

Profile: Neville Hyde

ANY salesperson who approaches a client dressed in a gorilla suit is bound to catch the latter's attention — if nothing else, to stop the beast from upsetting the paperwork on the aforementioned's desk. When one particular salesperson so attired finally peeled off his mask and shouted 'happy birthday,' the quarry shrieked with laughter. Quite surprisingly, the client had not the slightest inkling that the suit contained one Neville Hyde, now managing director of Airside Ltd.

Not many people could escape unscathed using such novel approaches — and get the business. But Neville has this unusual attitude to selling, to managing a business, in fact, to life. Perhaps this is due to being his family's black sheep, his growing years having been spent teetering precariously on the right side of policeman and teacher parents.

The home environment could have been where Neville acquired this irrepressible desire to do just the opposite when someone says: 'No!' or 'It can't be done!' His rebellious nature led him to becoming the managing director of a company at 27 years of age, and finally to creating his own company, also at a 'fairly young age.'

The true blue Brummy left school to take up a five year apprenticeship as a design engineer, and on completion joined Drake and Scull Engineering as a site engineer. He later joined consulting engineer R. W. Gregory and Partners, another Birmingham firm, and while there became involved in contracting engineering, moving about the country as contracts came up.

But the lifestyle did not really suit the then recently married man; besides, he decided that as an engineer he was only 'pretty average,' reckoning his strength lay most in his selling ability. As tends to happen in even progressive companies, the sales jobs he first applied for within the industry all wanted someone experienced. Exasperated, he joined a company outside the industry as it had a sales training programme. He was on his way.

Ellis and Everard later approached him to be branch sales co-ordinator of its Birmingham branch, which was running at a loss. After knocking that into shape, contractor C. W. Ingham, which was planning to establish a distribution company, approached



One black sheep who did everything possible to avoid following the flock has come up trumps. Cheryl Robertson spoke to Neville Hyde of Airside Ltd

remained there for seven years. The company was called Midland Cooling Services Ltd.

Several changes took place within the holding company, Neville soon became disgruntled, and with itchy feet he hit the long, lonesome trail and formed his own company.

On January 2, 1985 Airside Ltd was formed, with Neville as managing director and Denise Lewis, who has worked with Neville for 12 years, as another director. 'The first year was pretty good — it generally is, you just have to put your head down and go for it,' said Neville.

The company hit £1m turnover in the first year.

'The response I received from the contracting trade when setting up the business was overwhelming — even particularly hard nosed contractors were exceedingly good to me.'

pleading poverty, a starving family and offspring with holes in their shoes. Sure, he did do that once, past an astounded secretary and into the contractor's office, but that's just Neville's way — sometimes. At other times he can be as hard as nails.

Airside's most recent success in the expansion stakes is the formation of Airside Southern Ltd about a year ago, in Southampton, with Steven Glover as managing director. But as Neville says, Airside is just at the bottom rung of the 'elite' distributor ladder.

'The problem with the distributor service is that there is not enough work around to satisfy every company's ambition. The grand plans of all the distributors cannot be met and ultimately some will disappear through mergers, takeovers or by simply going under.

'What I see happening is a band of elite emerging out of a pile of distribution companies.'

Last year's upheaval within the distribution and manufacturing industry proved to Neville that business is now much more fiercely competitive than it was about 15 years ago when it could have been labelled a gentleman's game. The consequent current discount wars being attempted on some product ranges he sees as ridiculous, but it is 'a volume game now.'

Neville believes the British manufacturers have got to look seriously at overseas markets, as there are numerous overseas companies looking to get a foothold here. 'The Japanese have a good toe hold in this market and it remains to be seen how they respond in general terms to the restrictions that are placed by the EEC.'

In terms of research and development, he feels the Japanese are a long way ahead of the British, 'which is going to make it harder for the British manufacturers.' While he agrees that not all British manufacturers stick their heads in the sand as to what is happening on the streets, many 'don't have a clue as to what is going on.'

The one time bullfighter (when one was allowed to do it — and he still has the scar to prove it), banger racer and amateur golfer leaned back in his chair, emitting a heavy sigh. '1988 was a very interesting year, and the upheaval in the supply industry ain't finished yet. I'm confident about the