



Richard Burbage illustration by Brett Lethbridge.

QLD Business

# He fled Australia five years ago after his used car empire collapsed but karma has finally caught up with Richard Burbage

Anthony Marx, The Courier-Mail

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## KARMA WINS

HE fled from Australia five years ago, leaving behind \$12 million in debts and about 1200 shafted customers across the country.

But karma has finally caught up with Richard Burbage, the Pommy immigrant who once ran a Brisbane-based used auto empire trading as We Buy Any Car.

The 44-year-old spiv, who used to cruise around town in a leased Lamborghini, was jailed last week for six years after an English jury found him guilty of five counts of fraudulent trading.

During a trial lasting more than a month, the court heard how Burbage had ripped off more than £250,000 (\$A429,470) from hundreds of clients by selling faulty vehicles and refusing to pay refunds over a three-year period.

UK regulators investigating five companies run by Burbage discovered he had wound back odometers on 17 sample cars, shaving off more than one million miles. Jurors, who spent nearly four days deliberating, were told that he also provided false descriptions of cars, failed to deliver them, forged documents and falsified warranties.

In his sentencing remarks, the judge assailed Burbage as “devious and dishonest” and someone who had caused “a great deal of misery for the public”.

One of Burbage’s close associates was handed a 40-month sentence, while two others were acquitted.

## **NOT SURPRISED**

MEANWHILE, back in Brisbane, liquidator Raj Khatri just shook his head when he heard the news about Burbage yesterday.

“I guess nothing surprises us given the manner in which the affairs of We Buy Any Car were handled here,” said the top gun at insolvency outfit Worrells.

Khatri found that Kar Land Pty Ltd, trading as We Buy Any Car, owed trade creditors \$2.6 million and another \$3.6 million to vehicle owners.

He also determined that Kar Land was insolvent almost from the first day it opened for business in 2011.

That prompted Khatri to launch Supreme Court action three years later against Burbage and Brisbane business associate Armand Daiga to recover \$4 million.

No prizes for guessing that Burbage’s exile precluded any hope of clawing money back from him. But it’s understood that the a few hundred thousand dollars was recouped late last year from Daiga, whose family previously operated Highway Auto Group.

That money came in addition to \$400,000 of more than \$1 million in unfair preference payments that Khatri managed to extract.

Creditors ended up getting nothing back but all the employees were paid, he said. Daiga, who lost a \$6 million investment in We Buy Any Car, could not be contacted yesterday.

## **LONG BATTLE OVER**

REDLANDS property developer Chris Anderson has emerged triumphant after a costly three-year legal battle against a former business partner.

Anderson couldn't help but gloat this week as he noted that a wind up bid against his Rosewood Properties had recently been withdrawn by ex-associate Brent Upston.

Anderson said the settlement included a provision for Upston to sell his stake in the lucrative company for just \$1.

But it appears the struggle has taken quite a toll on Anderson.

He said the dispute, which cost him nearly \$1 million, spawned "a nasty campaign" of whispers in local real estate circles about his marriage, business affairs and charity work.

"These kind of things become very personal and we have weathered and refuted not just the allegations made in the court but a long campaign of personal attacks," Anderson said.

Upston declined to talk to City Beat yesterday. His lawyer said Anderson's comments included "a number of false statements" but he would not elaborate.