



DAVID BEBEE, RECORD STAFF

David Kassik, owner of B-K Motors Group, stands in front of the off-road track he installed behind his Waterloo dealership for his Land Rover customers. B-K Motors also sells Volvos and Jaguars.

Bitten by the auto bug

By Chuck Howitt, Record staff

WATERLOO — David Kassik stares at the camera, looking stoic and serious, as if someone had just put a dent in one of his prized Volvos or Land Rovers.

In person, he's far more friendly and outgoing than in the photo which ran in a recent advertisement for Kassik's B-K Motors Group. His spacious office has a bit of a cluttered and disorganized look. A large cardboard figure of Darth Vader greets visitors, a concession to his two young children, and rolled-up maps and documents litter the floor in one corner.

He's even a bit awkward around machines. He tries to print out a copy of the company's history, but something keeps going wrong with the printer and it clicks and clatters through the entire interview, despite his best efforts to fix it.

Kassik can't be blamed for appearing slightly

overwhelmed at times. In truth, the pressure has been on him since birth. He's one of those marked people, the offspring of an overachieving parent.

From humble beginnings in a small Fina station in 1973, his father Helmut built one of the largest, most successful car dealerships in Waterloo Region.

If you drive up King Street toward Conestoga Mall, you can't miss the spacious and sparkling BMW, Mini, Volvo and Land Rover dealerships, all erected by Helmut in 2000. Though he says his father initially discouraged him from going into the car business, David Kassik was bitten by the automobile bug from the moment he sat down in a Grade 10 business class at St. Jerome's High School 20 years ago.

A thorough apprenticeship followed, first at Georgia College in Barrie in the three-year automotive marketing and business program.

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One-stop shopping for luxury vehicles

► **Auto dealer** continued from F1

Then it was at B-K itself where he did virtually every job in the place.

"I've spent a majority of my career on the sales floor and still do," he says.

The ownership torch was partially passed when David Kassik bought the Volvo and Land Rover dealerships from his father in 2001 and Helmut Kassik continued to run the BMW and Mini operations. When Helmut decided to retire last September, the pair, who have a close working relationship, decided to sell BMW and Mini to a Toronto firm that owns several such dealerships.

It was a case of bigger isn't always better. "We're large enough to provide one-stop shopping for luxury vehicles, but small enough to still know people's names," Kassik says of his remaining holdings.

And he's not worried that BMW and Mini are right next door and serving a similar demographic. "I welcome the

competition," he says, noting that it forces the company to stay sharp.

Kassik, 36, didn't wait long to put his own stamp on things. In February he added Jaguar to his stable of vehicles by purchasing the Jaguar dealership on Manitou Drive in Kitchener from Gemini Motors, which continues to sell Subaru. Though the decision was his alone, in reality the deal was in the works for several years, he says. Land Rover and Jaguar have always had a close working relationship and when he built the new Land Rover showroom in 2003, Kassik left room for Jaguar.

The cars he sells range in price from \$30,000 to \$130,000.

Despite these wallet-busting amounts, B-K Motors, which employs 41, sold nearly 300 new vehicles and more than 100 used cars last year.

"The market is much less volatile with premium brands," he says, but adds an important caveat, "as long as you do your job right."

For Kassik, doing the job right involves the little things as much as the big ones, such as putting real towels in the washrooms, shoe polish in the waiting room, and providing free loaner cars and car washes every time a customer brings a vehicle in. One of his favourite expressions is "bumping the lamp," lifted from an old Disney movie and meaning go that extra mile.

He went more than a mile with the \$75,000 off-road track he installed behind the dealership for Land Rover customers. It offers a slow but heart-pounding ride over hills made of boulders and railroad ties and ridges set at steep angles.

Kassik's goal is to continue to grow the operation — but not too fast. "If we doubled sales, we wouldn't be able to service customers the way we want to."

It would also make it more difficult to bump the lamp.

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