



Rob Lindley

Experienced automotive industry executive, Non-Executive Director and Property investor

CONTACT DETAILS

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SKILLS

- Strategic planning
- Leadership
- Mergers and acquisitions
- Business development
- Marketing strategy
- Sales management
- Automotive aftermarket
- Change management

EDUCATION

University of Nottingham: Bachelor's Degree, Chemistry with Industrial Economics

Stanford University Graduate School of Business: Executive Program in Strategy and Organisation, Business School program

Ennis & Co were delighted to welcome Rob Lindley as an Associate.

Rob brings to the table a wealth of experience in managing and leading change within large global automotive organisations from a two-wheel as well as four-wheel perspective – most recently as Managing Director for The Colt Car Company.

Working with some of the world's leading brands from Harley-Davidson Motor Company to McLaren Automotive, Mazda Motors UK and Ford Motor Company, Rob's vast experience within sales, marketing and management across the world has culminated in his current status as a Non-Executive Director and property investor.

Whilst Rob has been taking a brief hiatus since the exit of Mitsubishi Motors from sales in the UK, we took some time to find out more about Rob's past, present and future...

What drew you to automotive?

There is a funny story around that. When I completed my university degree in 1987, I joined the graduate milk round, and my first job was with a Unilever Company that was the Distributor for Caterpillar in the UK on their graduate programme.

18 months into this I was staying over at my friend, Chris's flat in Balham and on a bleary Sunday morning we went out to get the papers. Flicking idly through the Sunday Times employment section there was a full-page advert for "Zone Managers" at Ford Motor Company which featured a great photo of a Sierra Cosworth. Initially I was attracted by the car of course – and the brand. At that time Ford was massively a market leader in the UK with almost 30% market share and was absolutely the best marketing company in the car industry.

I read the profile in the job advert and to be honest it sounded a lot like me. Two interviews and a gruelling two-day assessment centre later I got the job, along with eight others, and the rest is history. I wonder what would have happened if I hadn't stayed over with Chris that Saturday and seen the advert?

Having held senior positions within automotive in the "four-wheel" and "two-wheel" arenas – what are the key differences and similarities, challenges, and opportunities?

There are a lot of similarities of course with both being high value purchases largely sold through dealer

networks but there are some differences. Most motorcycles are bought for leisure purposes rather than essential day to day use and as a result the purchase tends to be more emotionally driven. Motorcycling is a lifestyle, especially with Harley-Davidson and as a result people tend to be more engaged with the brand and the dealers making regular purchases of accessories, clothing, and merchandise.

I worked for a week within a Harley dealer, and it was remarkable to note that there were some customers that came in every day, just to hang out! We could spend a lot of time talking about the challenges and opportunities. Both four-wheel and two-wheel face regulatory challenge. For cars it is more about environment and adapting to net zero targets, for motorcycles the bigger issue is safety.

Power Two wheelers (PTWs) represent about 1% of road users but around 25% of serious injuries and fatalities in the EU. Because of the social impact of that candidly I think European regulators would want to regulate PTWs out of existence if they could and this is a key challenge for the industry.

I really appreciated and enjoyed working in both sectors though and because senior execs with motorcycle experience are a bit rarer than those with car experience, I do get contacted quite often for consulting opportunities related to bikes.

You also have experience in the world of property investment. Why did you do this and what key learnings have you gained?

We started investing in property in 2011. My wife and I have a small property business with a number of flats in Oxford and HMOs (house of multiple occupation) in the Midlands. We also do some property lending to developers. Initially the objective was diversification of investments and creating a (relatively) passive income for the future.

Over the long term, especially since George Osborne's tax changes, you tend to find that most of the gains from property come from capital growth over time rather than income after taxes. Compared to a full-time job in automotive it is relatively hands off, especially if you use an agent but it is a business in its own right and should be treated as such.

What are the key challenges the automotive industry is facing right now?

I think that my most recent experience with Mitsubishi Motors is a good microcosm for the challenges the industry is facing at the moment, especially in Europe.

The costs for manufacturers of moving to net zero are huge. Electric powertrains remain significantly more expensive than petrol or diesel and the development costs of a whole range of new product to meet 2030 deadlines are frightening. In addition, the European market has some of the highest regulatory burdens and operating costs and the market itself is no longer growing.

Mitsubishi Motors looked at this and decided that, as a relatively small player, they would be better served in putting their investment focus into Asian markets and to cut a very long story extremely short, that is why you saw them exit the market for new cars in the UK and a number of other European markets.

This is a challenge faced by all the car companies to a lesser or greater extent, but especially the niche Asian brands. At the same time, you are seeing the newer entrants to the market like Tesla, Rivian and Innovation Automotive looking to establish themselves with a new model which goes direct to consumer. That has, in turn, prompted other car companies like VW Group to look at the "agency model" to attempt to reduce their distribution costs.

It will be fascinating to see how all these issues play out.

What next for you?

The last 18 months with Mitsubishi Motors UK / Colt Car Company was tough with COVID and with the decision of Mitsubishi Motors to exit the market.

This meant we had to go through a massive restructuring of the company with a large number of redundancies and all of this during a pandemic. To be honest it was tough so when I stepped away at the start of October, I decided to take some time out and enjoy some hobbies and family time.

Personally, I am not looking for another full time MD role, but I am looking instead for Non-Exec / Advisory Board opportunities where I can use my skills and experience to help guide companies through these challenges. We'll see what happens...

For further information, or if you think Rob can add value to your business, please contact:

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