. It is working well enough."

Greene has never wished for someone to wave a magic wand to restore or make his fortune. Still very much hands-on when needed – he was off to deliver a container to Scotia Gas in his 6x4 Scania following our visit – these days he leaves most of the day-to-day running of APG Traffic operations manager Jon Spur.

Greene is group managing director, is the financial director and even raises the invoices. His company is self-financing and he owns all his equipment, save a couple of vehicles on hire purchase agreements. He says he only sees his bank manager once a year 'for a chat'.

In 2009 he appeared in the Who's Who directory of the UK's business elite. He is listed among the directors of the UK's fastest growing companies and in the most prestigious category, business category. He says he will appear again in the 2010 edition.

By his own admission his success has been down to years of hard work and he proudly tells us: "We haven't done bad."

With all his companies in RHA membership, Greene values many of the services the association offers. RHA area manager, Paul Lyon, recently helped him through a problem increasing the vehicles on his O-licence and he is a regular customer at the Hauler's Shop. He has moved his telecommunications over to RHA Communications and uses RHA Training to keep his staff up to speed with legislative developments.

The future

Looking to the future, sixty-year-old Greene says he does not have any family currently in line to take over his business when he retires his grandchildren are still very young. He says retirement is not something he plans to settle into for some time.

"I am going to consolidate what I've got and this might allow me to take life a bit easier and it will give me a little more time to spend relaxing on the golf course."

Judging by his enthusiasm and energy for business, we suspect that Greene won't be giving golf a lot of handicap for some years to come.

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In brief...

APG HOLDINGS

Founded: 2007
Group companies: APG Traffic Ltd, 3Borders Scaffolding, Farringdon Commercials, Farringdon (Hampshire) Newington (Kent)
Staff: 60
Fleet: 5x4, 6x4 Scania
Services: Traffic management systems, scaffolding, Hiab and storage container hire, commercial vehicle servicing
Turnover: £2.5 million

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