

I had to become like one of the boys to fit in



One of the most male-dominated industries in Britain is the motor trade. Very few women work as mechanics in Norfolk — except, that is, for Caroline Lake, who started her garage Caroline's Cars in June 2006.

The business, based in Ashwellthorpe Industrial Estate, offers general servicing and repairs, paint and bodywork, welding and restoration to classic cars.

Miss Lake, a single mum of two boys — Andy 14, and Matt, 12 — employs three staff.

The 35-year-old said: "The motor trade is one of the most difficult for a woman to enter as there is so much sexism."

Miss Lake said throughout her career she had put up with

comments like: "What are you doing here? Why aren't you at home cleaning?" But her fascination with cars kept her morale up and she was determined to prove everyone wrong and become a mechanic.

After she split from her children's father eight years ago, she set up a business importing cars from Japan and while doing that started training in the motor trade. It was so hard to get into that she started off as unpaid apprentice.

"There were no other women at any of the garages I worked at and I don't know of any women in senior positions in Norfolk.

"I don't think I would have got to the top at any of these garages so I set up my own."

She said she was spurred on to

set the business up because she wanted to offer an honest service to women, who were often intimidated or ripped off by garages.

"You don't need any qualifications in the garage industry, it's completely unregulated. Anyone can open a garage and say they can fix your car."

Miss Lake has no NVQ qualifications but is an MOT tester and hopes to do a degree in mechanical engineering.

The former Long Stratton High School pupil said: "I saw female customers as a big group to target as most feel intimidated about taking their car to a garage.

"It's a traditional male-dominated