

A fortune riding on the back of a truck



By NIGEL AUSTIN

DOMENIC D'Ambrosio, 53, can hardly believe the economic miracle that is about to transform his tiny Regency Park truck-body building business.

A group of Chinese businesspeople paid him a visit recently and as a result, he expects his business, Aldom Transport Technology, to grow by about 400 per cent in the next year or two.

Quite an achievement for a man who arrived in Adelaide as a 16-year-old fresh out of an Italian high school, little more than 35 years ago.

Chen Wei, the chairman of 12 subsidiaries of the Shanghai Automotive Industrial Corporation and engineers from the company, ranked as the world's 461st largest firm, were here for several days this week.

The Shanghai Auto Company has at least a dozen plants around China.

It makes Buicks in partnership with General Motors and VWs with Volkswagen.

It is the largest car manufacturer in China, making about one million cars this year and achieving annual sales worth \$22 billion last year.

Shanghai's target was the panel-lock truck bodies and the smart technology behind them from Aldom. The company has been a successful Adelaide business with Australian sales worth about \$2.5 million a year.

Its panel-lock truck bodies are lighter, stronger, quicker to assemble and more cost-effective



and easier to repair than the alternatives.

Mr D'Ambrosio's export consultant Warwick Prestwood, from International Sales Solutions, believes it will lead to Chinese sales worth at least \$10 million. "We are going to China in the next few weeks to visit them and do a presentation to the rest of the board," an excited Mr D'Ambrosio said.

"This was beyond my imagination until 18 months ago when we employed Warwick as our marketing person to see if he could open some doors for us and he did."

Mr D'Ambrosio said his company thinks it is doing well if it produces 15 to 20 truck bodies

a month. "The big challenge is to grow to 300-400 bodies a month," he said.

Mr D'Ambrosio said his plant would have to expand by up to five times, with employee numbers growing from 25 people to 120-150 within 24 months.

Mr D'Ambrosio started Aldom Transport Engineering with his then business partner about 30 years ago.

"It always involved building truck bodies which includes truck trailers, big ones, small ones, all sorts," he said. "Over the years we've refined our design and come up with new designs to build special products which we've patented."

SATISFIED: Chen Wei, chairman of 12 subsidiaries of the Shanghai Automotive Industrial Corporation, looks at the Aldom workshop with managing director Domenic D'Ambrosio and director Warwick Prestwood.

Picture: CAMPBELL BRODIE.

\$2.6m for fire relief

THE Federal Government has committed \$2.6 million for bushfire-affected farmers on the Eyre Peninsula.

Farmers will be able to apply for grants of up to \$10,000 to help rebuild their farms.

Federal Agricultural Minister Warren Truss announced the package in Port Lincoln yesterday, saying that in some cases, 20 years of work had been "lost in a flash" in the fires.

Meanwhile, hotels throughout the state will be asking customers to pay \$1 for water at the bar to raise funds for bushfire victims.

Volunteers for the Pat

A COMMUNITY volunteer group to help monitor the Patawalonga Lake will be launched tomorrow.

'PatWatch' has been set up by the Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation to give the local community an opportunity to help manage the lake.

It is expected the group will meet 10 times each year and work closely with a number of organisations responsible for the Patawalonga and surroundings.

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