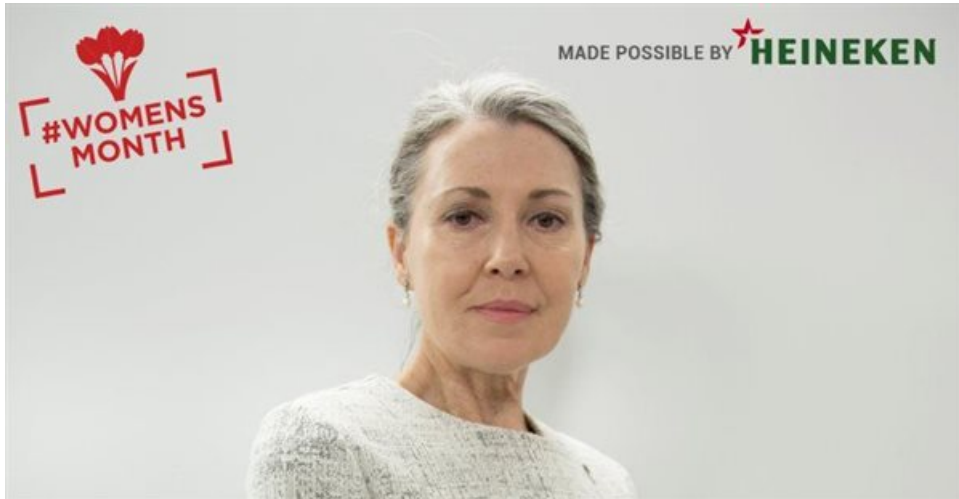


# Jeánné Esterhuizen, president of the Retail Motor Industry Organisation (RMI)

This [#WomensMonth](#), we celebrate the sheroes, SHE-E-Os, fempreneurs and fempire builders of South Africa and the rest of Africa



Jeánné Esterhuizen, president of the Retail Motor Industry Organisation (RMI)

## ■ Tell us a little about yourself?

My name is Jeánné Esterhuizen and I am the president of the Retail Motor Industry Organisation (RMI). I have been in business since I was a young woman. I have an incredibly talented son and daughter-in-law. Soon I will be the most loving grandmother to a baby boy.

Outside of an extremely rewarding career in the retail motor industry, I am an adventurer, an avid reader and lifelong student of literature, art, history and international best practice in skills development and training initiatives.

I love to hike, climb mountains, ride a mountain bike, do trial runs, paddle (kayaking) and recently took up horse-riding again. I was born in Barkley East and ever since I can remember I admired beautiful cars and motorcycles. I have ridden off-road bikes, road bikes and superbikes.

My business partner and I opened Technicolour in 1994 as a small micro enterprise, mainly focusing on repairing motorcycles. It took about 15 years to migrate from a micro enterprise into a large auto body repair centre, a formidable brand accredited by the most influential OEM's in the country.

The company has received a number of national accolades over the past 26 years. Even though I stepped down as CEO in 2019, I retained shares because I still believe so strongly in the brand. The company is currently a level1 contributor to BBEE.

When we opened the business in the retail motor industry I was so frustrated with the onerous legislation and massive skills shortages in the sector that I realised I needed to expand my influence from a small business space into the larger industry where I could influence and impact policy.

That is how I joined RMI and also became integrally involved in policy, transformation, sustainability, wage negotiations and a number of other key Human Resource issues impacting the industry and its employees.

■ ***What did you want to be when you were growing up?***

I always had a sense of responsibility to be of service to society in general. I also had a fascination with how the world works and a natural affinity to anything to do with technology so cars, bikes, planes fascinated me. My very first job I had was with SAA.

“ Life takes one on a journey and if you dream enough you end up where you belong. ”

So I ended up in the Motor Industry. If I followed the advice of those who tested my aptitude at a young age I would have ended up as a human rights lawyer or a clinical psychologist.

■ ***Describe a typical work day***

Currently, I work from home, so a lot of my day is taken up by online engagements, board meetings, strategic discussions, research, mentoring and expanding my business interests. I also make sure that I learn a new concept every day. I am normally up at 6am and back in bed by 11pm.

■ ***What do you love most about what you do for a living?***

I have always seen myself as a conscious capitalist. I feel we can all do so much more to uplift the people and communities around us. I have seen what we have been able to achieve in our own small community.

“ In my current position I can use my broader involvement in the industry as a platform to grow and to share my broad business experience as a means of giving back to industry. ”

I love seeing people being given the opportunity to grow and realise their potential.

■ ***What is the best advice anyone has given you?***

Think before you speak. Your words shape your future and the future of the world.

■ ***If you could do any other job what would it be?***

A human rights lawyer.

■ ***What advice would you give to young women wanting to enter your industry?***

If you love technology and commerce and are interested to know how beautiful and powerful vehicles and motorcycles are designed, built, maintained and repaired, then this is the industry for you. It is also an industry in which you can do exceptionally well.

*“ We actually have four women on our RMI board which is excellent for a predominantly male industry. A large majority of our member companies also employ employee women to engage with customers, handle the administration and human resource functions as well as the ordering of supplies and so on. ”*

Many of these businesses start as family-owned businesses so mothers, wives and daughters all get involved. Of late we find more and more young women entering technical trades as well and owning their own businesses.

### ■ **What do you do to relax?**

Of late I try very hard to live a balanced life. I physically train four to five times a week as a stress release. I relax best when I am in nature, whether hiking, biking, kayaking, horse riding or just enjoying time with family, friends and giving back to my community.

### ■ **What are the trends in your industry?**

Artificial intelligence (AI), robotics and automation are all impacting the way we do things in the automotive space.

*“ In many respects we are having to unlearn what we know and learn what we do not yet understand; re-imagine this world and constantly improve our ability to innovate. ”*

This includes adapting to technological changes, creating an enabling environment in the workplace to maximise human potential, and being socially responsible.

### ■ **What are the challenges?**

Learning how to embrace the digital revolution of an evolving sector. We know that alternative fuels and electric vehicles will affect how vehicles are serviced and repaired. This will have an impact on how technicians are trained and qualified. It will also have an impact on the traditional repair workshop and motor body repairers' business.

Then comes the parts industry. The number of replacement parts in an electric vehicle, for example, is far less than in a petrol or diesel-powered vehicle. Businesses are going to need to be flexible and adaptable or will become obsolete.

Professionalising the industry. Like any trade or occupation there is the opportunity to transform the RMI and member companies into a recognised Professional organisation with the highest integrity and competence. We anticipate a future where working in the retail motor industry is regarded as a profession with clear career paths.

4IR and skills training. The industry is changing rapidly, not only because of 4IR, but because of changes in consumer behaviour, so to remain attractive to consumers, businesses must improve technical and soft skills in all employees. Our purpose is to find the most cost effective and least disruptive ways to grow skills and encourage innovation in the retail motor industry, and to encourage the growth of small, black-owned businesses.

Transformation. Eighty percent of accredited RMI business owners are in fact small to medium size business owners and this is where the growth and employment opportunities that are going to drive the economy will come from. Migrating informal business into the formal sector by becoming compliant and meaningful contributors to the economy, will secure a far stronger sector. It is possible, our company is a vibrant example.

Green economy. Businesses in retail motor industry must become much more proactive in preserving our planet for future generations. It is not good enough to plan only for five years from now we must think about the impact our actions have on the environment 50 and even 100 years from now. Future generations deserve our consideration.

■ ***What would you say to your younger self?***

Walk like the camel don't run like the cheetah.

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