

Peter Robinson -- 21 April 2024

They reckon if you make your obsession your profession... truly, you won't work a day in your life.

Ladies and gentlemen, that phrase may have been coined for the winner of this year's Newspress Lifetime Achievement Award.

He has worked on his magnificent obsession for 60 years ... and by doing so, has achieved capital L legend status – not just in Australia, but around the world.

Let me set the scene. Our winner is variously

. Feared and respected ... in (almost) equal measure

. Contemptuous of most PR men (and back in the day they were all men)

. Incorruptible, passionate to a fault and not afraid to stick his finger in the chest of the most vaunted CEOs.

Didn't care if your name was Edsel Ford or Dieter Zetsche – they all got the benefit of forthright opinion, honestly delivered.

Edsel Ford still loves him for that....

But Ferrari ... hmmm not so much. It black banned him. But in true Italian style ... all was eventually forgiven. Until, in true Italian style, it blackbanned him a second time.

. He'd famously call a lemon a lemon ... or in Ferrari's case limoncello ... and it didn't worry him.

. Actually, I think it did worry him quite a lot ...but he had the courage of his convictions and he aimed up when the going got hot.

. The suits really didn't know what to make of the bloke or his disciples he is also a formidable talent spotter , who discovered and nurtured generations of Aussie talent.

I count myself among that privileged group.

He was an editor for whom you wanted to do your best work. He knew all the tricks, of course, but he was fair and fulsome in his feedback. You were never in any doubt ... you'd hit a six or laid an egg.

At every motor show you'd see him sucking up the pain of that famously dodgy hip... yet he would still wear out more shoe leather than the youngest, fittest journo – all in search of the elusive ...exclusive.

That tells you everything you need to know about grit and competitive spirit.

And didn't he guard the good stuff from the lazy bastards on newspapers! He was working with impossibly long deadlines, but his spiral bound notebook still beat most of the daily crew.

There are many stories. The injunction from General Motors made national headlines - of course - but the story that to me speaks volumes about the man is the famous crashing Lamborghini saga.

It happened not long after he arrived to set up shop in Italy. The Lambo drive was a big story for Autocar and for us.

A farmer in an old Fiat wasn't part of the script. The front was duly ripped off the bright yellow Diablo with barely a frame or two shot. The photographer kept snapping – there was our man, a forlorn figure, head in hands, a picture of absolute despair. How could this happen to a bloke with a reputation for being kind to the machinery?

Being genteel Englishmen, the Autocar chaps decided to draw a discreet veil over the whole thing. No story, nothing to see here, move on, it didn't happen.

When he told me over a crackly telephone line what had happened... I said mate, write it exactly as it went down.

Because this is more than a car story.

To his eternal credit, he buried his pride and wrote one of the most memorable yarns in motoring history.

Every reader felt the passion and the pain.

It was so honest it was a no brainer for the cover ... with my immortal lines:

We Drive Diablo... And Crash.

Read it and weep.

The magazine sold like a beauty but the greater impact was that for years afterwards - in Europe and the US - they'd read your name tag and say

... " so you're one of the guys from THAT magazine!!"

Ladies and gentlemen, tonight's winner of the Lifetime Achievement Award has not only lived the dream. He's squeezed every last drop out of it.

His name of course --- is Peter Robinson!!