



Graeme Kelly - Kraft Engineering

Graeme started off in the business as a gaffer for Neil Peterken and Quinto Allan at Mills Engineering following a stint as a welder at Kinleith and a driver for various contractors around the Bay of Plenty.

It was his time with Neil Peterken, Quinto Allan, and Bill Vercoe at Mills Engineering in 1968 that would introduce him to trailer building - something he would carry on when he shifted to Australia later that year to build trailers for Freighter Industries.

At the turn of the decade, Graeme Kelly was back in Rotorua, where he joined Manu Tuanui's N.Z. Arc Welding (Tui Trailers).

He was still there in 1972, when the company was sold to Allen Mills and it became Mills-Tui Trailers, but he didn't stay for long after that.

The next five or six years for Graeme Kelly were spent largely in the wilderness - literally and figuratively. He returned to Kinleith for a stint, worked for a time for Ian Patchell, and then for Graeme Manson. But a fair amount of his time-most winters-was spent hunting.

And that's where he acquired his nickname - Possum.

In 1978, he decided to ply his skill as a welder and engineer and go it alone. He started small, as Graeme Kelly Engineering, doing general jobbing work. But he also managed a couple of good commissions setting up trucks for Robin Moore and Brian Stanaway, and his business and his reputation for quality work grew.

Graeme shifted his business to Rotorua Brake Services, a company owned by Mick Kelly. Mick was not a relative, and to avoid any confusion and a possible conflict of engineering work, in 1984 Graeme decided to change the name of his company. Graeme Kelly Engineering became Kraft Engineering, and Graeme Kelly became Kraftie.

Kraft Engineering's first trailer was built for Warwick Wilshier. To that point, much of Graeme's work was manufacturing and servicing general logging gear. He had not tried his hand at a full trailer-not on his own account. That first trailer was stock standard. Good quality, good enough to lead to further contracts and the attention of Pacific Haulage and a man called Mike Lambert.

In Graeme Kelly, Mike Lambert found a trailer builder who had the time, the plant, the capacity and, above all, the inclination to join Lambert in his search for "the different and the better." The latitude and that faith he had in Graeme would produce such groundbreaking innovations as the **Krafty Loada** - the first folding trailer in New Zealand and a whole swag of versatile backload configurations, including units that would carry no fewer than three different types of loads on a round trip.

Graeme Kelly is proud of what he has produced for the industry - a lot prouder than he lets on. There is no doubt he broke significant ground, but he remains largely self-deprecating, "Designing these things wasn't hard," he says. "Yeah, it was a bloody big learning curve - still is, but you get a guy like Mike Lambert fire the bullets and tells us there has to be a better way to do something, and even if there isn't, we can always turn it into something else - and you have a good partnership between an operator and his builder. No doubt about that."

Graeme sold the business in 2021 to Colin King and James Worsnop and although he lends a hand from time to time, Graeme's got plenty to do around the farm, and the odd bit of fishing.



Graeme joined the TTMF in 1989 and served on the Council from 2002 until his retirement is 2021.



Left: Neil Peterken, 1993 Life member, presenting Graeme with his Life membership certificate at the 2024 AGM.

Above: The Rotorua lads - from left: Graeme Kelly, Neil Peterken, Ian Patchell (2023 Life Member) and Jeff Mear.