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A 40-Year Mark in the AGRR Industry



Kerry Soat

The automotive glass repair landscape looked much different four decades ago, according to Kerry Soat. Windshield repairs were rare. He purchased his first Novus windshield repair do-it-yourself kit in December 1974. Fast forward 40 years and he's still in the business.

He caught a love for the AGRR business early. In the mid-1970s, Soat was based in Michigan, prime automotive country. He had relationships with dealers, automaker employees and fleet managers. At the time, he was in the whitewall business, which involved painting whitewalls on tires for car dealers as a service. Soon after, he began selling the do-it-yourself windshield repair kits, and Soat quickly saw this business take off.

The Beginning

Soat began his career with Novus Glass as a Novus area representative in Michigan.

"In January of 1975, I signed on as a Novus area representative for Michigan, and in March, I was the top producer for Novus, shipping kits all over the world," he says.

"In the beginning, things were different than today," Soat explains. "One, there wasn't a deductible on comprehensive insurance coverage. All windshield replacements were paid for by the insurance companies. Back then a lot of windshields were in rubber gaskets and ran about \$99 or less. A far cry from today's windshields for sure."

Soat mostly sold do-it-yourself kits to people who wanted to try it out on

their own vehicle or do repairs as a side business.

"The biggest problem was we were selling kits but very few people were buying resupply. The idea of a do-it-yourself system wasn't going to sustain itself. ... Another problem back then was that some cracks would open up and some wouldn't. The resin wasn't as strong," he says.

The resin used when Soat first began in the business was a two-part epoxy, he says.

"You mixed the two bottles together and it would 'set up' or 'cure' within 10 minutes or less, depending on the outside temperature. It worked best at 70 degrees. In Michigan, that could mean a couple of weeks a year. ... Before drills, we just set up the bridge, mixed the epoxy, put in the injector and went through the same pressure and vacuum cycles we do now. We did it 'slower' back then because the resin would get considerably thicker each minute. We had to use a new injector for every repair because the epoxy would set up inside the injector, gluing it together," he explains.

Another challenge for business back then was the low demand for windshield repairs, Kerry notes.

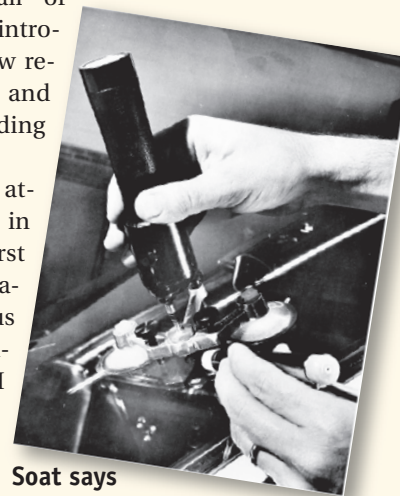
"Most of the fleet managers I talked with would tell me, 'We don't get chips in our windshields. When our windshields crack, they crack-out completely.' Guess who started using a piece of sample glass to show a repaired chip? You can't sell something to someone they don't know they need. So we established the need," he says.

"When the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety came out with a report recommending waiving deductibles for windshield repairs, our phones started ringing like crazy. They were asking, 'Where can we send our clients?'" Soat says.

A New Repair System Is Born

In the fall of 1978, Novus introduced its new repair system and resin, according to Soat.

"I was in attendance in that very first meeting (of national Novus area representatives), and I have a certificate to go along with it," Soat says. "This is where Novus came out



Soat says this is an early Novus drill from the late 1970s.

with the new bridge unit, still in use today and the ultraviolet cure resin, which is also still in use today. In 1978, with an extended repair time (covering a wider range of temperatures) using the UV cure resin, we expanded our repair capability to larger damages. Our number of repairs went up dramatically with a lot of people making a lot of money."

In 1982, the Arizona Novus area representative position came up for sale.



Fas-Break has trademark licensing agreements with operators in 19 states. Here is what one of the locations looks like in Billings, Mont.

Soat decided to pack up in Michigan and move to a sunnier, warmer climate.

He began expanding his territory, buying up Las Vegas and parts of Southern California.

“When I went to buy more of Southern California, I was told I couldn’t buy any more territory since I was ‘big enough,’” he says.

This was about the time Novus switched its business model to franchising.

“In 1984, I sold my distributorship in Novus, along with my other territories, and went full time into the insurance and investment business,” he explains.

A New Company

In 1988, Soat again turned his attention to the AGRR industry once his non-compete agreement with Novus expired.

“A friend and I decided to put together a windshield repair system and put some people on the street doing repairs,” he says. “We formed the Fas-Break windshield repair system based on the knowledge I had gained with Novus.”

He started out with 15 technicians working in the Phoenix market.

“Later that year, a gentleman from Durango, Colo., contacted me and wanted to set up an operation with Fas-Break in Durango. As others



Technicians Shannon Smith (left) and Dustin Cassidy (right) take time for a posed picture at their Freemont, Neb., Fas-Break location.

learned of my return to the business, we added operators all over the country. That was the start of Fas-Break, and now I am going on 41 years of helping people start a business in windshield repair and auto glass replacement,” Soat explains.

