

40 Years in a Stately Business

Starting up a business of your own is not for the faint hearted and it requires more than just trade skills and business acumen. Long term success also demands strength of character and real staying power.

The man behind Stately Albion is much too modest to admit to any of these things but, if 40 years of successful trading - in bad times as well as good - is any proof, then Roy Hurd has what it takes. For Stately Albion to have reached its 40th anniversary is a sure testament to his success at running a business.



1963-2003



1963-2003

Raised in Bristol, brothers Roy and Alan Hurd had both worked as coach builders and learned their trade the time honoured way as apprentices and craftsmen on the shop floor. As young working men growing up in post-war Britain neither would have seen themselves as company owners of the future. But, when the caravan company they were working for closed down, they saw an opportunity waiting to be taken. With

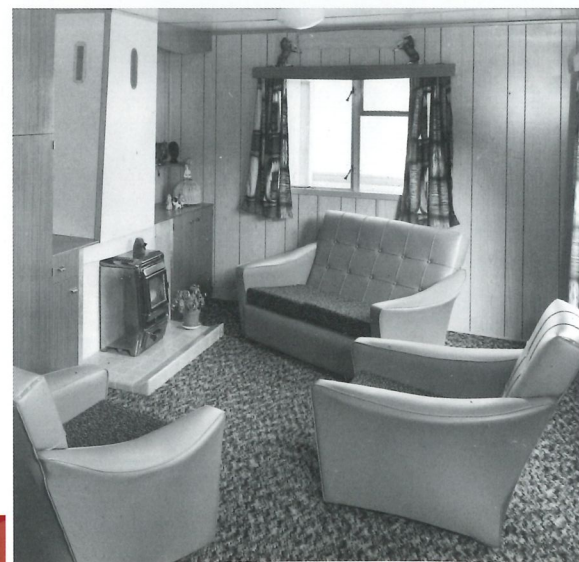


the help of two others from the same company, and using equipment that was going for a song, they took the biggest gamble of their lives and opened a new business - Stately Caravans. When asked why the name of Stately was chosen, Roy simply says that it was chosen "out of a hat". It was 1963 and, according to Harold Macmillan, we'd "never had it so good!" With a growing economy emerging from austerity into a new-found affluence, the holiday and leisure market was a good one to be entering.

Stately concentrated their core business, then as now, on what were later to be called mobile homes. These were larger than average caravans and were permanently sited, either for holiday or residential use. The industry was still in its infancy and, in the post war years, people were so badly in need of inexpensive accommodation that they would even reclaim and

adapt old aircraft fuselages. So the idea of a well-built and fully furnished 'caravan' up to 30ft in length was the answer to many people's dreams.

Their first factory was an old barn formerly used for keeping chickens, and the memory of the odour still induces a grimace from Roy and his wife Gladys. Although she had a growing family to look after, Gladys Hurd helped out in the early days by making the curtains for the caravans on her treadle sewing machine. Realising the importance of re-investing any profit, all the family worked hard, taking only basic wages for many years. With a natural caution about borrowing money, plus an eye firmly on the long-term, they ensured that the company grew steadily. Key to their success was the Hurd's canny flair for knowing what customers would want.



To differentiate Stately caravans from others on the market they decided to wallpaper the interior walls rather than paint them, as was more usual in those days. The very first customers gasped with delight and immediately placed an order. This gave the company a real boost and was an early indicator to what has become Stately's trade mark attention to customers' needs.

In those early days you could buy a 30ft single home for around £735 - in sharp contrast to the cost of an average 3 bedroom home which was around £4000.

Within a year of setting up the business, Stately outgrew the 'chicken shed' and moved to the outskirts of Bristol, renting a factory (this time one used to make wartime barrage balloons) on a trading estate at Pucklechurch. Extra staff were taken on and some of them are still with the company today. Initially, just three units a week were being built but during the next few years business steadily increased. Early experiments with twin homes proved popular though these were not like the ones we see today. Instead units were placed end to end providing long and narrow accommodation - 44ft x 7ft 6ins was typical.

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The first side-by-side twin home was also built at Pucklechurch and simply named 'The Bungalow' it cost £1660. As customers appreciated the benefits of more space, the demand for 'Bungalows' increased. Making, fitting out and storing sizeable buildings meant that, after just three years, the company again needed more space to accommodate their steadily growing business. Encouraged by incentives aimed at redeveloping the Welsh Valleys, Stately took the bold decision to move to South Wales.

Abercarn sits in a lovely valley of the River Ebbw and the factory is surrounded by steeply wooded hills. Over the years Stately has become one of Abercarn's major employers.

Over a six month period in 1967/8 they acquired the land and built a brand new factory on a three acre site, formerly occupied by the Prince of Wales colliery, in Abercarn near Newport. The company name was altered to Stately Albion Ltd, partly as an acknowledgement of their English beginnings and partly to choose a name which was more readily understood abroad.



It was at this time that the company produced its biggest home to date, the 30ft x 20ft Concorde (another nod in the direction of their Bristol origins). This was to prove the forerunner to many other twin homes for years to come.



The 1970s

It's hard to say, looking back, whether the market development was spurred on by the innovations that Stately developed, or whether the growing demand for attractive and affordable accommodation drove the progress of those innovations. Suffice to say that, hand in hand with the growing industry, Stately introduced a large number of new ideas which gradually changed the way people think about park homes.

Increasingly, customers wanted homes which looked less like large caravans and more like a solid house with normal house-type fittings and furniture. Among the innovations which Stately developed was the use of pre-formed aluminium for external walls and this was later combined with cedar wood. Looking to standardise their range, they adopted white weatherboard exterior cladding to match the cedar wood structure and finished this in white stone paint. Stately were among the first to introduce central heating, double glazing, exterior textured wall coatings and a granular coated lightweight steel pitched roof. Eventually the name 'mobile' home fell out of favour and the term Park Home was found to



The 1990s

be more apt, as the trend for residential park developments increased.

