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Hard-working Membrey keeps making it happen

Life has thrown Craig Membrey more than his share of challenges, but a passion for helping others and growing his thriving Melbourne business drives him on.



Membrey got a big kick out of meeting fans in Tasmania, including young Charley Poulton, pictured.



Proud dad Craig Membrey with son Jack, 13, and daughter Leah, 15, who run the memorabilia side of the operation.

BY JAMES GRAHAM

HOURS after learning he had just suffered his first heart-attack, Craig Membrey had to laugh when doctors asked if he had a stressful job.

Since he took over Membrey's Transport and Crane Hire from his father Jack in 1989, Membrey has barely stopped: seven days a week the self-confessed workaholic is focused on moving everything and anything that's high, wide, long and heavy.

It's that boundless passion that's seen Membrey, now 56, build the business from its humble beginnings with just six trucks to a yard in Dand-

nong South, Melbourne, that today boasts over 200 "bits of gear", and growing.

"It doesn't happen with sitting around doing nothing; it happens with hard work," the 2015 Hall of Fame inductee tells *Big Rig* in a rare moment of reflection.

"I have a saying: work hard, play hard, life's short, make it happen."

So, yes, Membrey knows his health scare in early September should signal that it might be a good time to "drop back one gear from top gear", but it doesn't mean he'll stop doing what he loves.

In fact, just a month after undergoing a stent and bal-

loon angioplasty procedure to unclog a narrowed artery, the walking, talking embodiment of his catchy company logo, Make it Happen, was back on the road with his crew in Tasmania.

They were there to move two giant cranes – a LG1750 and GMK6300 – from Berrybank, Victoria, to a wind farm in Granville Harbour, a job that involved hauling 72 pieces of gear and one that was supposed to take three weeks. Membrey did it in two.

The trip away set the reset button, in more ways than one for Membrey, who admits that in the first few weeks after the heart attack, he had cause to wonder if it was all worth it.

"Going away to Tasmania made me appreciate how lucky I am, and how good the team are," he said.

"It was real eye-opener for me to see the blokes perform, and the passion they've got. It was good fun."

Membrey also got to see first-hand the power his livery has on truck fans – a video clip posted on the company Facebook page of his trucks' push-pull configuration on the challenging Tassie climbs to the wind farm got two million views alone – with countless

devotees lining up for pictures and a chat.

Nine years after he launched the special tribute truck to late son Rowan, who tragically took his own life in March 2011, the beautifully restored 2006 Kenworth T904 with the 4ROWAN rego plate is still one of the biggest draw-cards.

Emblazoned with murals of Rowan on the back of the cab and the Beyond Blue logo and website details on its side, Membrey uses it to spread a mental health message he never tires of sharing.

"So many people come up to me and say that truck saved my life. It's just enough to snap people out of doing the wrong thing," said Membrey, a vocal Beyond Blue ambassador.

"I've been through it myself. I copped it three years ago and I'm not afraid to admit it, but I sought good help and it got me across the line."

"It doesn't matter how much money you've got, you've got to get help before it's too late."

Rowan would be 26 now, and no doubt stepping up to help Dad shoulder today's gruelling workload – Membrey's other children Leah, 15, and Jack, 13, helm the popular



The refurbished 1988 Kenworth T650 is the latest addition to Membrey's busy one-stop-shop in Melbourne.



Membrey felt "proud as punch" towing his team up Tassie's steepest hills in the truck he dedicated to son Rowan.

memorabilia side of the operation - but Membrey still draws strength from his son's legacy every day.

The recent trip to Tasmania with Rowan's truck leading the charge - it pulled a Kenworth T909 Director with a Kenworth K108 pushing the loaded 10 line Drake Platform trailer from behind - was a classic example, giving Membrey a boost at exactly the right moment.

"Hearing Rowan's truck grunting up the steepest hills in Tasmania with two other prime movers hooked up behind it made me proud as punch as a father."

Membrey returned to Victoria recharged and excited about his next venture, his new heavy vehicle towing and salvage division.

Inspired by Membrey's desire to be a one-stop-shop, the truck is both a nod to how far the boss has come and a chance for him to give back.

Membrey got his start behind the wheel as an 18-year-old, driving tow trucks for Barry Bailey at Bailey's Towing and Salvage, based in Frankston.

When Membrey, an 'old school' truck fan and eagle-eyed enthusiast of auction sites, spotted a 1988 Kenworth T650 up for sale in Queensland, he saw the chance to pay the opportunity forward to a new generation.

"I was young once and someone gave me a go [Bailey] so I want to return the favour," he said.

"I like to give young guys a start, and if they have a passion to drive and are keen, that's all you need.



The first trip to Tasmania for Membrey's pride and joy.

"I'm very lucky that I've got that; that's the secret to get someone through."

Sadly, Bailey passed away half-way through the on-site refurbishment of the T650, but Membrey has dedicated the truck to his memory and had his name painted in a prominent spot on the side of the wrecker.

"I don't forget those who helped me out."

Nor does Membrey stop looking to the future, even if his recent health episode might mean it's at a slightly less manic pace, at least for the time-being.

Buoyed by the tax breaks in the latest federal budget, Membrey is lining up yet more equipment to add to his impressive array, with Kenworth

taking pride of place in the 20-strong truck fleet.

He has a new T410 crane truck reporting for duty in November, a T509 coming off the Bayswater factory line the same month and was spec'ing up a T909 when *Big Rigs* checked in.

"Kenworths are just worth paying the extra money for. They build what I want, and I get what I want. They'll spec it up from every nut and bolt right through, and they've stuck by us through the thick and thin."

Meanwhile, Membrey's unmatched status in the die-cast world here keeps growing - Drake Collectibles are tipped to release another 2000 truck and crane models in the next few months - and the phone

at the Dandenong HQ keeps ringing.

Mostly it's for wind farm work, said Membrey, but his 50-strong team, headed by right-hand men, operations manager Daniel Narkiewicz, and general manager Leigh Canet [Membrey's ex-bank manager] are ready for anything.

"We've got the most versatile trailers in Victoria; there's not one thing we can't do now."

"It's only taken 32 years of my life to get all this extra equipment, but I still have the passion and it's just amazing to see what we can actually do."

"You've just got to shake your head and think, 'wow wee'. I might be moving a ute



load of spare parts one day for a hotshot express load, then on the Saturday moving wind blades up to 68.5 metres long, and the week before that we're in Tasmania with three prime movers and the heaviest load of 250t.

"I remember my dad saying to me 32 years ago, 'son enjoy hobby transport', and I said 'why do you call it hob-

by transport Dad?', and he said 'because you don't make a fortune but you'll have a lot of fun, like a hobby', and how true he was."

• *October is National Mental Health Month in Australia. If this story has raised any issues for you, or someone you know, call Beyond Blue 1300 22 4636, or visit beyondblue.org.au.*



The Kenworth T900 Legend that Membrey dedicated to son Jack.



Membrey and his right-hand man, general manager Leigh Canet (pictured left), are ready for anything.