

# Winning mentality



**NUMBER ONE:** John Cleland's success in BTCC has served him well in car retailing

## PERSONAL FILE – John Cleland

**Position:** Dealer Principal

**First job:** Ran parts department, father's Triumph dealership

**First car:** Triumph Herald

**Current car:** Porsche 911T

**News source:** Telegraph online

**Book:** Thrillers (only on holidays)

**Film:** The Rock

**Best business decision:**

Taking Volvo franchise in 1989

**Worst business decision:**

Retiring too early as a professional racing driver

**Downtime:** Competing in motorsport

**Gadget:** iPhone, iPad

### How important are CI scores to you?

There are KPIs, targets that we hit but we are also very critical.

We constantly look at our business and want to know why we are so successful in some areas, and less so in other areas.

My whole team understand my mentality of winning, at being first, the best. I have directly 110,000 head of population in my territory, 43,000 houses. There are more in one district of Glasgow or Edinburgh. So I have to make sure I give everybody I touch the best experience, because in an area like this, if you upset someone or sell them something that's not right, very quickly everybody gets to know about it. If someone in Glasgow buys a car that's not right from a dealer in Glasgow, no-one cares.

### How important is the customer experience?

We sell cars at £2,500 and that car is just as important to its buyer as an £85,000 hybrid to another. If someone has a genuine fault we will not argue, we will replace free of charge with a similar car or give them back their money, end of story.

My front-line staff all have the autonomy to decide that a customer has been messed about, not been given what they were promised, and to send them a bouquet of flowers or a box of chocolates as an apology.

Everybody has a choice. This morning we are delivering an S90 to an 80-year-old man who bought it off the internet having read reviews about Clelands and phoned some people he knew in the Borders, and they raved about our service. He's bought a £35,000 car on the internet, because of our reputation.

### How have you applied your motorsport experience to business?

I shake hands with everyone who buys a car in this business, if I'm here. And when I go down and introduce myself, around half the customers remember watching me on TV racing cars.

The background of what I did absolutely works in this business. I think

Andrew Charman

## John Cleland has transferred his winning ways in BTCC into running a successful Volvo dealership

**J**ohn Cleland is one of the UK's best known racing drivers, winning the British Touring Car Championship (BTCC) in 1989 and 1995. In all that time he has successfully run the family business started by his father, taking on the dealer principal role in 1974 aged just 22. He terminated his Vauxhall franchise 15 years later, despite being a works BTCC driver for the brand at the time, and took on Volvo in new premises in Galashiels.

Clelands of the Borders has just been named Volvo's best UK dealer for the first six months of 2018, having held top or second in the brand's table for the past two years. Speaking to Motor Trader in a centre that has recently undergone a £1.7m refurbishment, Cleland puts much of the dealership's success down to applying the winning mentality he learnt in motor sport.



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it's often missed that professional sportsmen and women make great ambassadors and have a role to play in business. They have reached the pinnacle of their sport through hard work, effort and being the best and this can be utilised in business somewhere. Their mind is wired up differently to be successful.

**How do you find staff recruitment?**

Very difficult. We aim very high and I personally interview all potential new staff, because I want them to understand my mentality of winning.

I want my staff to be happy, to know they are paid more than their equivalents in dealers around them. But I also need them to buy into the thinking here. For example, they must never say "that's not my job." I will make someone a cup of coffee, take someone outside to a car. Staff need to understand that is how this business is built.

Recently I needed a Saturday receptionist and trainee salesman, and I emailed our database asking if customers might have a family member who could suit the bill before we advertised on the open market. Our customers understand what we expect from our staff because they experience it. I got a whole lot of emails back praising the idea, and I employed a lad whose mum is a customer. He was previously stacking shelves in a supermarket and he has proven to be a star – he understood from his mum how we work and what we expect, that we are hard but fair.

**How big a deal was the refurbishment?**

It was the first complete refurbishment the place had undergone. I sold my Jaguar franchise 18 months ago and we moved into that showroom while this one was rebuilt, moving back in on 14 February in conjunction with the launch of XC40.

On the Friday evening before the Monday we reopened the staff all saw the inside for the first time. I had replaced everything other than my desk and a couple of chairs – even the franking machine was new, ➤

## High performance retailing



**Mike Macaulay**

National Sales and Development Manager | **AutoProtect**

**T**he mental and physical preparation, along with an attention to detail required to be a success in high performance sport is often used as a metaphor for success in business. I have seen and heard many sports stars who have excelled in their chosen sport providing motivational speeches about the effort and commitment required to lead their field. Without fail, they have provided me with a boost, as they have to the people who have worked alongside me. Now, imagine having such a highly competitive sporting leader at the head of your business every day. It is probably why I found John Cleland's story so inspiring.

A lesson I have taken from sport is the importance of the 'marginal gains' – those small actions, which when combined make a difference that customers and bottom line feel. John's Volvo business is not exactly in the heart of a heavily populated area, so making every moment and action

count is crucial to ensure the business stands out. This effort is evident in the personal handshake John gives every customer and through to an absolute focus on the Volvo brand; combined they ensure John Clelland's is the expert Volvo buyers can trust.

Another sporting metaphor I took from John's case study is the importance of a positive service and work ethic by the individuals in the team. I have a quote on my office desk; "The victory of success is half won when one gains the habit of work". Written in the 19th century, it echoes John's ethos for hard work personally and by his team and their responsibility to customers and to the business. I couldn't agree more; this work and service ethic is central to the way we work and support our dealers and their customers.

Thank you, John, a great case study, packed with thoughts that reflect our own ethos.



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