

In-depth with Herm Deal

If you like hot water, you should love Herm Deal.

Summary: *Herm Deal is a behind-the-scenes genius who brought hundreds of carwashes the little things operators now take for granted – like deicing systems, radiant floor heat and weep heating. He also was a pioneer in identifying carwash applications for recycled water and reverse osmosis. But, over 37 years in carwashing, Herm Deal's greatest legacy is as one of the industry's most trusted members. From establishing dialogues with major automobile manufacturers, to Saturday morning consultations with new carwash investors, Herm Deal has come to symbolize the determined spirit of an industry bent on improvement. Herm Deal is a legend of car care.*

By TRICIA E. CUPP F MANAGING EDITOR

PC&D: How did you get started in the carwashing industry? Tell us about your background before starting Huron Valley Sales?

Herman Deal: Prior to starting Huron Valley, I was regional salesman and sales manager for a gas utility company.

I started in the carwash industry by discovering there wasn't a professional heating or water heating company in the industry. A Robo distributor in Michigan liked our approach and the equipment we were selling and pushed us to start looking at this industry.

We were able to convince our suppliers to give us the North American territory on an exclusive basis to see if there was indeed a market. We called on all the carwash manufacturers in the US and were fortunate enough to get most of them to use our equipment.

PC&D: What were your main goals when you were starting out?

H.D.: To educate all the carwash manufacturers and their distributors on the



need for hot water and how to apply it to their systems. This gave us an opportunity to work with their people and develop other systems that were required for successful operation of their carwashes.

In 1964, we installed our first deicing system in a one-bay high-pressure automatic wash. The deicing system was accepted almost immediately and became a standard by the industry.

Later, we were also able to develop other incidental heating systems such as duct and rail heat, weep heating and tunnel heating systems.

PC&D: Tell us about your involvement with the ICA. You acted for a time as a liaison with the auto manufacturers, establishing some of the first major communication with this group.

H.D.: One of the most challenging committees I served on was the liaison with the auto manufacturers. The thing that got this committee off to a good start

was when it was discovered one of the Chevrolet Vega models was so low it could not go through a conveyor wash. This has been an ongoing active committee since that time.

It is important that cars be designed so they can be easily washed and go through a wash without damage to the vehicle. The auto industry is much more willing to share future designs with the committee and this has led to a more successful communication within the two industries.

PC&D: You got into the carwash industry at the same time that a lot of the carwash pioneers in the Midwest were making their mark. What was that like for you?

H.D.: Huron Valley entered the carwash business at the real beginning of self-service and high-pressure automatics, or in-bays, as we call them today. Many were small companies and they either sold or went out of business.

There was a lot of movement of people – of the owners of the manufacturers and their personnel. As they moved or founded other companies, we were able to work with them.

PC&D: Tell us about the family involvement with Huron Valley Sales. We know that's been a source of pride for you.

H.D.: My feeling was you could always accomplish more through family members than regular employees.

Our second son, Jeff, always wanted to be in the business and was a great asset working with our customers. He now has his own distributing company selling to other markets. Our fourth son, Alan, also spent several years with Huron Valley until it was split by the different industries it served.

Doug, our fifth son, started with Huron Valley when he was in high school, joining the company full-time after finishing college. Doug is now owner and president of the company.

PC&D: What are some of the major issues that still need to be resolved, with regard to water use and water quality at carwashes?

H.D.: The industry has experienced increases in water hardness and in total dissolved solids (TDS). This condition brought a new industry to carwashing: spot-free rinse by reverse osmosis (RO)

or deionization.

Huron Valley installed its first RO unit in the early 1970s in northern Missouri. The installation was very successful but also expensive.

We finally introduced the PRO-SFR to the carwash industry in 1980 at the ICA show in Washington. By that point, the industry had started to increase their prices, and operators were more able to afford spot-free rinse.

PC&D: How has the distributor role changed over the past 50 years and how do you expect it to change in the future?

H.D.: In the early days, if a manufacturer sold a system in an area where it had no distributor, it would make that company a distributor and attempt to train the operator to install and maintain the equipment.

Today most operators are trained or have acquired operating knowledge of the equipment and don't require the training they once did. I personally feel that the distributor will play a more important role as we see more investor groups get into the business.

PC&D: What place do you think water

recycling is going to hold in the future of carwashing?

H.D.: Water recycling will become mandatory in some areas where water is in short supply. The equipment will work satisfactorily if the operator is properly trained and follows the equipment recommendations for best results.

The area where reclaim has not been successful is investor locations that have no trained personnel or have no means to service the reclaim system. The equipment does have a bad reputation, but this is not the fault of the manufacturer in all instances.

PC&D: Hundreds of people in the carwash industry consider Herm Deal a friend. How do you want people to remember you?

H.D.: I have and will always be available to the industry at all times. When an operator has a problem on a busy Saturday or Sunday, he needs my help that day, not the next week.

I would like to be remembered as someone that was a friend of the industry, that was trustworthy, and always looked for a way to help his fellow man.