

# WORLD-CLASS SERVICE IN A DOWN HOME *atmosphere*



Canada — its vast expanses, endless snow trains, oceans and fresh-water lakes and rivers — it just begs to be explored and enjoyed year-round. And most Canadians find their own unique ways to enjoy their incredible natural surroundings.

Winters can be filled with hitting the snowmobile trails, perhaps heading out onto the frozen lake for a little ice fishing. Those very same lakes turn into glistening playgrounds for fishing enthusiasts, water skiers and leisure boaters alike.

Once back on land, the allure of jumping on an all-terrain vehicle and hitting the muddy, dusty trails can spark some spontaneous summer fun. For the more ambitious, maybe a competition where they can pit their skills up against likeminded participants, vying for bragging rights around the evening campfire.

Whatever your outdoor utopia looks like, you're likely going to need equipment. This is where Cobequid Mountain Sports fits into the picture. Tucked away in Collingwood Corner, Nova Scotia, Cobequid is a one-stop shop for those looking for the power-sport or marine equipment they need to make the most of every season.

Spotlight on Business Magazine spoke with owner/operator Alex Parker about his business and the power sports and marine outfitting scene in Canada's beautiful Maritime Provinces.



Realizing he was staring at a fork in the road, Parker decided to take the question to heart and wrote down what it actually would take to keep him at Cobequid. "So I wrote out all of my demands, you know, because I was young and foolish. And I said when you're ready to sell, I want to buy. And he just said 'okay well that sounds good then.' And then I thought 'oh boy, I definitely bit off more than I could chew.' It took us eight months to a year to work out the deal, but we got it done. And away we went!"

Away they went indeed!

Parker took the helm about eight years ago and has since made a number of game-changing improvements and upgrades to the business, including product and service diversification, and the creation of an active online presence.

## **"Oh boy, I definitely bit off more than I could chew."**

He explains, "The changes we made over the last eight years... we've entered into the marine business, for one. The store had never been in the marine business before I took over. Before that, we were just doing ATVs and snowmobiles, you know, just power sports. And we also brought in aluminum, pontoons and fiberglass boats. Now we are a full line dealer rather than just power sports only."

Parker points out that online marketing has boosted sales and put them in touch with an emerging demographic who is beginning to buy big ticket sporting goods. "Social media also brought a big change to the game. When I started, we had no social media at all. No Facebook page

By John Allaire

Cobequid is certainly no new kid on the block. The business opened its doors in 1965. Parker explains that before he took over, he had other plans, not necessarily involving store ownership. "The company's first order was actually signed in the living room of the original owner. I got involved in the business eight years ago. I started in the parts department. I moved over to sales and climbed up further and further until I was essentially running the show.

However, at the time, I was ready to move on to something else. I went to school to be a power-line technician. But before I finished up with that, the owner talked to me and asked 'what would it take keep you here?'"

# RE-FL<sup>OW</sup>

FILTER CLEANING SOLUTIONS

YOUR DIESEL PARTICULATE FILTER CLEANING SPECIALISTS

## SERVICES

DPF & DOC CLEANING  
EGR + SCR CLEANING  
ONEBOX CLEANING & SERVICE  
SENSOR REMOVAL & BUNG REPAIR

## PRODUCTS

REFLOW OFFERS BRAND NEW AFTERMARKET DPF  
& DOCS WITH NO CORE CHARGE AND A WIDE  
RANGE OF GASKETS, CLAMPS AND BUNGS

FREE LOCAL DELIVERY • FAST QUALITY SERVICE • GREAT CUSTOMER CARE

+1 (604) 474-4388

TOLL FREE: +1 (855) 640 8755

admin@reflowsolutions.com

[WWW.REFLOWSOLUTIONS.COM](http://WWW.REFLOWSOLUTIONS.COM)



or anything. So I brought that in. Now we have one of the most active Facebook pages in the Maritimes as far as the industry goes, so that's a real positive."

"We also modernized the website and made some changes. We have made it more interactive.

In fact, we have just upgraded to a more responsive website, so that's another avenue we have turned down. And we are changing with the times and are currently doing

more digital marketing, rather than print. We are also now dealing with Cineplex Theatres. So we advertise on the Cineplex movie screens during the pre-shows as well as in their lobbies. It gets lots of eyes there."

