



PARR

Motorsport is in the blood for this Porsche specialist, yet 30 years of history suggests that racing isn't the sole reason behind Parr's remarkable rise

Written by Josh Barnett Photography by Phil Steinhardt



Now in its 30th year of existence, Parr has taken its racetrack-honed skills and experience, and utilised them in their Crawley-based workshop for road cars



There aren't many places in the world where you can get your Porsche serviced by a team with a podium finish at the 24 Hours of Le Mans under their belt. In the UK, one such outfit is Parr, the West Sussex-based Porsche specialists who, in 1996, ran a Porsche 993 GT2 to second in the GT2 class at the world-famous French endurance race.

Founded in May 1984, Parr's Le Mans podium is just one in a number of racing achievements for the company that includes an appearance at the 24 Hours of Daytona (also in 1996) and a significant amount of success in the Porsche Carrera Cup GB. Of the latter, Parr enjoys a very close relationship with the championship, having been selected in 2003 by Porsche's German arm to help with the formation of the UK-based, one-make 911 series. To this day, Porsche's UK VIP car (revived for the 2014 season) has been run out of Parr's workshop.

"My relationship with Porsche in Germany grew out of the fact that we bought GT2s back in the Nineties," explained owner Paul Robe. "We bought our first direct from the factory in 1994, so we had an account with Weissach (which we've still got). So my relationship with the factory was very strong, and it still exists. I know the likes of Hartmut Kristen [Head of Porsche Motorsport] enough to say 'hello' and have a beer."

Despite their extensive motorsport experience, Robe is quick to point out that Parr was not a

racing team that went into the car trade. "No, it's a father-and-son business that started out on the road," he explains, "but it was my ambition to go into motorsport."

That ambition was initially superseded by Robe's wish to see Porsche become a mainstay of the business. Before Parr's formation in mid-1984 (which leaves it celebrating its 30th anniversary this year), Robe's father Ray had also been in the car trade. "He was into Jaguars," Robe says with a smile. "His business at the time didn't really specialise in them. However, they did quite a lot."

Jaguar, though, was second in Paul's mind to the offerings from Zuffenhausen. "Seeing the rallying in the Seventies, and looking at the technical specifications of these little 2.0-litre engines, I thought, 'These are fantastic little German pieces of engineering. I like that.'" The smile on Robe's face widens as the stark contrast between the Porsches and Jaguars of the time comes to the forefront of his mind.

When the company folded, Paul stepped in alongside his father and "directed the business at Porsche as much as I could." Parr had been born, and very quickly Paul's other ambition – to go motor racing – was borne out. Yet the decision to enter the racing paddock was not one purely of passion; Paul is an astute businessman, and saw an opportunity to use motorsport as a marketing tool for the newly set-up endeavour.

Even 30 years later, motorsport is still a key means of advertising the business, as Paul divulges: "We do motorsport because it is the best way to market the company. We are partaking in what Porsche's existence is all about. It is a requirement of a Porsche business to race as well. That is how I feel about it."

Yet, while motorsport has helped Parr achieve a formidable reputation – their place as a GT3 specialist is potentially unrivalled, such is their expertise in this strain of the 911 breed – racing has sometimes acted as a double-edged sword when it comes to attracting customers to the company's bread and butter: servicing.

"I think people see us running around in our £150,000 racing cars and think, 'Oh, they're not going to be interested in the water leak on my Boxster. They're far too busy,'" Laurence Stockwell, Parr's head of PR points out. But they are far from this perceived one-trick pony. "It's really for people to understand that we are not just motorsport. We're happy with any problems," Robe adds. "We'll do door cards, window motors, anything. That's how we started." It's true. Parr has never shied away from investing in technology in order to allow them to keep up with their competitors. This has left them geared up to offer Porsche owners (not just 911 drivers) a wealth of quality services.

Traditional servicing and maintenance is a large part of their business, and with a gargantuan workshop with ample space for nearly 20 cars, ➔



Parr personally take care of the bulk of servicing matters themselves; only tasks relating to metalwork and painting are outsourced



“It is my opinion that a very good race mechanic comes from a very good road mechanic”

road and race machinery can easily be catered for under the same roof – something that wasn’t the case at Parr’s previous home ten years ago. This allows the race mechanics and road technicians to work on both types of car, something that Robe feels strongly about. “It is my opinion that a very good race mechanic comes from a very good road mechanic. We try to make sure that our guys work on both, in most cases. Therefore, they get the proper range of expertise and they see both sides.” Similarly, no distinction is drawn between air-cooled and water-cooled cars. With decades of experience in the workshop, Parr is happy – and extremely capable – working on both.

Engine rebuilding is done in-house, with Robe himself passing on his wisdom to the company’s technicians. Once completed, each unit can be tested on one of Parr’s two in-house dynamometers. Race motors can be put on a rig while other engines can be kept in the chassis and tested on a hub dyno if necessary. In a similar vein, gearbox work can also be carried out at Parr’s Crawley base.

Parr’s restoration skills have been tested with various 2.7 Carrera RSs, with only the metalwork and painting carried out by third parties. “I’ve got a metalwork guy who I’ve used for about 20 years. He does all my special projects,” Robe explains. Sometimes it is better to admit where others are better after all. These types of project are kept at a sensible level to ensure the quality of the output is befitting the Parr name. “I won’t be one of those companies that does seven all in one go, because I’ve only got two guys who specialise in this area,” Paul says.

While these areas are familiar to Robe, one sector that Parr has only recently emerged into is sales. Thanks to the capital invested in the successful racing arm, being “cash rich is quite difficult.” Without much in the way of stock money, the majority of Parr’s sales are through ‘Sale or Return’ at the moment. However, this is something that is expected to change over the course of the next three to five years. “When we can we try and buy one or two,” elucidates Robe. “If you look at it

Company profile

- **Owner:** Paul Robe
- **Founded:** 1984
- **Location:** Crawley, West Sussex, UK
- **Paul’s first 911:** A five-year-old 2.2 911E bought in 1974
- **Rarest car worked on:** “A genuine 911 Carrera 2.8 RSR. We did a lot of work on that one: we built the engine, and we did a lot of remedial chassis work to make it look beautiful. It sold and went to Monaco. That one was a cracking car.”
- **Currently racing in:** Carrera Cup GB with Kieran Gallagher (Pro-Am1) and Peter Kyle-Henney (Pro-Am2). Parr are also responsible for the Porsche UK VIP car.

Contact

- **Website:** www.parr-uk.co.uk
- **Telephone:** +44(0)1293 537911

as part of a five-year plan, it will aid quite a strong growth in the business.”

Yet, with a wealth of RSs outside the HQ, including a 964 RS 3.8 Clubsport and 997 GT3 RS 4.0, the current ‘toe in the water’ is certainly proving popular. It’s testament to a reputation founded on three decades of excellent service and, if all goes to plan, the only way is up for Robe and his incredibly three-dimensional specialist. **911**