



PARR FOR THE PORSCHE

Words and photography:
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PARR INTRODUCED MOTORSPORT STANDARDS AND ATTITUDES TO PORSCHE SERVICING AND THIRTY YEARS ON THAT ETHOS REMAINS FOR ALL MODELS

Rocking up at Parr's Crawley-based premises in, say, an ageing Boxster, can be a tad intimidating. You approach the place through a sprawling yet well groomed industrial estate, and once you're in through the gates you're confronted with an array of glitzy late model Porsches for sale; a smattering of cool-looking race cars; and a race transporter of pantechon proportions. There's no litter or oil stains on the forecourt; all the signage is neat and clean. And if you make it as far as stepping through the front door, the reception, while not vast, is nicely decorated and lined with motorsport trophies and aftermarket accessories from Cargraphic, of which Parr is the UK distributor.

Subconsciously you're wondering if you can afford to be here. When you mention this observation to Paul Robe, Parr's owner, he rolls his eyes and grimaces, because it's a problem of which he's all too aware. 'It's ironic, really,' he sighs. 'Way back when Parr was in its infancy, even in our small, five-car shop, I was determined that it wouldn't look like a back street garage.'

That's hard to do, because this is essentially a grubby business. But I wanted to inject motorsport workshop standards of presentation and working practices. You have to remember that a customer's relationship with his or her car is unbelievably intense; some of them would almost put slippers on before getting behind the

wheel, and they keep their cars in garages with carpets and heating and dehumidifiers. Therefore our working environment needs to meet those sort of expectations.

'The trouble now is – and it's a situation exacerbated by the solid reputation Parr has in motorsport – that some people think we're too upmarket for them. Recently I had a chap ring up asking if we'd consider working on his 993. And at our recent open day there were plenty of people surprised that we had older cars up on the ramps: that wasn't their perception of us.'

'Yet we're not aloof, not a stratospheric company that you can't talk to. The truth is that we're a very friendly bunch with a huge passion for all types of Porsche, any age of Porsche. And the experience within these walls is phenomenal – several of our senior technicians have been here for 30 years, several more for 25 years, and even one of our comparative "newbies", who came to us from Porsche itself, has been with us six years.'

'As a consequence, some of those older cars that people don't think are on our radar, well, we've been working on them since they were new. And yes, we work on the newer cars, too – 997 Turbos and GT2s and GT3s and Cayennes and Caymans – doing servicing and repairs and upgrades. But I'd just like people to know we are equally as happy to replace the dampers on an elderly 944.'

When you wander through into Parr's white-walled, meticulously clean, well ordered and, frankly, huge



Parr boss, Paul Robe, has overseen the business for over 30-years

Left: No mistaking the high-end, motorsport influences here, but Parr are happy to work on any type of Porsche



workshop, there are no 944s on any of the company's ramps or engine testing bays or suspension setup machines. But when my 2000 Boxster S gets hoisted skywards for a quick underside inspection, technician David Watling undertakes the task with just as much enthusiasm as I'd earlier witnessed him lavishing on the new 991 GT3 Cup racer Parr is building for Porsche GB – matching his level of enthusiasm was the depth of his knowledge on the Boxster's common maladies, reinforcing Paul's claim that his staff are passionate about all Porsches.

While 944s may have been absent on the day of our visit, Parr's ramps and rigs were accommodating some other interesting old Porsches, including a (930) 911

'But we will always discuss options with our customers depending upon their needs and their budget. A concours standard paint finish simply can't be given to every vehicle – minor accident damage might just require a Porsche-approved level of finish, while above that we have what we describe as a "mid-level" standard for, say, a more modest restoration.'

