

MISTER FIXER

Founder of truck rental group NRG Sid Sadique was named an IRTE fellow earlier this year in recognition of his long, varied and successful commercial vehicle career that included founding NRG and Electra Commercial Vehicles, plus a lifetime of service to IRTE. He speaks to Will Dalrymple

The career of Sid Sadique is a game of two halves, in his case before and after early retirement in 2006. In the first half, the bin lorry technician rocketed through the ranks to take a place on the board of waste management firm Biffa. In the second half, he turned around a number of ailing dealers, created a conglomerate and launched an EV manufacturing company. During both, he was an active member of IRTE, first at the local and then at the national level.

Two themes stand out. One has been limiting the focus of his work to a particular market niche (whether RCVs, truck rental or tyre management). The second has been delegation. For example, speaking about his recent work in dealerships (and see below), Sadique observes: "It's all about the management team. I am lucky to attract good people. I believe in equity and rewarding people in the business. I want to incentivise them, [saying] 'this will be your company;

I'm only here for the journey; you are really working for yourself, and I will give you that autonomy."

Sadique, 58, first joined the IRTE - and in particular, the Wakefield, West Yorkshire Centre - while apprenticed as a fitter for Kirklees Council's refuse collection vehicles. Looking back, he recalls: "At that time, the average IRTE member age was the same as today - lots of older people. I was a youthful lad with a need to question how the industry treats young people and bring them in." He would end up sitting on the Wakefield IRTE committee for years.

At work, he recalls having a similar attitude. At 21, he was given an opportunity to put his money where his mouth was, by becoming a workshop supervisor. "That was the first chance I had to be able to express what I thought of as the right thing. It was a strange environment: one minute I was an apprentice, and then I was running a pretty diverse workshop with service engineers, welders, fabricators, joiners."

He continues: "What I found was if I was absolutely straight with people, and showed an interest in what they did, I could create a customer and service-



delivery environment. Previously, people thought it doesn't matter what it costs [to finish a repair]. At that time, there was compulsory competitive tendering, a government initiative. You had to be competitive. Privatisation was looming, and I articulated the idea that if we didn't modernise, we would lose out."

ONWARDS AND UPWARDS

Driven by such ambitions, Sadique's twenties quickly passed in a succession of other jobs in the North - running a facility for a local authority in Calderdale, next business development and fleet engineering at TNT, then a private waste contractor, until along came a crucial role at waste contractor Biffa.

"Biffa at the time was owned by Severn Trent, and as it grew, I grew too. I started as a fleet engineer, then head of the northern region, then as a national fleet engineer, and I morphed into taking on responsibility for its acquisitions. By the time I left, I was involved in building facilities, buying and



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selling companies, running a recycling division, running a container division, with revenues of £400m under my control - I was responsible for all of the fleet.”

He continues: “It was fast-growing and very profitable. There were so many innovations. When I was in my 30s and early 40s, I thought I was invincible. I had a great belief in myself and the team.”

That came to an end in 2005, when Sadique felt the first effects of the onset of diabetes. Having decided to take early retirement in April 2006, he and his wife embarked on a round-the-



world tour. But after only a few weeks of travelling he heard about an unexpected opportunity to buy a former supplier, Riverside Truck Rental, and, from Florida, struck a deal to acquire it.

Riverside eventually came to be part of a much bigger group, now known as NRG Riverside. Sadique explains that this name came out of an ambition to create a national hire business by acquiring Scottish business Noblett and Trio Truck Rental in Milton Keynes, making Noblett Riverside Group, NRG. That name stuck despite how difficult Noblett proved to acquire, which took four attempts over eight years. Other acquisitions included DTM, Direct Tyre Management, in 2013.

Later, Sadique also became involved with the Mercedes-Benz dealership network when he was approached by members of the management of Sparshatts in Kent about guiding them through an MBO process; more recently, he did it again in Merseyside with Roanza, now called eStar.

SKILLS SHORTAGE

It was in 2013 that Sadique worked with the late IRTE volunteer John Parry on a relaunch of the IRTE’s irtec technician licensing scheme. Of that initiative, he says now: “irtec had been through its paces and needed a refresh. It had gotten in the doldrums.” He continues to sit on the irtec committee.

When asked about the technician skills situation today, Sadique reflects: “Brexit hasn’t helped. It’s had a negative impact in losing our ability to recruit from abroad, which was always part of our psyche. We recognise that technicians and people working in the motor trade are valuable, so they need to be given a fair rate of pay. And apprenticeships are only one part of the solution for the skills shortage. irtec is a great way to qualify skilled or semi-skilled technicians coming through. But it’s an age-old problem; when I was in my 20s people were talking about the

same thing. Nothing has improved; nothing has changed. Not enough effort is going into bringing on talent and skills.”

Sadique himself, however, stretched his own abilities in 2018, when he launched Electra Commercial Vehicles, taking gliders (engineless, cabbed chassis) from Mercedes-Benz and IVECO, adding electric drivelines and getting them type-approved.

Now that series-produced electric RCVs are more available from the OEMs, the competitive situation is changing. But Sadique says that small is beautiful: “OEMs build thousands of the same thing. We can compete in the 10, 20, 30s, and keep customers happy with aftercare service.”

Its small scale works against Electra in terms of manufacturing costs, but pales in comparison to the need to change the culture of the electric vehicle buyer. “We are now selling on TCO [total cost of ownership]. It’s not about capital, but cost over life. Electric and hydrogen have a high upfront capital cost, but when you take into account fuel, maintenance and operations, you suddenly find the cost of electric and hydrogen compared to diesel is not that big.”

Of this marketing approach, he observes that the UK “is the most complex market in the world and we have to adopt a real commercial approach in selling maintenance and TCO.”

Still, if anyone can do it, Sid can. [ite](#)

