Get it right, not 'she'll be right!'

by Ian Hendra

There's something inexorable about '…geon' words. *Bludgeon* is worse than *smack*; high *dudgeon* is more than *upset*. *Dungeon* is worse than *cell* (hmmmm - would *Exdungeon* be more accurate than *Excel*?). And burgeon means something more than spread.

In a coffee house in Wellington, I ask for two trim lattés. I am then asked "Cream with that?" I go to KFC, order chicken & chips and get treated like an idiot by the child behind the counter. From the latest issue of the manufacturer's catalogue I order a complete set of ten polyurethane bushes for the front suspension of the precise variant and year of my car; eight don't fit. Most worrying of all, I hear tales of woe from a colleague at the NZOQ Conference bemoaning the 'she'll be right' attitude of suppliers to his leading edge 'NZ Inc' manufacturing facility.

You see, I am suffering from a *burgeoning* awareness that 'she'll be right' is taking over from 'get it right': this, of course, is a major issue for us QA professionals for it strikes at the very heart of our values. Two examples from the other side of the coin have hammered this home of late.

The first was a hot Mini engine rebuild that 'Hendra Motors' completed over the Christmas break (that's it in the picture). We did our level best to do everything right. All the machining work was as good as it could be. Engine and gearbox were assembled with clinical precision. Ignition system and carburettors were restored to factory condition. Known production problems were compensated for. Tuning was done fastidiously. The result was that it starts instantly,

the car runs smooth as silk, pulls like a train, and did 14.5 km/litre (40 mpg in old money) for a Taupo to Wellington round trip. But that wasn't the best bit so far as this tale is concerned. When it got to Taupo it wouldn't idle, so it had to be turned up a shade. When it got back to Wellington the idle was too fast…in other words it was acting like an altimeter and responding to the difference in altitude.

The second 'get it right' example was our NZOQ Central Branch visit to The Vintage Aviator Ltd (TVAL) in Kilbirnie on 28 Jan. If ever there was living testimony to 'get it right', TVAL is it. The products are superb and spot-on accurate. Right, first time, every time, is absolutely their way of life.

Just as it was evident to us that getting our engine right didn't take us any longer in the end than taking short cuts, once we'd committed to it, I came away from TVAL with the feeling that it didn't take them any longer to meet their exacting standards than it would to work around them. The roots are careful planning, understanding the supply chain, and discipline in meeting standards during all stages of all processes, from assembly of wings to filling out time sheets. But these are the values at the core of our profession; they're where we start…and they're always the most cost-effective way to operate; it's a no-brainer. So what's going wrong and how do we fix it?

The point is that rejects, rework, incidents, accidents and complaints arise from errors and omissions. Errors and omissions mean something's gone wrong. It follows, as night follows day, that the best chance we have to avoid things going wrong is to get everything right, or at least to create a climate where getting it right is the 'way we work around here'. In many organisations, I'd say, that means a culture change to control the risks that shoddy work exposes.

Cultures that don't drive at 'getting it right' have lost the basis for continual improvement, it's as simple as that, and therein lies the fix, in my opinion. And we all know that continual improvement is the lifeblood of survival under any guise.

So, you see, quite apart from 'get it right' being centre stage for us NZOQ members, it's also the place where you start when it comes to controlling hazards and managing risks. Of course, QA management system standards have always driven at this; I'm still pondering on why safety and risk management standards don't…