

Grace Under Pressure

Mike Oliver channelled his passion for engineering into a multi-million-dollar business.

He has worked in an advertising agency, designed a gear rolling machine for the Ford Motor Company, and was an apprentice with a legendary British engineering company, but Mike Oliver found his true calling when he went into business for himself.

In 1979, aged 42, he took the plunge and started Oliver Valves. His office was a one-car garage at his home in England. His first product, developed in that same garage, was a high-pressure needle valve suitable for use in the oil and gas industry.

It didn't take long before his bright idea was being ordered in bulk by British Gas, BP, Shell, Exxon and Chevron. The rest, as they say, is history. Today, he is the chairman of three family-owned companies with offices on three continents as well as six valve factories in Knutsford, Manchester, with some 250 people on his payroll. His products are selling in 50 countries, and he has made it to the UK's *The Sunday Times Rich List*.

Yet, despite all his achievements, Mr Oliver is unassumingly down-to-earth. He is a devoted family man and a conscientious businessman who keeps in touch with his office daily. No matter where he is, he is firmly grounded on what makes a successful business. His favourite mantras – "impossible is not an option", "be firm but fair to your staff", "gross margin is king" – may go some way to explaining his spectacular success.

Tremendous success in his business has also given Mr Oliver an opportunity to engage in a life-affirming pursuit: He supports several charities and a hospital in Malawi that provides care for children. Ask him why he does it, and he says simply: "It's the right thing to do."

At 71, he is still passionate about life, work and cars. His garage boasts, among others, five Bentleys, three Ferrari, two Aston Martin, a Bugatti Veyron and two Rolls-Royce Phantoms.

He recalls: "I bought a Phantom three years ago, and put the unique registration number 1MRO on the car." Then on his birthday last year, he treated himself to a Phantom Coupé, promptly registering it under another unique licence-plate number, MRO1. "The Coupé is unusual as it is the only one, according to the factory, that has ever been done in two-tone. It has a light blue roof and Silver Ghost Edition paintwork."

So enthusiastic was he about his Coupé that the very day he picked up the car with his wife Jennifer, they drove to Rheims in France's Champagne region. "The people in Rheims who saw the car were very interested in it, and we had quite a few people admiring it."

"We later drove the car to Switzerland for a 10-day car rally. We covered about 4,800km in three weeks. My wife and I shared the driving, and the car performed brilliantly." ○



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01 The Olivers with their numbered Phantoms at Goodwood.

to Rheims, Champagne as part of their Pan-European tour.

02&04 The day they took delivery of their Phantom Coupé, the Olivers drove straight

03 The Olivers in Switzerland during their 10-day car rally.