

Le Kluse Autoschade, one of the first Five Star partners

Le Kluse Autoschade is a bodyshop in the Dutch town of Dordrecht, about 25 minutes outside Rotterdam. The bodyshop has always been associated with the high-quality products of DuPont Refinish and was one of the very first bodyshops to join the Five Star network in 1991.

In the 60s, the father of the current owner of Le Kluse Bodyshop, Rob Le Kluse, used to run a grocery store but also had an interest in cars. He predicted at the time that the number of cars on the road would increase and decided that vehicle maintenance and repair work was the way forward. He looked for, and found, a small bodyshop in Dordrecht and took over the company. He was, of course, right in his prediction and, just like so many businesses in those years, his company profited from increasing prosperity amongst the general public. As more people could afford a car, and sometimes even a second car, the streets got busier and accidents happened more frequently, generating work for Le Kluse Autoschade.

The business started with three employees and a bodyshop area of approximately 250 m² which expanded over the years to the current 1,500 m² and 12 staff. The growth of the company in the early days did not, however, always go smoothly; the oil crisis around 1970 and the economic downturn in the 80s and again in the 90s had their impact on the business, but Le Kluse Autoschade landed back on its feet every time, and continued to grow after each set back. Today it looks after repairs of privately owned cars, leased and fleet cars, as well as caravans and campers which it repairs with pre-fabricated moulds, erasing all traces of damage.

The bodyshop has always focused on high-quality damage repairs, but as it evolved and as other profitable opportunities arose, it was quick and well-poised to take advantage of them. For example, it added rust proofing when the then-current anti-rust treatment of new cars wasn't up to the modern standards; it

provided windscreen replacement at a time when windows would crack and break into thousands of pieces after being hit by debris off the road, and the company retro-fit sunroofs when these became fashionable. Even though all these activities provided sound returns for Le Kluse Autoschade during times of high demand, it always fell back on its speciality – vehicle damage repair.

For this, its core business, Le Kluse Autoschade has always worked with the high-quality products of DuPont Refinish. Twenty years ago the products used were very different, but still cutting edge for the time. Then, it took the keen eye of its expert in order to get the colour right, but Le Kluse is proud to admit that the principle of matching the colour hasn't changed much over the years - the finishing touch is still in the hands of the company's colour maker.

Generally in the bodyshop the equipment used has evolved technically over the years, resulting in a broad wall, filled with the full range of DuPont Refinish products and the Cromax[®] mixing machine.

“In the past we tried the products of another manufacturer for six months because they offered a big discount,” says Rob Le Kluse, “but we returned to DuPont Refinish as quickly as possible because in the end, there is much more profit to be gained with products that offer both high-quality and excellent productivity. With DuPont Refinish we are simply able to have faster throughput and it is the perfect, high quality brand we want associated with our business.”

Le Kluse was one of the people who saw the benefits of a network for bodyshops of similar quality to his and so he did not hesitate to join the Five Star network when DuPont Refinish initiated it.

Five Star was started 20 years ago, and looking back on the years since becoming a partner in 1991, Le Kluse doesn't regret joining the Five Star network for one second. It has proven to be beneficial for the business from the start. In the 90s for instance, when companies switched their focus from being practical to being commercial, the educational trips that the network organised for the

partners to visit lease and insurance companies resulted in more work, shorter lines of communication and a better understanding of each others' specific situation. Also around that time, Le Kluse Autoschade got the essential help from the network it needed in order to obtain their first ISO quality certificate. Many have since followed.

Network partners are able to profit from all the services the Five Star network and DuPont Refinish provide; that was true 20 years ago and still is today. Amongst these are product and management training, bench marking, overall marketing with a strong and recognisable Five Star logo and the very recent introduction of the Business Audit Tool, a tool with five specific modules to help bodyshops manage their business better, increasing their productivity and therefore their profitability – an ideal tool in these tough economic times.

Another major benefit for the individual partners today is the fact that the network as a whole does the negotiations with the big insurers and lease companies. For Le Kluse Autoschade these insurers and lease companies account for up to 50 percent of the workflow, the rest coming from dealers in the region and many individual car owners who are drawn to Le Kluse because it is known for its outstanding reputation of delivering a high-quality repair.

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“To attract and to retain customers you need to deliver quality and your business should always look its best,” concludes Rob Le Kluse. “It doesn’t cost you much to have a clean reception area and to clean up after your work in the bodyshop, but clients do notice this, and on that basis they know we are offering quality in every way and at every stage of the repair process. They almost always decide to come back.”

Fred de Groot, Five Star coordinator in The Netherlands, says: “Five Star is 20 years old and will continue providing Le Kluse Autoschade and all other partners in The Netherlands and throughout the other eight European countries where the network exists, with all that is needed to help them survive and thrive.”

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Note to editor:

The mission of DuPont Five Star is to help bodyshops face the challenge of the future with a vibrant European bodyshop network that provides high quality repairs and unbeatable customer service. DuPont Five Star will promote rising standards of work through a combination of national and international best practice to the benefit of all members and their customers.