The notion of engaging with his customers to determine how best to help them, extends to the options Paul offers them for mechanical work, too. 'For five years we built all the engines for Porsche's official Carrera Cup championship in the UK,' Paul explains, 'so we have a colossal amount of experience in engines and gearboxes. So if someone comes in with an engine

“We'd like people to know we're equally happy replacing the dampers on an elderly 944”

Targa, a 911 RSR recreation, a 2.7 RS, and a 906 Carrera 6. 'We've always undertaken restoration projects,' stresses Paul, 'but we've always been a bit quiet about it; we're about to get much more pro-active on this side of the business. That said, restoration is a monster from a commercial perspective, because of the sheer amount of time involved in all the processes and the need to keep a very careful eye on the costs.'

'We tackle all the mechanical work in-house – we have our own engine and gearbox room, for example – but the bodywork we sub-contract to trusted sources. It's hard to find the right guys to deal with who can work to the standards that I want: it's vital that we control the quality rigorously, because at the end of the day, when a customer collects their finished restoration project, it's the Parr name that's attached to every part of it.'

problem, we may be able to offer them the chance to sort out just one of the cylinders.

'Or if the problem is more extensive, we could offer them the option of using either aluminium Nikasil-coated liners or cast iron liners that are stronger and have greater longevity. It depends on their budget and their need. And over the years we've developed our own solutions for common problems such as the IMS bearing. Our pricing is very competitive for engine work, and again that's something we have never really shouted loudly enough about.'

Well documented problems with certain Porsche engines and the expense that can be entailed in bringing older, superficially tidy cars back to mechanical health, has spurred a growth in another side of the specialist's business. 'We've seen an upsurge in pre-purchase





inspections,' explains Paul, 'including bore-scope examinations and diagnostics and suspension geometry, etc. This work is becoming ever-more popular and, because of the soaring values of air-cooled cars in particular, ever-more necessary – there's still a lot of rubbish out there, and the difference these days is that people are asking a lot of money for it.'

Talking of car sales, that's another area that Parr has expanded into recently. 'We have a few sales cars of our own,' Paul tells us, 'but most of the cars you see parked outside are here on a sale or return basis, many from existing customers. Because we don't actually own the vehicles, we don't need to engage in high-pressure sales

problem areas to add longevity, and because its chassis was very solid, it should now go on for many years to come – for the £11K we sold it for, our customer got himself a genuine bargain and a great car to drive.'

As we alluded to earlier, for some years Parr's motorsport operations rather overshadowed its road car business, and to try to redress the balance the word "motorsport" has been quietly made redundant in the company's corporate communications. Yet the car park and the workshop are crammed with race cars old and new, including the latest 991 GT3 Cup car that has just arrived at Crawley. 'These days we try to say 'Parr, who do motorsport;', laughs Paul, 'but it's still an extremely

Whatever Porsche you own, take it to Parr and it will be in good company. We get around a bit on our travels, but it's not every day we see a 996 Carrera 6 being restored!

“With due diligence when you're buying and the right engineering, a 996 is a delight to drive”

techniques to keep the cashflow fluid.

'However, we vet each car carefully before agreeing to sell it, check its provenance and the condition of its bodywork and mechanicals. We have a minimum standard and we do turn cars away, even high-end desirable stuff such as a GT2. We're properly insured to guard against the unforeseen, which means that our buyers are protected as well as us: we're an honourable company.'

Amongst Parr's own sales cars sold recently was a 996 C2. 'Some people think that Porsche stopped with the 993, particularly in the context of the 996's engine woes,' reasons Paul. 'But with due diligence when you're buying and the right engineering, a 996 is a delight to drive. In the case of this C2 we attended to potential

important part of our business. This year we'll be running cars in Carrera Cup and GT Cup, and are preparing cars for various Historic championships, too. We have a long heritage of successful racing and of course that means that the experienced gleaned from the track – not to mention the equipment we use to set up the race cars – can also be applied to regular road cars.'

This year sees Parr celebrate its 30th anniversary, during which times it has grown from a small outfit that split its attentions between Porsches and Jaguars (the latter the passion of Paul's father, Ray), into one of Britain's largest and most respected Porsche specialists. Despite the evident success of the business, Paul's of the opinion that there are plenty of fresh challenges out there: 'After 30 years, Parr is still a work in progress!' **PW**

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