

In conversation with...

Nigel R Bottom,
Managing Director, Witham Group



Where were you born and where did you spend your early years?

I was born in the City of Lincoln, in the maternity hospital which is about 500m from the site of our Witham Group HQ. I am married to Ali, and have two girls, one at university age and the other a couple of years younger enjoying 6th form at school. I grew up in Lincolnshire and enjoyed many different sports and my local young farmers club.

What did you want to be growing up?

At school and into college life, I played a lot of football, ending up at Norwich City after playing the lower leagues for Lincoln United and then Lincoln City youth teams. I guess I never knew properly what I wanted to be, if not a professional footballer, but after realising I wasn't good enough to be at the top level to go pro, thought sales looked good as you got a new car every other year and freedom to express yourself.

Education – where did you go, what subjects did you choose and why?

I was formally educated at local comprehensive school and then Agricultural College (it was converted to a university while I was there, but I still call it a college!) where I completed a Diploma in Business and Finance. I enjoyed my time at college and the freedom to choose my path ahead, developing many good traits I still have today (plus many other bad habits!)

Where and when was your first job, and what did you like and dislike about it?

My first official job was where I went to work experience in my final year at college. They offered me a job in my second week, but I still had a term left at college. I convinced them to keep the opportunity open and joined the Grain Trading business helping to and then overseeing the transportation / haulage side of the business. My first ever job was selling sweets from the local shop & stationery at my primary

school to friends and teachers, plus seasonal fruit and vegetables from our family garden on the roadside. I progressed at approximately 14 years old when I worked my school holidays (for £1.00 per hour!) at the then, Witham Oil & Grease Co. How legal this was is unsure, but I enjoyed the work, learning the basics and of course a bit of pocket money!

How has career mapping led to where you are now?

When I worked for the Grain Trading Co., I felt my career had plateaued and I had grown into a cul-de-sac from which I could not progress. I mentioned this to my then Managing Director, and he somewhat agreed but didn't want me to leave. However, in the time of contemplation, an opportunity came up at Witham Group to work within the sales and operations office and I jumped at the chance. I worked here for a few years, filling in as a delivery driver when required and then helped setting up exhibitions. I was then given the opportunity to join the sales team as the junior (basically, I looked after all the customers the existing team didn't want to, plus I wasn't allowed to go and see anyone new!). After filling out daily call sheets for a few months, it was soon clear that my enthusiasm to get on was producing some good results and I was keen to take on a larger area for myself and help more customers. I soon rose to getting a full-time sales role and my own trading areas, which I really enjoyed. It was then that a senior sales executive left the business to retire and in the same month our sales manager decided to move onto pastures new and left the oil industry. So, this left myself and only a newly appointed Sales Exec. with only a few years to go in another geography and my father (then Sales Director) who was looking to retire as soon as he could! We sat and talked about it, and we were fortunate to appoint a couple of excellent brand-new faces to the team immediately, and then one more, and soon the team looked very different, with youth and enthusiasm. I then became

Sales Director at 21 years old. A few years of this and new appointments joining us strengthened the team ever further. My knowledge of the whole business grew, not just from a sales angle, but from operations and of course the factory and deliveries, where my work experience over the years had played a major role. By now there was not a job in the company I had not had experience in or helped support. I suppose it was also my passion for our business and customers that led to a natural progression to rise further in the business. The existing MD and my father retired and I took on his role and appointed a new Sales Director from the sales team. This is pretty much where we are today, but with a team of nine sales executives covering the whole of the UK and Ireland. The business has grown more in the past 15 years or so than it had in the past 50. Not because of me, but because of a great team of sales, marketing, operations, technical, transport and admin support, all of which are engaged in the business, its values and goals and to just try and be the best in all that we do.

Are you a lifer? If yes, how do you see your career panning out over the next 20/30/40 years?

Yes, absolutely. I am 3rd generation in the business and love it! I love the team, the customers big and small, the challenges, the opportunities, the progress, plus all the other people I have met in the industry along the way who help and support our company.

How has the industry changed since you started?

