



Paul Marsh and his wife Dr Nikki James with their Land Rover at Uluru, formerly known as Ayres Rock in Australia.



Staff busy at work in Footlose's service centre.



Guests attend Cambridge Housing Society's opening of new affordable homes in Wimblington, near March.



Footlose general manager Chris Bishop.

The service centre with added passion

IF the staff at Footlose 4x4 were sticks of seaside rock, the words running through them would be Land Rover.

by **MARK WILLIAMS**
BUSINESS REPORTER

Everyone at the service centre, which has moved recently to Shrewsbury Avenue, Woodston, Peterborough, has a passion for Land Rovers. The only employee who does not own and drive a Land Rover is too young to have a licence.

Footlose 4x4 was established eight years ago by South African Paul Marsh in buildings at Sacrewell Farm. This year it had outgrown the premises and was moved into Peterborough to a specifically equipped workshop in Woodston Business Centre.

Footlose 4x4 is four businesses in one. Footlose supplies Land Rover parts and accessories, builds bespoke custom Land Rovers and is one of the UK's leading expedition vehicle specialists. The core of its business is, however, servicing Land Rovers.

"We are passionate about Land Rovers," says Paul. Two members of staff were specifically trained by Land Rover. Footlose 4x4 has learned the lesson of keeping its business focused on what it does best. It prides itself on personal attention. There are no reception staff.

You talk directly to technically-minded people who understand Land Rovers.

Footlose 4x4 does not generally sell Land Rovers, it is more focused on servicing them. It now offers more convenience by being based in Peterborough itself.

Your Land Rover warranty remains valid at Footlose 4x4, as they will use genuine Land Rover parts just as they would at a Land Rover dealership. Footlose 4x4 is, however, independent from the main agent, and can therefore offer all of this at more competitive rates.

General Manager Chris Bishop keeps a watchful eye on everything that goes through the workshop.

"Our independence is our strength," he says. "At some franchises the technicians become isolated from the customers and communication breaks down. Footlose 4x4 offers that personal touch and, for me, there is nothing more important than a happy, satisfied customer."

Chris has been responsible for equipping the workshop with the ramps and diagnostics allowing Footlose 4x4 to service and maintain every Land Rover right up to the latest Discoveries and Range Rovers, maintaining origi-

nal warranties.

He said: "The only Land Rovers we prefer not to deal with are the very early Series models. They are really classic car restoration projects, and we can recommend specialists who do this kind of work."

"The old Land Rovers, do, however, remind us that 80 per cent of all Land Rovers ever built are still being driven today. They can have a very long life if they are well maintained. We recently serviced a Defender which had covered 400,000 miles on its original engine.

"People sometimes forget the carbon emission costs of building new cars which may only last 10 years. In that respect, Land Rovers are the most environmentally-friendly vehicles you can get."

"Land Rovers are not particularly expensive to service. We can provide a 12,000-mile service for a Discovery TD5 for under £190 including parts and VAT. We do a 48,000-mile main service on a swish 4.6-litre Range Rover for under £450. Even a 24,000 mile service on a Freelander TD4 will cost just over £235."

The Footlose 4x4 team includes expedition vehicle engineer Graham Day, technicians Dave Day and Steve Brown, parts specialist Bob Webb and apprentice Gareth Bosse.

"Some Land Rover owners prefer to do their own work and for them we have an extensive stock of genuine Land Rover and pattern parts", says Chris.

There is little that proprietor Paul Marsh does not know about expedition vehicles. He has driven the length of Africa three times, crossed the South American continent and driven from London to Sydney in 2005.

Next year, Paul and his wife, local GP Dr Nikki James, are the technical and medical support crew for an expedition rally from Panama to Alaska. It is a trip they will take in their stride. One of their African expeditions lasted 14 months, covering 40,000 miles.

Paul's career, after studying engineering, included being a safari guide in Botswana as well as owning his own business in the motor trade, preparing expedition vehicles in South Africa. The couple moved to England in 1997, and two years later Paul established Footlose 4x4.

"In the beginning I imported South African expedition equipment which was probably the best available at that time. The first roof top tent, Eezi-Awn, was one of the products I imported into England. I will never forget the amount of interest I received at the Billing Land Rover show when I slept on the top of the

Land Rover in a specially-designed tent on my exhibition stand.

"The business has moved from strength to strength and as time has gone on, the service side has become the largest part. Chris has been the main player in this side of the business."

Paul has concentrated on expedition vehicles. Footlose 4x4 has built expedition Land Rovers for customers worldwide. One vehicle was built and exported to Singapore for a customer that Paul had never even met. Such is the Footlose 4x4 reputation.

"We built a vehicle for Sir Terence English, the prominent cardio-thoracic surgeon. Since his retirement he has driven the vehicle all over the world and now, six years later, has sold it on. It is still soldiering through deserts and jungles."

"One couple that we prepared a vehicle for started expedition travel in their 60s. They have now driven completely around Africa, done a two-year trip around South America and are now planning to drive from London to Sydney. They still keep in contact, and we service and maintain this vehicle between their adventures."

"To be honest," says Paul, "I live for the passion of travelling, and seeing other people live the same dream is very fulfilling."

Affordable homes development is officially opened

CAMBRIDGE Housing Society's (CHS) new development of 15 affordable homes was formally opened last week.

Chairman of Fenland District Council Councillor Bernard Keane cut the ribbon on the homes at Hassock Way, Wimblington, near March.

He praised the partnership between the district and parish councils and CHS that had enabled the building of these new homes which would be available for affordable rent and shared ownership for local people in perpetuity.

MP Malcolm Moss also attended as he has a strong interest in housing for local people.

He said: "The quality of these houses is excellent." Other guests attending the opening included the developer, Flagship Housing Group; the contractors, F E Peacock Construction; local residents and the private landowner who sold the land. CHS Chief Executive, Nigel Howlett was delighted

to have had the opportunity to increase the number of their affordable homes in the area to more than 200 and announced an expansion of CHS work in non-housing issues in Fenland, including enabling people to have access to cheap loans, computer equipment, one-to-one tuition and skills advice in their own homes.

CHS is a charitable housing association providing high quality and good value affordable housing together with support, care and community services to enable people to enhance their quality of life and further their personal development.

Established in 1927, CHS now employs 300 people, manages 2000 homes and provides care and support for 520 people across the Cambridge sub-region.

Community investment, the non-housing products and services offered by CHS, include enabling people to have access to cheap loans, computer equipment, one-to-one tuition and skills advice in their own homes.



Proprietor Paul Marsh.