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Carpinteria business keeps on truckin'

After selling "lightly used" commercial vehicles in Carpinteria for 15 years, Malcolm McDonald has established himself as the go-to guy for a number of large and small businesses, universities, school districts and municipalities all around California.

Working with just one mechanic, Bart Willoughby, Mr. McDonald also has some customers from out of state and has even sold a few trucks as far afield as New Zealand, American Samoa and Hawaii.

He deals in all sorts of trucks, from dump beds, utility beds and stake beds to cargo vans and larger box vans, right up to the occasional big-rig. Most are recent models, from 2000 to 2006, although just this week he sold two low-mileage 1996 trucks to a pipe company in Oxnard.

He also has an arrangement with a Ventura business that supplies custom-

SHOP TALK Frank Nelson

built truck beds to meet specific client needs; in these cases, his focus is on buying trucks with a solid cab and chassis that he knows he can build on.

Mr. McDonald said his clients range from owner-operators with a single vehicle to companies with perhaps 30 to 40 trucks in their fleets. Roughly half the customers place specific orders for the types of vehicles they want, while the rest are happy to pick from the ones that catch Mr. McDonald's eye.

He estimates that 80 percent of McDonald Enterprises customers are in California — about half of them in Santa Barbara County — and while vehicles mostly fetch between \$12,000 and \$20,000, he believes he's also selling a service.

"I provide the convenience of having a wide range of used commercial vehicles in the Santa Barbara area," says the man who makes between one and three buying trips to Los Angeles every week and will travel to other states to track down a particular truck.

His clients, he said, are busy people who don't want the stress and don't have the time to go to L.A., where, in any case, many of the trucks are available only at auctions and sales open to licensed dealers.

Also, people sometimes end up buying something they wish they hadn't. "With me, there's more of a comfort factor," said Mr. McDonald. "I personally inspect and purchase all the vehicles in order to make sure they are all of



STEVE MALONE / NEWS-PRESS PHOTOS

Every picture tells a story ... Malcolm McDonald in his Carpinteria office with a wall of photos showing some of the trucks he has sold since starting McDonald Enterprises 15 years ago.

high quality."

He said he buys vehicles he likes and, while not a certified mechanic, he knows enough to carry out some basic checks, such as checking fluid levels, looking for oil leaks and listening to the engine. "I'm more of a detective than a mechanic," he quipped.

He also sees advantages in not having to buy trucks constantly just to keep a large lot fully stocked — sometimes



STEVE MALONE / NEWS-PRESS PHOTOS

Malcolm McDonald, who started his truck-selling business in Carpinteria 15 years ago, now supplies businesses, schools and municipalities all over California and beyond.

good trucks are hard to find and he won't buy anything he doesn't like. For 10 years, he's had an office at 4191 Carpinteria Avenue, and he maintains an inventory of 15 to 20 vehicles at storage locations around town.

Each vehicle that arrives in Carpinteria, whether pre-sold or just bought on spec, goes through a rigorous inspection process where Mr. Willoughby identifies everything that needs fixing and makes sure the work is done.

Mr. McDonald said this part of the operation is crucial since a good portion of the business is with repeat customers who sometimes buy trucks for their fleets sight unseen. "It's important I put out a good product and maintain my reputation," he said.

Though he advertises regularly in the Trade Express and several truck trader magazines, Mr. McDonald thinks he attracts a fair bit of business through the company Web site, www.mcdonaldtrucks.com.

It was via the Internet that he was contacted by a power authority in American Samoa and a business in Hawaii; however, the New Zealand sales stemmed from Mr. McDonald's family connections in that country.

The 42-year-old is from a farming family in southern New Zealand and had his first taste of America when he came here in 1983 for six months of motocross motorcycle racing.

He returned home, but was back in the U.S. five years later, heading for Santa Barbara, where a geology professor at UCSB — who had done some work on his uncle's property in New Zealand — was the only person he knew in the States.

Though he originally came here on vacation, he decided to stay, first taking a job managing a Montecito estate for a couple of years and then starting to buy and sell vehicles. He also met and married an American, Rosemary, who today is an integral part of the business and does all the bookwork.

e-mail: fnelson@newspress.com