The products have changed exponentially with the advent of advancing technology, but the adage of Sales / Quality / Value and Service remain the same. The industry as a whole has made great strides and I am passionate about helping the customer achieve what they really need in the most efficient way and we try and always educate our customers about quality and only using the right oil for the right application. With the back-up of the UKLA, UEIL and VLS this has improved. Some of the global OEMs are still painful with restrictive practises and lack of access to specifications for machines and vehicles, but again, the issue has always been there and will always be a reason to keep educating and improving.

What do you like about the industry? And what would you change if you could?

I love the constant changes and challenges of this industry. The fact you have to work for everything

you get and the constant opportunities which are out there. To change – get rid of all of the dishonest companies who do not put in their drums what the label says! I really feel that this practice should these days carry a much stiffer sentence, but I guess notification through VLS and LUBE Media will have to suffice!

What challenges do you think the industry faces? In your role and as a whole?

Challenges are what we are all about, there will always be product shortages, end of technology runs, pricing issues, margin shortages, cleaning up our fossil fuel industry for the environment and future generations, developing better processing and blending technologies and cleaner alternatives, the list goes on but it is how you wake up every morning to deal with them and with a positive attitude and collective thinking, anything is possible! My role will remain and I will keep pushing hard to ensure the values of the company continue up until I sit at the Boardroom table and utter the words “hmm, I like your idea but we tried that sometime ago and it wouldn’t work,” When I say this, it’s time for someone else to find a solution and move the company on!

How do you balance work life with home life?

It may be better for my wife and girls to answer this! I think pretty well, but my family are very understanding with my need to work and travel and respond to customer and colleague queries. I think it is much better now than it ever was, with ‘out of office’ messages being acceptable. It is all about discipline and keeping to your mantra when being away and trusting your team to get on with the job. I am lucky that my wife is also involved in the business and my girls help out at shows and events when they can, so there is a deep understanding of our company around the kitchen table, although hopefully we do talk about a lot more than Witham and oil!

I have also always accepted that you cannot do everything yourself and no business should revolve around one person. Therefore, perhaps your business will not make quite a much profit at the end of the year if everyone gets their holidays in and spends vital time with their families. We ensure that we thank all our families who support not just me but everyone within Witham Group in our own special ways throughout the year.

What are your hobbies?

Spending time with my family and our friends in equal measure if we can. Motorsport (watching and taking part), Rugby (watching only!), Snow Skiing, Boating, and walking our dog, Pepper. I also enjoy time at home, just drifting from job-to-job while enjoying the business of family life.

Where do you like to holiday?

Anywhere. Literally anywhere in the UK for walking and exploring, Europe for skiing and the Med in summer. I aim to travel further afield and I am lucky to have been able to travel on holiday (and some work) all over the world, but there are always so many places to visit and explore.

What is your perfect weekend?

Beers with Ali my wife and friends on a Friday after work for as long as we can into the evening. Saturday – Formula 1 or England International Rugby, or maybe some snow skiing, or out for a blast on the sea in our Boat. Followed by walking the dog which would finish at a local pub with a roaring fire and the family. Sunday – relaxing while cutting the grass at home followed by a Sunday lunch with family and friends.

If you could meet anyone famous (dead or alive) who would that be and why?

I would like to have dinner with Jeremy Clarkson (although I do think his comments about Harry and Megan were unforgivable) as many of his 'likes in life' are the same as mine. I have been lucky through my career to meet many famous and interesting people, but never Jeremy... Yet!

Favourite quote?

I have lots, but I do like *'there is no replacement for displacement'* which stems back to how big an engine you could squeeze into a '90s & 2000s car (before the fun police restricted us through insurance!) I also like EVERY film quote from *Top Gun* (the first one) and *The Wolf of Wall Street*, *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels*, plus *The Dukes of Hazard* (original series!).

www.withamgroup.co.uk

Lube

THE EUROPEAN LUBRICANTS INDUSTRY MAGAZINE

The official journal of



subscribe
FREE

LUBE is the largest and leading publication for the European lubricant industry, advertise with us today!

- 32,000 readers across 100 countries
- Essential reading for the entire supply chain
- Authoritative, original content

Subscribe here:
www.lube-media.com/subscribe



For editorial submissions or to advertise email:
editor@ukla.org.uk or call: + 44 1442 875922