And people are using the website to purchase their equipment. But part of Cobequid's diversification efforts brought them into the "wrap kit" business. (You know, those fancy decal-like designs you see on the side of snowmobiles and side by sides) Parker says, "We do a significant business online. A lot of it is wrap kits for boats and other equipment. We are also the largest SCS Unlimited dealer on the planet. We ship vinyl wrap kits all over North America out of little Collingwood. We do the sales and install of these wrap kits, and this has been our biggest year yet for it. Every one of them is custom ordered."

Cobequid also sponsors a Pro Stock race car, and since Parker took over, they partnered with the "Cooke Racing" snowmobile racing team. They now compete North America-wide in competitions, bringing even more visibility to the business.

When talking about power sports and marine equipment, the conversation always winds its way to the economy. The "toys" are seemingly always the first things that become expendable when the economy tanks. So what is the state of the industry in today's economy? Parker points out, "The industry is currently very strong. The snowmobile industry is a little down because of lack of snow in our area. But as a whole it is definitely up."



## **“We also sponsor three or four local minor hockey teams.”**

Of course, as Parker mentioned, good ol' Mother Nature plays a large role in the sales of outdoor equipment. Is there a contingency plan for unfavourable seasons? “It’s something that you have to roll with and have to be creative. Instead of letting the manufacturer bring the programs to the table, we do a lot of our own internal sales programs to differentiate us from the competition. Instead of Mother Nature dictating the business cycles, we’re trying to do it ourselves with our sales and marketing programs.”

Product-wise, Cobequid is strictly a BRP (Bombardier Recreational Products Inc.) dealer in the power sports and marine world. So, you’ll find top-of-the-line products from familiar names like Ski Doo, Can-Am ATV, Can-Am side-by-side and Evinrude outboards motors. Parker assures,

“It’s no doubt that BRP is the big dog as far as power sports goes. Quality, fit, finish and reliability. It sets us above the competition.”

## **“We are on track to do three times the business that we did eight years ago when I started.”**

Not one to rest on his laurels some eight years into the business, Parker suggests that a bigger and better Cobequid is in the back of his mind. “Expansion is definitely a topic of conversation.

It’s definitely something we want to look at in the future. If you’re not growing, then you’re going to go backwards at some point. So it’s definitely a topic of conversation.”

One could only imagine that a company who brings leisure and sporting equipment to a population would embrace (and be embraced by) that local community. Parker points out that they do all they can to put their community front and center.

“We do an open house here at the shop once a year. So we invite different groups, like different local snowmobile

clubs, to come and present themselves and their organizations. It gives them a chance to sell trail passes and that kind of thing. We also sponsor a major marine event in our local community called HarbourFest. We are a platinum sponsor for that. It’s basically a not-for-profit organization that is focused on enhancing the marine activities in the local area. So we sponsor them and actively help them out with their event. We also sponsor three or four local minor hockey teams. We try to be as active in the community as we can.”

This all translates into a strong commitment to exceptional service. In fact, their motto is World Class Service in a Down Home Atmosphere. “We are essentially focused on growth, and we know that customer service is the name of the game. And that’s why we try go the extra mile.

On a footprint scale, we’re a small business. We know that people have to be looked after if they’re going to return. We aren’t hoping to just sell a customer one unit. We’re hoping to sell them multiple units over many years. So we realized that staying late, organizing pick-ups and drop-offs for customers, and also going the extra mile trying to get things covered under warranty that aren’t usually covered, that sort of thing. We have a pretty strong brand ambassador team out in the community. So we try and get people on demo rides and support their local events and rallies and stuff.”

Visibility is the key. Being out in the community, brandishing the long-trusted Cobequid name.

“We are of the sixth oldest BRP dealership in the world. Top six as far as longevity. And I’m the youngest owner of a BRP store in history, which is kind of cool. And we are on track to close out this year doing three times the business that we did eight years ago when I started.”

Head on down to Cobequid Mountain Sports or check them out online. And reap the benefits of top-of-the-line brands coupled with their world-class service! You’ll be glad you did! ●