

Old fashioned standards still rule at Bill's Auto Body after 55 years

By DONNA DANIELLI

Automobiles and the technology used to keep them humming has come a long way since Bill's Auto Body first opened its doors 55 years ago. And when owner and operator Bill Phillips took on Milton's Ries Boers as an apprentice in 1962, little did either man suspect that one day Ries would own the Milton business.

"I was taught by four Old World tradesmen, Arnaldo Zoppas, Johnny Liut, Amrigo Grazian and Dick Phillips," explains Ries of his apprenticeship years. "That was important to me because it was a more thorough standard of training." Although his apprenticeship was only to last four years, Ries stayed around Bill's Auto Body for two more years before moving on to Acton Auto Body, and Halton Hills Collision before eventually accepting a position as Manager of Kerr Cadillacs. He stayed friends with Bill's sons, Malcolm and Dave, who went on to take over their father's business when he passed away in the early seventies.

In the early eighties, Malcolm and Dave Phillips decided it was time to move on and offered to sell the business to Ries. It was a surprisingly difficult decision at first for him to make. "It took me about a year to figure it out, I'm one of those Conservative Dutchmen," laughs Ries. "I had a lot of soul searching to do because I had a really good job. But growing up in Milton, and living here, it really was a no brainer."

Electing not to change the name, Ries

became the owner of Bill's Auto Body in 1983. "It was an established business with a good reputation," he says. "I'm not so vain that I need to put my name on the building."

Those first few months were rough, he admits. "That first February, I think I could have shot off a cannon in here and not hit anything," he jokes. Business picked up steadily though, and today Ries has seven employees to attend to collision repairs and collision related mechanical repairs as well as paint jobs with quality Dupont products. He spends most of his time handling the business's administrative work and admits that he sometimes misses the hands-on work of his youth.

Although born in Holland, Ries emigrated to Canada as a child. Milton became home and his family still farms land in Campbellville. Ries lives in Milton though, and remembers that buying his business gave him a reason to purchase his first ever brand new bicycle to pedal to and from work.

Ries points to that sort of exercise as a mainstay of his lifestyle. He has taken part in adventure races, climbed the highest peak in the San Francisco mountain range, and just a few years ago, was able to combine his love of his community with

his adventurous nature. "It's very rewarding," he says. "I finally got to the stage where I could give something back to the community that has supported me." A member of the Rotary Club for the past 24 years, Ries took up the baton of Polio Plus, a Rotary sponsored charity dedicated to eradicating polio in the world. He gathered \$3,000 in sponsorships and set off to hike the rim of the Grand Canyon, a 23 kilometer hike in 120 degree weather that would take him 6,000 feet down to the bottom of the Canyon, and then 7,200 feet back up the other side. Later he would repeat the adventure just for fun. "I already knew I could do it by then," he shrugs. "Besides," he grins. "I love an adventure."

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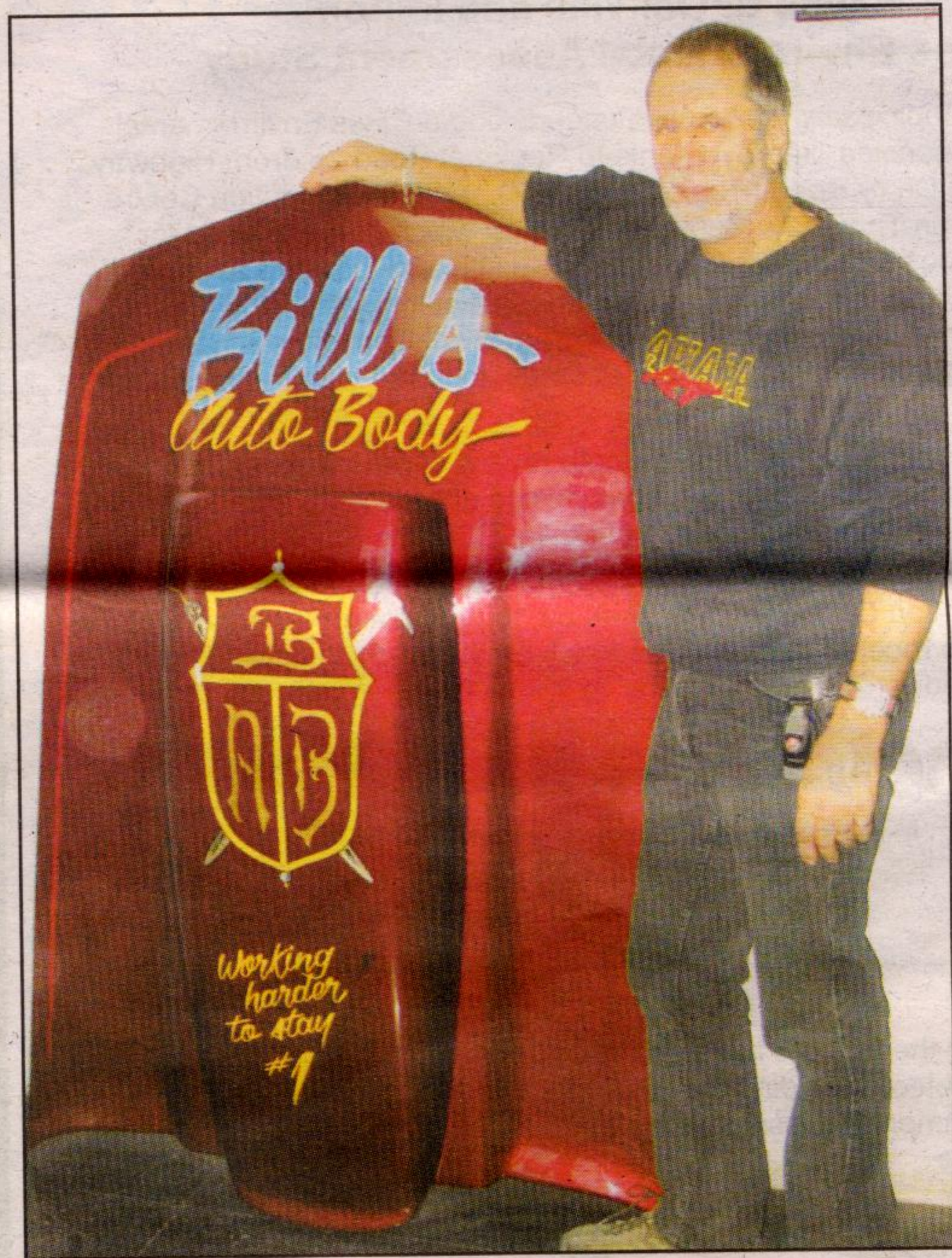


PHOTO BY DONNA DANIELLI
Ries Boers, owner of Bill's Auto Body which has been in operation for over fifty five years, poses with a custom painted hood advertising his business.

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