

Ambitious plans drive Mitsubishi

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Mitsubishi Motors Australia chief executive Shaun Westcott, pictured at the brand's best-selling dealership at Goodwood. Picture: Dean Martin

MITSUBISHI Motors is marking its 40-year milestone in the Australian market with ambitious plans to convert Holden loyalists while also driving new technology-led growth.

"I think everybody is targeting the Holden space and we have products that resonate with Australian customers," said Mitsubishi Motors Australia Limited chief executive Shaun Westcott, who took the reins of the business in April this year.

"The reality is we probably have the most attributes in our products that will appeal to a significant number of very loyal Holden users ... I have seldom experienced such loyalty towards a brand as people have towards Holden, which is a good thing," Mr Westcott said. "As they transition out of Holden, we believe

that our proposition will really meet their needs. We believe them to be a really loyal customer base. We can win them and we plan to meet their needs so they stay with us," Mr Westcott said.

The South African-born executive took the reins of the national operations of the Japanese automotive manufacturer after just two years with group and in the midst of what he describes as "a perfect storm". "I really walked into the eye of the COVID-19 storm. Our sales fell off a cliff edge in April, down 90 per cent for the month.

"But I come from an international background where I have seen cyclic economies, and I also have the GFC experience to fall back on, so I am ready to face challenges presented by COVID-19. It's up to us to find opportunities in the midst of the adversity."

The group pivoted to support dealers as they boosted services during the national shutdown and roped in consulting firm Deloitte to offer specialist webinars and advice to its 183-strong national dealership network. Tax support to the automotive industry to the end of June also helped MMAL's V-shaped recovery as it gears up for key events.

A \$2m state grant in 2018 ensured MMAL retained its headquarters in SA, which will see the group relocate from Tonsley, where it made cars until 2008, to a new facility at the Adelaide Airport in February next year. In addition to the corporate division and about 28 dealerships, Mitsubishi also has its product strategy team here in Adelaide, including engineers and technicians. There is also still a design studio, which helps with components, while some product testing also happens in SA.

With Australian customers "pivoting" to SUVs and 4X4s, next year will see the launch of its Outlander PHEV hybrid featuring battery technology that allows the car to be recharged by solar/battery systems and charge batteries in residential and commercial buildings. This technology, Dendo Drive House, was launched in Japan last year with a feasibility study scheduled for Australia this year.

MMAL has sold 2.7m vehicles in the country since 1980, and now has an 8 per cent market share, occupying the No 4 sales position.