

GROOMED FOR SUCCESS

A retrenched engineer tells Samuel Ee how he made a new start by becoming the owner of a car grooming centre

A TOUGH time out of work led one unemployed man to Toughseal, a paint protection system. Today, Patrick Selvakumar is the UK product's exclusive distributor for Singapore and the proud owner of his own auto grooming centre.

A mechanical engineer by training, he found himself on the streets two years ago when the construction firm he was working at was restructured. After not being able to find alternative work for a year, the self-confessed car buff gravitated to something that didn't pay much but at least held his interest.

He started work at a car grooming centre but soon decided the wax and polish system used wasn't doing what it was supposed to do. So he surfed the Internet to look for a better alternative.

He found Toughseal.

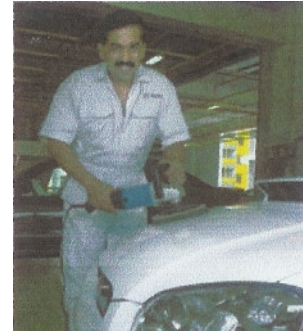
After three months of frantic e-mailing, during which he had to explain his business plans and prove to the British company that he had the right credentials, he got the exclusive rights to sell the Toughseal range of products in Singapore.

'It was my partner's reputation which helped,' says the 43-year-old 'autopreneur' of his business partner, who does not want to be named. His chain of motor accessories shops gave Toughseal the assurance that we had the experience to do it.'

So one month ago, with \$200,000 and bated breath, they rented some space at Ang Mo Kio Autopoint and set up ST Auto Grooming Centre. The 2,500 sq foot unit has five treatment bays and four staff:

'Toughseal is not a wax,' explains Mr. Selvakumar. 'It is an acrylic-teflon sealant which bonds with the car's paintwork to seal and protect the surface.'

A few other companies in Singapore also apply the same principle of an air-tight sealant that bonds to the paintwork like an invisible film and prevents dirt such as acidic bird droppings from permeating the surface for up to 72 hours.



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-Mr Selvakumar

But at Toughseal, about \$400 (depending on the size of the car) will get you the following:

First, a Pre-Treatment removes all 'foreign impurities' from the car. This refers to not only the dirt and grime but also any resin and polymer wax that had been previously applied.

'We want to get to the original lacquer or paint surface that your car had when it left the factory,' he says.

Second, the Acrylic Sealant is applied. After 48 hours, Mr. Selvakumar says the sealant will recreate the car's original shine while protecting it against ultraviolet rays, acid rain, bird droppings and tree sap, among others. This protection comes with an 18-month warranty.

'In the UK, the warranty is for five years,' he says. But in Singapore, we give 18 months because we don't know where you go with your car. I mean, what if you work in a shipyard or petrol chemical plant where there are foreign particles like blasting grit and paint droplets?'

But the length of the warranty isn't the main concern of the owners of the 40-add cars that he's groomed so far.

'Some people have this mindset. They think that for say \$500, they must have six polishings. They don't believe that the car does not need follow-up treatments.'

So what he does is to let all his customers come back and for \$10, the car is washed and cleaned - inside and out - to the level that it was when it first exited his premises.

So what's next?

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