

Cadillacs hit the road: a success story

by Michael Romanos

John Tantrum is justifiably proud of his long, long Cadillacs. His Auckland-based tourist transport company, *Luxury Limousines Ltd* is well named.

The 42-year-old Tantrum says his business is unique because he owns the only two 25-foot stretched Cadillacs operating as tourist cars in the country.

The "stretched" in the Cadillacs means the cars have been lengthened to accommodate six passengers in the back compartment and two more in the front. Stretched eight feet, the silver and white Cadys are of 1984 and 1985 vintage and have a collective replacement value of \$600,000. Also added to the fleet is a 1976 Silver Shadow Rolls Royce, valued at \$60,000. The Rolls was used last September by ageless, sexy pop singer Tina Turner.

Tantrum's Maori lineage is on his mother's side. His grandmother was Mary Cribb of the Ngati Raukawa tribe. Tantrum was raised to have an understanding of the Maori language and culture.

When I visited his sumptuous home in Milford along "Millionaire's Row" overlooking Lake Pupuki, I spied a handsome Maori carved panel. Tantrum said it had only recently been sent by his uncle, Gilbert Knowles, a minister of the Ratana Church and the carved Maori warrior, blessed by the church, was just what he needed to protect his house.

In his early days Tantrum served an apprenticeship as a jockey and he had over 100 rides before weight and height meant an early retirement. Then followed stints as a freezing worker, salesman on the road and hotel manager.

"Where I've been very lucky is that I have been able to listen to the right people and be guided by the right people," Tantrum told me.

"Through a lack of a high quality edu-

cation - I never did make college, I finished schooling at 14 - I made it my business to seek the right advice from the right people. You don't listen to unemployed people about how to succeed in work."

Palmerston-North born, Tantrum took on a spray painting business before shifting to Hawera where he met his wife Anne Squires, a hairdresser. They moved to Auckland in 1977 and purchased a hair dressing salon. With sheer hard work the salon flourished and expanded. They finished with a chain of five salons.

The salons were gradually sold off and funding was put into one up-market salon in Takapuna where a customer receives a complimentary wine or lager. Mrs Tantrum is currently the president of the Auckland Hairdressing Association and artistic director of Inter-Coiffure (a select organisation of hair designers).

Last September Tantrum brought out Clayton's Limousines which was in receivership. The two Cads came with the business and cost Tantrum about a third of their value.

"I feel that behind every successful man is a successful woman and because Anne has such a good business acumen I have developed an understanding in relating to people. This was one of them: I was there at the right time and got the limousine business for a virtual song. The previous operator had poor communication and business management.

"It's a competitive business. There are

50 cars on the road round the Auckland area all into tourist transportation. I can understand why Clayton's went into oblivion. There were little telephone manners for a start - it was take it or leave it.

Renamed *Luxury Limousines Ltd*, the dapper dressed Tantrum was only into his seventh week when I interviewed him.

"I've done extremely well already," he said. "I've employed a co-driver and a part-time driver so that all the fleet can be on the road at any one time. I have visited a lot of the travel agents who deal with in-bound tours. The reason why my business has grown in such a short space of time is that I have the confidence of the travel agents. They're happy to use my services. The bookings are coming in and there was one week where I had to turn down \$3000 worth of work."

Tantrum said he finds out what interests his tourist customers and he ensures they get a fair portion of Maori culture. Tantrum takes at least one group of tourists (usually Americans or Japanese) every week on the Auckland-Waitomo-Taupo-Rotorua-Auckland excursion, spending up to six days on the road and in hotels. For any group of up to eight this costs the group \$600 per day, apart from Tantrum's own accommodation and meals.

Tantrum virtually lives it up along with his "guests" but he says it can be lonely and hard-going particularly with tourists who speak little English or who like to keep to themselves. Also, the same ground is covered over and again. He says getting back to his wife's cooking is a real treat.

Since he has been on the road, Tantrum says he has learnt a great deal about the areas he has covered. Of course, he is expected at times to impart knowledge of the features and interests that his vehicle passes by.

