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Marie Gibbons quit her job at a Montreal college and moved to B.C. to help her brother, but 35 years later is still selling Volvos at her dealership in Abbotsford. JASON PAYNE/PNG

VOLVO LADY: Marie Gibbons has a good problem: Too many buyers, not enough cars

Few people are as passionate about what they do for a living as Marie Gibbons.

The personable sales professional has been involved in the auto industry for the last 35 years after quitting her job at a college in Montreal and relocating to British Columbia at the request of her brother George, who was looking for a partner to help him run — and grow — his small dealership.

“My brother was operating a repair shop here in Abbotsford when he received an offer to become a Volvo dealer and decided that he needed some help,” she explained. “Our partnership was like the Odd Couple, as I was really organized and he was not.”

The two helped grow George’s small auto shop into Abbotsford Imports, a full-service dealership that sold Volvo and Suzuki products.

“George and I worked together for 16 years before selling our franchise to Dockstader Volvo in 1996 because Volvo Canada wanted to expand their dealer network and made demands for expansion which we considered unrealistic.”

A change in the economy and a failed plan to move the dealership to Langley led to the eventual closure of the now Dockstader-owned dealership a couple of years later.

“My brother had retired when we sold Abbotsford Imports, but I enjoyed working with people and cars so I started my own business, Valley Import Connections, to fill the void left in the market by the closure of the dealership,” Gibbons continued.

“I recognized that there was still a large interest in Volvo products in the Fraser Valley, so I set up shop to sell used Volvos as I was familiar with the brand and liked the product very much.”

Often referred to as the “Volvo Lady” by local residents because of her unbridled enthusiasm for the brand, Marie was happy to be back in business.

“I love coming to work because I see my customers more like friends, and I have been lucky enough to know and serve some of them for 35 years!”

Gibbons secured a space in the same building that once housed the dealership. “Residents of the Fraser Valley seem to like to do business in their own neighbourhood, so it was nice that we were able to set up shop at the same location as the original dealership. People were used to coming here for Volvos and it is nice that continues to this day.”

Volvos have a solid reputation for being cars that last and are well suited to the Canadian environment, so Gibbons was more than confident to continue to promote the brand and put her name behind the cars she sold.

“Volvos are good vehicles, so people are more willing to buy one with higher mileage due to their proven longevity and reliability. And don’t forget that their reputation for safety is unmatched.

“My motto is if it doesn’t break, it won’t be expensive to fix. We specialize in cars valued in the \$3,000-5,000 range, but occasionally we will source pricier models if a customer requests something in particular.”



The Volvo Lady doesn’t buy a car just because it is a Volvo — she says she buys a car because it is a good car. If it hasn’t been well cared for, she will pass it by because there has to be a solid foundation for her to build on.

“There are certain models and years that I seek out as I know and trust them. With all my experience, I know which ones are easier to recondition and repair.”

Gibbons has a variety of sources for her inventory, including the dealer auction, wholesalers and a long list of personal contacts at large dealerships that often get the Swedish machines in as trades.

Demand is so strong she rarely has to seek out customers or even advertise, but still maintains a website to tell her story and to promote her business. Cars turn over quickly and a vehicle is rarely in inventory for more than a week.

“When people look at my website, they often comment that all the cars in my inventory are already sold,” she said with a smile. “But the reality is that by the time a car ends up on the lot, I usually already have a buyer lined up for it, or at least a customer in mind.”

Always on the hunt for quality cars, Gibbons keeps a list of customers and the cars they are looking for. “The problem is I have more customers than I do cars! But that is a very good problem to have.”

In an effort to help her customers keep their beloved cars on the road, she started to service Volvos with the help of veteran technician and friend Charlie Mulholland. It also gave her the means to ensure the cars she sells have been carefully inspected, refreshed and maintained prior to delivery.

“Because they are so many Volvos in the area, expanding to include vehicle service was a natural progression for my business. If I can find a way to reduce the repair costs for my customers, I will go that route and with a low overhead, I am able to keep the shop rate down.”

Gibbons has always liked to tinker with things with wheels. Everything from bicycles to automobiles. Her goal is to fix things so the customer doesn’t have to.

“Now that we do service, we go through each car very thoroughly and replace missing, worn or broken parts,” she noted. “There is no smoke and mirrors in our business, just lots of blood, sweat and tears. In fact, our detailer spends two to three days with each car to help it look its best for the new owner!”

“I want to make sure that my customers are getting the best car they can for the money they spend.”

“I don’t do this because I have to, but because it is who I am.”



Russell Purcell

WOMEN AT THE WHEEL