

**‘NEVER BEEN A BETTER TIME TO BUY VOLVO’
- North East motor dealer changes ownership and base –**

North East businessmen Bill Ward, together with Bob Nicholson, have acquired motor dealer Mill Garages.

Bill – the face of North East Volvo and the man who has featured in regional TV campaigns promoting Volvo through the Mill Garages dealership network - has taken the advice of his own advertising slogan – ‘there’s never been a better time to buy Volvo’.

In a deal worth almost £7million, the management team have acquired the five Mill dealerships from Inchcape plc. The sites in Scotswood Road, Newcastle, Hexham, Sunderland, Stockton and Harrogate will continue to trade under the Mill Garages brand.

The company has annual sales of more than £60million and employs over 140 people at its five North East sites.

Despite tough trading conditions Bill is totally confident about the future and the strength of the Volvo brand and its growing and popular product range.

“Volvo North East has been very successful and in the last two years has increased its share of the market. Even at the end of this year we expect to have sold over 2,000 new cars which is a rise year-on-year,” he said.

The acquisition represents a ‘coming home’ for the Mill Garages brand. Established in the region in 1947, the company has more recently been owned by national operators and controlled from outside the region. Inchcape plc, headquartered in London, acquired the North East dealerships when it took over European Motor Holdings less than two years ago.

“It’s great to be bringing control of Mill back to the region. We have a strong North East based management team that has great industry experience, an understanding of the company and the Volvo brand and has ambitions to build a bigger dealership network,” said Bob Nicholson.

Bill takes on the role and new title of managing director; the chairman is Bob Nicholson who has more than 25 years motors industry experience; fellow directors include Jim Anderson, as finance director; Mark Askew, after-sales director; and Jeff Tabb, sales director.

“This is a strong team that intends to grow Mill Garages and is committed to investing in the network. Volvo is taking market share from other manufacturers and we believe that will only continue in the North East and Yorkshire,” said Bill Ward.

The acquisition has been several months in the planning.

Locally, the professional team supporting Bill Ward and his team was led by BTG McInnes Corporate Finance. Partner Chris Appleby said: "It's fantastic to have delivered this deal for an exceptionally talented and well known management team. It is refreshing to be able to confirm good news in the North East buy-out market. Mill is part of the North East and has been for over 50 years – we've helped Bill and the team bring it back home."

Other advisers to the MBO included North law firm Ward Hadaway. Corporate finance partners Robert Thompson and Mike Spetch led Ward Hadaway's team advising Bill Ward and the management team on the deal. Robert Thompson said: "It is always a pleasure to help a North East business success story to continue and we wish Bill and the Mill team all the best for the future."

The Co-operative Bank in Newcastle provided working capital facilities while stock funding was provided by Volvo Car Finance/Ford Credit Europe and Castrol.

Jeff Fryer, business development manager at the Co-operative Bank in Newcastle, said: "Our entire team has worked hard to make this transaction happen. It proves that we're very much open for business, and that current market conditions can be overcome and funding made available for businesses such as Mill that have the right balance across product offering, management team and financial structure."

Bill Ward added: "We are delighted that the Co-op provided support for what is a truly based North East company and we are looking forward to their continued interest in the further developments of the business."

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