

Medway Mogul

There's life in the industry yet!

Times may be hard, but it is still possible to carve a niche for yourself in oil distribution, armed with little more than flair, a good wife, a propensity for hard work, and a willingness to grasp opportunity by the throat, as our Business Affairs Correspondent discovered in a recent interview with Bob Boggis.

Standing somewhat over six feet in stocking feet, with a slightly gangling look, Bob Boggis does not immediately strike you as a potential tycoon. But then, appearances can be deceptive.

Now 27, Bob started off on his own account with one waggon and a van just three years ago, in October, 1978. His introduction to the industry had come through six months' driving for a distributor whose name he prefers not to mention. When he started on his own account, it was in the field of waste oil collection, and his first big break came with a contract to supply 400,000 gallons of waste oil for burning in a lime works. As he admits with disarming frankness: "I couldn't get anywhere near that, but we did put in 250,000 gallons".

He took on his first—and best—driver in January 1979, and James Prout is now a non-shareholding director of Oil Processors (Kingsnorth) Ltd. Their tank cleaning service, with especial emphasis on marine work, was popular because, according to Bob, "We had the equipment, and we realised what frame of mind was needed".

The company's present operations are based on a one-acre site purchased from Berry Wiggins, on the Medway. Relations with the previous owner have not always been cordial. Three times whilst he was renting storage, they tried to throw Bob off, but he refused to move. Bob claims that the pot was stirred by rivals who were not best pleased by his advent. Now, he thinks his operation is bigger than theirs.

Relationships with his erstwhile landlord seem to have improved with the arrival of Alec Porter, a man whom Mr. Boggis describes as: "capable of making a decision, and sticking by it". We suspect that a fair number of our readers devoutly wish that more examples of that rare species existed at the interface between distributor and supplier or other outside agency.

On the site which he now owns, Bob Boggis has some 2000 tonnes of gas oil storage, and 1500 tonnes of black oil capacity. With the four-gantry loading facility which he is just completing, capable of loading eight vehicles at a time, he thinks he has the largest facility of its kind in Kent.

Berry Wiggins are thought to be selling off more land to a company interested in berthing facilities capable of handling 30,000 tonne cargoes. Such a development would clearly add to the strategic importance of his



A new image for distributing oil. Left to right: Bob Boggis, James Prout, David Hiscock, plus the boss's Ferrari 308.

depot. As he remarked, for he is still a young man with few inhibitions, "that should make them sit up and take notice in Purfleet".

O.P.K. will uplift and dispose of any oil, but with "Processors" in its name, the company found that it was not taken too seriously as a possible distributor of heating oil. So, Saracen Fuel Oil was formed, and now operates four artics, a 6-wheeler, and a 2000 gallon four-wheeler. The company now handles gas oil, black oil in full loads, and bulk lubricants. Some of the work in black oil appears to be third-party charter work. In a couple of months recently, five O.P.K. artics. shifted 200,000 gallons for a nationalised industry, which Mr. Boggis would not name, but we would guess from external evidence was the C.E.G.B.

Although there has been an approach from one major with a view to an AD-ship at present Mr. Boggis prefers to remain an independent. He and his 25-year old wife Gillian own the company, with James Prout and David Hiscock (fifteen years with B.P.) as working directors. At present, the whole operation seems to run with very low overheads, and a high level of ploughed-back profits.

As others have discovered before him, Bob Boggis will doubtless find that the real crunch comes with expansion, when he has to set up control systems without spawning a paper-creating bureaucracy. Bob Boggis struck us as a young man full of confidence, with the resilience to meet future problems as readily as he had overcome them in the past.