By the late 1970s, homes included proper toilets, central heating and many other 'mod cons'. Having experienced a period of dramatic growth, Stately acquired a further 2 acres adjacent to their factory in Wales to use for other aspects of the rapidly expanding business. They began exporting to France and Belgium and, for 5 years, had a successful distribution outlet near Brussels.



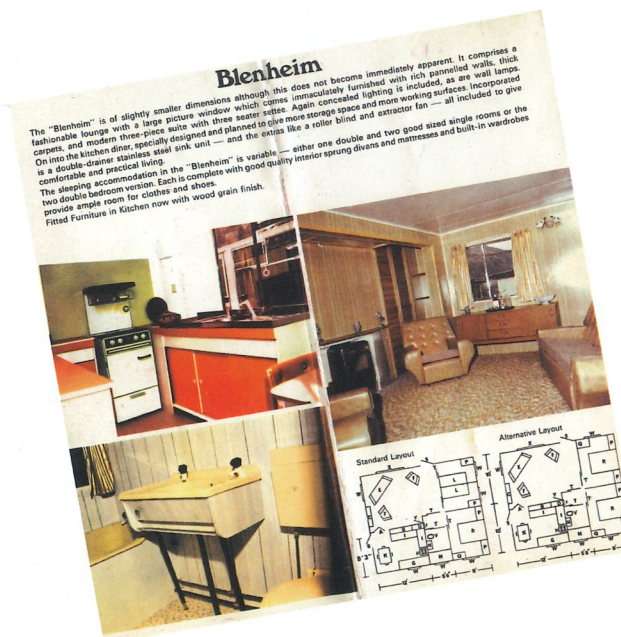
The 1980s

On reaching the company's 25th anniversary in 1988, Roy decided to take a well earned back seat, allowing his son David to take over as Managing Director. Sadly, Roy's brother and co-founder Alan had died suddenly the year before.

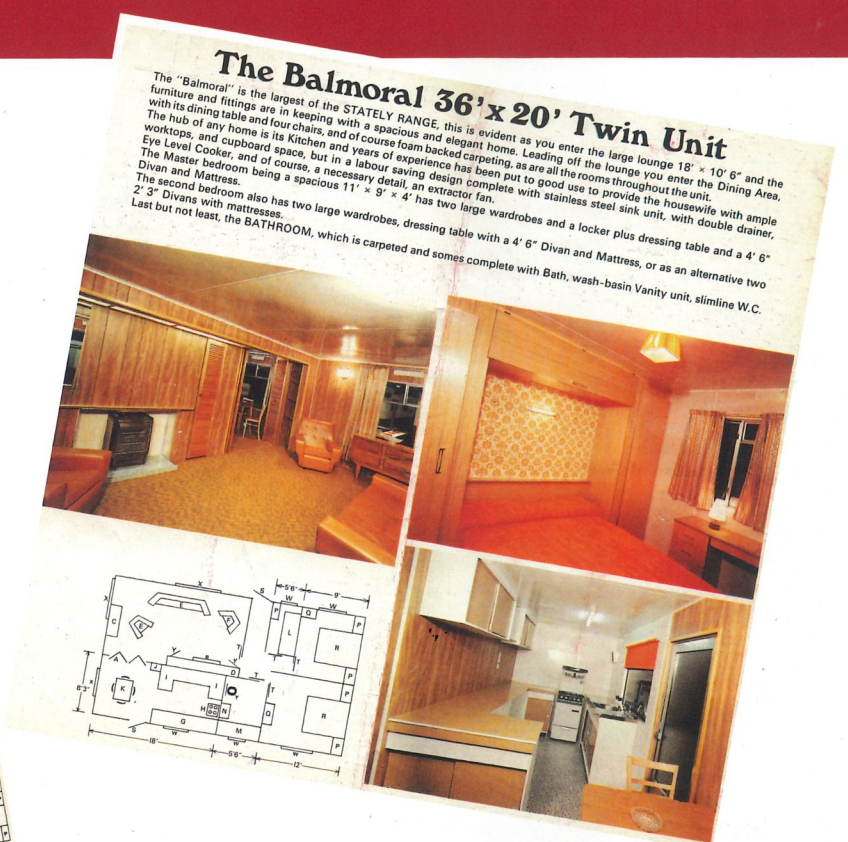
The collapse of the 80s housing boom paved the way for a period of recession.

But the company had weathered such periods before and did so again by dint of good management and sensible caution. It was necessary to shed some of their ancillary businesses and to concentrate again on their core product range. By becoming ever more customer focused they re-evaluated their

products and, led by a loyal and hard working management team, the company navigated its way carefully through this period, emerging stronger than ever at the turn of the millennium.



Of course, fashions come and go, and it is amusing to look back at the styles of a few decades ago to see how much they have changed. Stately's design team have always been alert to changing needs, so, no matter whether the latest style in sofas is tan vinyl or burgundy leather, or whether carpets have mustard and brown flowers or are just plain honey colour, such details are really incidental. What doesn't change is Stately's desire to anticipate and meet the customers' needs. And that could mean anything from re-designing a layout to include the longed-for study, or simply offering a huge choice of curtains and carpets. One of Stately's long serving members of staff, Elizabeth Brown, puts it perfectly when she says, "It's all about making dreams come true!"



Stately has made dreams come true for customers of every description, from wealthy landowners wanting some extra accommodation to local authorities needing to replace worn out pre-fabs. They have even supplied homes to places as far afield as Iceland and Algeria, proving that Stately homes are adaptable to all climates and lifestyles.



Present Day