

# BUSINESS

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### Employers desperately seeking women to join automotive industry to overcome skills shortage

CARA JENKIN NATIONAL CAREERONE EDITOR • THE ADVERTISER • AUGUST 12, 2013 8:49PM [BE THE FIRST TO RESPOND](#)

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Fiona Lawrie is a third year apprentice motor mechanic at Hondacare in Geelong. Source: News Limited

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**CAR service and repair workshops across the nation are desperately seeking women to get under the bonnet and work as auto-electricians, mechanics, spraypainters and panelbeaters.**

FROM THE HOMEPAGE



Sgt Sleaze romanced 33 women at



Reporter manhandled on live TV

The automotive industry has been suffering a skills shortage for more than a decade and wants to widen its pool of applicants anyway, but believes women in some ways can be better at the jobs than men.

Technology advances means workshops are no longer the domain of men covered in grease and workshops and cars are much cleaner and require less physical strength than in the past.

The industry cites gender traits such as being better able to select colours, having an eye for detail, having higher literacy and numeracy skills required to deal with rapidly changing technologies and maturity to transition to the workplace as some of the advantages female workers have over many young men.

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Some employers even prefer to take on female apprentices ahead of their male counterparts.

But women are still in the minority in the industry. Of the 129,500 people employed in automotive repair and maintenance, only 14,000 are women.

And there were 1255 female apprentices last year compared with 28,066 males.

Auto Skills Australia national project manager Peter Gostelow said the number of females who were enrolling in training had grown by 35 per cent since 2009 but more were needed to address the skills and gender gap.

He said interest from women in training in becoming mechanics and other auto trades had never been as high as when Kylie Minogue starred as a mechanic in the TV show Neighbours in the 1980s -giving an insight into how more could be recruited to the trade.

"The reason we saw a pick up in that particular time is that women, in particular, look for role models," he said.

"There was an iconic person in a show that was very popular, particularly a role that at the time they weren't thinking about as a job role, so they connected to it.

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"It's about being introduced to role models, females that have done well in the trade."

Increasing the number of females in trades, particular those that are male-dominated, is an aim of this year's National Skills Week, to be launched at

Victorian Automobile Chamber of Commerce industrial relations, OHS and training general manager Leyla Yilmaz said it was a challenge to get the message across that the industry had changed and the types of workers it wanted were people who not only could work with their hands but had a range of other skills as well.

"They have to be quite good with language and literacy and numeracy because the technology is so diverse," she said.

"It's no different than engineering and we've seen a number of girls do exceptionally well in those sorts of areas.

"Workshops are quite technical in nature, not like the garages of yesterday with the guys in overalls with greasy hands. It's rare to see those types of environments these days.

"We have a lot of members who are very keen and have a preference for girls because they have proven themselves and done exceptionally well."

She encourages female school students to do their work experience placement at a workshop or try a school-based apprenticeship to get a feel for automotive trade workplaces while gaining credits towards their high school certificate or further training.

Automotive electrician, motor mechanic, panelbeater and vehicle painter are all trades listed by the Australian Government as being in skill shortage and have been for at least the past decade.

It statistics show not enough apprentices are finishing their training to keep up with the number of workers retiring or leaving the auto industry to take up roles elsewhere.

#### JOBS FOR THE GIRLS

Fiona Lawrie always wanted to be a mechanic but did not know how to get an apprenticeship.

So she tried studying interior design instead after finishing school and did not enjoy it.

"I thought it would be so cool to be a mechanic," she said.

"On the weekend I'd rotate my own tyres and did stuff on my own car."

A chance meeting with some friends who knew of an employer looking for an apprentice was the break that she needed.

Ms Lawrie, 22, is now a third-year light vehicle mechanic apprentice at Geelong Hondacare through VACC Auto Apprenticeships.

She is so enamoured with the career that she has started a Facebook page to encourage other women to try it and give them information.

Until this year she had been the only female in her trade class.

"I want to encourage more women into trades because girls are afraid of it and don't really know how to get into it," she said.

"Along with girls at my trade school, we're using ourselves as an example to get more girls to give it a go.

"We did it and we're just average girls who if you looked at you'd never think would be in the trade.

"I've learned so much and there's so much more that I have to learn and it's been really exciting."

Ms Lawrie will be part of a Q&A session at the National Skills Week launch at the Automotive Centre for Excellence tonight.

She encourages women who are interested in pursuing a career to contact her through her [Facebook page Fanelle](#) .

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