

PAINTING THE TOWN SUNNY

It's serious a decision jumping from a ute to buying your first truck, but for Rick Morgan it's made the world of difference to his expanding business in the tropical city of Cairns. *Greg Bush* writes



Purchasing your first major commercial vehicle is always a big decision. The question of what brand and model to choose to suit particular needs can take time and a lot of research. So, when Cairns-based Rick Morgan wanted to upgrade from his 4WD ute and trailer setup to take his painting business to the next level, he sought advice from his father, Scott Morgan. With around 30 years' experience in road transport, Scott has worked for QRX and is now the Laos country manager for Linfox. He also spent time in the mining logistics sector in Laos and Papua New Guinea. "I didn't know anything else about trucks," Rick admits. "But my father said he would personally go for a Hino if he had the choice."

Rick's new 300 Series Hino 616 Trade Ace crew cab arrived in 2021, serving not only to carry all the gear he needs, but also acting as a mobile billboard for the business he operates with his partner Liza – Morgan's Master Painters. With the old ute and trailer measuring around nine metres long, including what Rick says was wasted space between vehicle and trailer, the 7.2 metre-long Hino rigid made for an even more attractive proposition. "The amount of gear we can carry and the trestles and planks and all the heavy stuff I can compact into a smaller space, it just made sense," he says. "What I liked about Hino as opposed to Isuzu was the trucks were a little bit longer in the range I was looking at. And it also had engine brakes," he says. "People laughed because they said it wouldn't carry enough weight for exhaust brakes, but I put it on the scales and it's 4.3 tonne loaded. That's a lot of weight."



"So I quite liked that aspect of it and the extra room for the length." In addition, the Hino comes with pre-collision system as standard, including autonomous emergency breaking, pedestrian detection and lane departure warning. "It's got seven seats, which is amazing, because it's got four in the back and three in the front," Rick adds. "I've got two kids – a six and a five year-old with two booster seats – and I can still fit in everything else under the sun." To add the custom-built box on the back, Rick drove 25 minutes down the Bruce Highway to Shane and Trisha Stroud of Decked Out Fabrications in Gordonvale. "They weren't the cheapest quote but I went to them because of reputation," he explains, adding that the Strouds went the extra mile to accommodate Rick's needs. "Because the box spread out across the width of the truck, he was quite worried that it might crack because the aluminium tray would twist slightly when you're going over bumps. "So he ended up putting it up on industrial springs, which are bolted to the tray, and it moves independently, which was a great idea." For the signwriting on his new Hino truck and trailer it was simply a case of driving around the block from Rick's regular paint supplier, Paint Right on Scott St. Again, the choice of Adrian Fernandez from Design Lab who wrapped the rig except for the front of the truck, was one through strong word-of-mouth reputation.



"I've been told if you service and look after them you'll get every bit of 20 years."

Opposite: Rick Morgan founded Morgan's Master Painters in 2018. Left: Neat setup: The custom-built box holds all the Morgan's Master Painters essentials



“The signwriting was important because for me it’s like driving a giant billboard and I’m still a new company in the industry,” Rick explains.

“We’ve only been going for four or five years so still trying to get our name out there. We obviously want to look professional because we try to give professional workmanship on each and every job.

“So, for me, it was about getting something that was not only practical but I wanted people to say: ‘Oh wow, that’s different.’”

The right brew

Rick founded Morgan’s Master Painters in March 2018, starting out with just himself and a tradesman. After eight months he hired an apprentice and, later, another tradesman. Before painting he worked in the family business, Marlin Coast Home Brew, operated by his mother Terri Morgan. He then decided to try his hand as an adult apprentice employee, a vocation he says suited his “meticulous nature”. All up, including being at the helm

of Morgan’s Master Painters, Rick has been in the painting game for close to 15 years. Now in its fifth year, the business is actually a team of five. With Rick, his apprentice and two tradies out on jobs, Liza takes care of the office essentials.

“She helps me out with a lot of the paperwork side of things,” Rick says. “I do all the quoting and invoicing and pays online but Liza, my bookkeeper and our accountant, basically handles everything else.

“I’m not real good with the tax paperwork but I can get by with all the standard stuff.”

The bulk of Rick’s work is for high-end residential and commercial buildings. He avoids doing project homes, preferring to work for smaller builders. Residential repaints, however, are his core business.

“People appreciate quality,” he says. “We’re not the cheapest company but we go out of our way to try and be the best at what we do and do everything by the book and make sure it’s an A-grade finish.”

That’s one of the reasons he only uses the Haymes ultra-premium range of paints.

“Out of the big brands, Haymes is the only one that’s still Australian owned and operated,” Rick points out, adding that Haymes has won Canstar Blue’s award for number one paint brand in Australia five years running.

“But I also like them because we’ve never had a problem there. They have great customer service and, for the smaller companies, they actually help you out on price to stay competitive.”

The Hino has helped make life much easier for Rick; it’s a truck that he plans to keep running for some time yet.

“I’m hoping to get 20 years out of it,” he says. “I’ve been told if you service and look after them you’ll get every bit of 20 years.

“It’s been a big difference for us as far as just ease of having everything in the one spot.

“If it got to that point where I was big enough and I could get a fleet I think I would always keep it myself,” Rick ponders.

“So yeah, I don’t imagine I’d ever get a fleet of trucks, but you never know. It might work out as something that no one else has. Morgan’s Master Painters might one day be 20 trucks strong!” 🚚

Top: The Hino 300 Series 616 Trade Ace crew cab can fit in “everything under the sun”

Above: In comparison to Rick’s previous ute and trailer, the Hino Trade Ace offered space saving and stability

Left: Rick is planning on driving the Hino for up to 20 years