After learning about the chemical processes and engineering of the resins at Novus, Soat says he was able to develop a strong resin for his company by partnering with the same resin manufacturer Novus uses.

“We reformulated once 12 years ago,” he says.

The company currently has trademark licensing agreements with operators in 19 states.

Fas-Break focused on repair-only until 1997, then added automotive glass replacements.

Looking Ahead

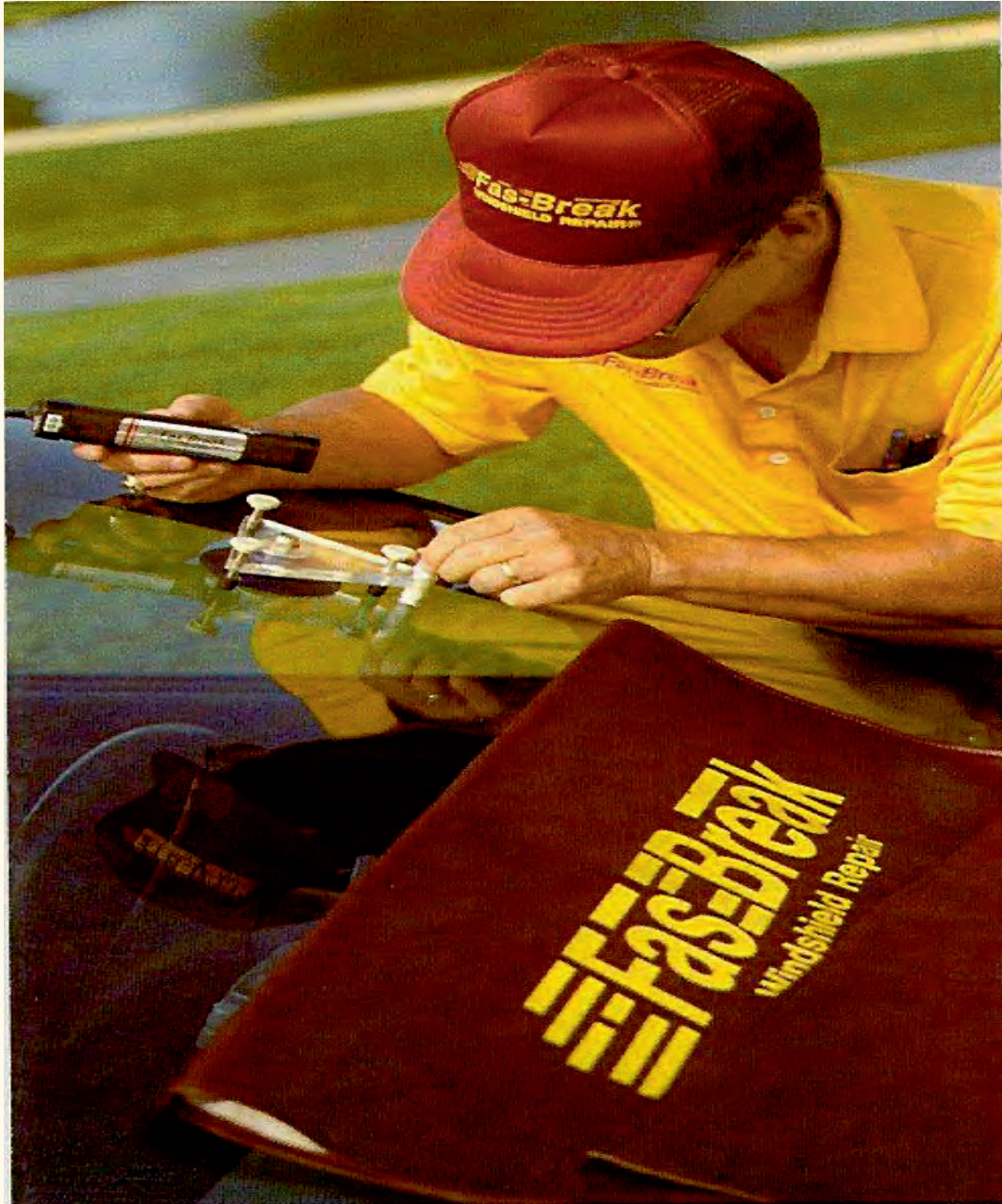
Soat says that the demand for AGRR services is high.

“If you take the population of any county, you will find there are more registered vehicles than people who live there. The reality is that about 10 percent of windshields are repairable and need work. This means for a county of 100,000, there are at least 10,000 vehicles that minute which need repair. And in many cases, the number is larger,” he explains.

“Here I am more than 40 years later and still going strong,” he adds. “I remember in 1975 when we really started making windshield repair known and my friends would ask, ‘What are you going to do when they make a windshield that doesn’t break?’ I’m still waiting.” ■

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