

# Garage with the female touch

Pictures STEVE ADAMS

## Pioneering woman boss takes on two apprentices

By EMILY DENNIS

As a woman in a male-dominated workplace, Caroline Lake was subjected to a rough ride when she began work, as a mechanic.

But the determined mother-of-two battled to overcome prejudices and went on to set up Norfolk's first female-run garage.

Now the 37-year-old is turning her attention towards helping other women starting out in the business by taking on two female apprentices.

Miss Lake, who owns Caroline's Cars on Ashwellthorpe Industrial Estate, recently appointed 17-year-olds Kelly Clarke and Nicola Arles from Norfolk Training Services, and is providing the pair with valuable hands-on experience of the industry.

Miss Lake, who opened her business two years ago, has always been a believer that women suffer inequality at the hands of male mechanics, and said she had to battle to achieve success.

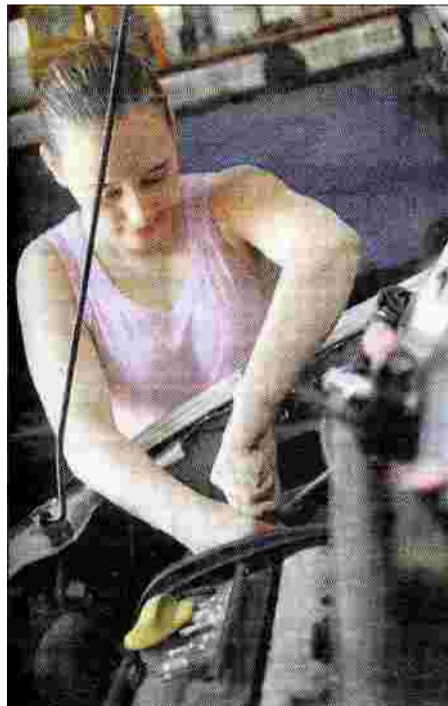
**She said:** "I've heard a number of stories of young women starting out in this business who aren't given any responsibility and are left with menial tasks such as putting tools away and making tea. It even happened to me, and it was only down to my persistence, passion and self-learning that I managed to progress.

"It can be intimidating for women in this industry, which is why I wanted to take on two apprentices and give them a real taste of what it's like to work in a reputable garage and allow them to get stuck in. They will benefit most from 'hands-on' experience and I can't wait for them to see what an exciting time this is for women to be working in this industry."

With two female apprentices and Miss Lake at the helm, women are now outnumbering men at the company by a ratio of 3:2.

Miss Clarke, who has been hired as a mechanic apprentice, said: "I feel more confident in this environment, learning from a woman. Caroline is really good with us as she talks us through each and everything we do together.

"We get an opportunity to get involved with all the jobs that come in and so far I've been learning about services, how to change brake pads, discs and oil- I'm really enjoying it." Miss Ades, who has been hired as a paintwork apprentice, said: "I love working at the garage. It's a really comfortable environment to work and learn in- It's great being part of the female-owned garage and



ABOVE: Apprentices Nicola Arles, right, and Kelly Clarke, left, with their boss, Caroline Lake, at Caroline's Cars, in Ashwellthorpe.

LEFT: The new girls at work.

Caroline makes sure we have a go at everything. It's the perfect place to learn the ropes." Taking on female apprentices is not Miss Lake's only way of instilling more confidence in women when it comes to their vehicles.

In December 2006 she launched car

maintenance classes aimed purely at women. Yesterday, she said the courses were proving popular with the next evening class taking place next Wednesday. She said: "It's been a pleasure running the courses and encouraging women to have more

confidence in the general upkeep of the vehicles. It's amazing how easy they find it once someone has the time and patience to show them. Some of the women who attended the course have approached me asking about a more advanced class where they can learn more and ultimately

become more self-sufficient. I'm in the process of producing this course and I'd love to get my new apprentices involved with it too." For more information about the garage or car maintenance classes contact Miss Lake on 01508 488441 or visit [www.carolinescars.co.uk](http://www.carolinescars.co.uk)