



# Parr *excellence*

Parr is a name synonymous with Porsche motorsport, but whether on track or off the company offers knowledge, experience and expertise across all models of the marque. As its 30th anniversary year drew to a close *Porsche Post* headed to Crawley to discover the secret of the organisation's enduring success.

Story by **Chris Seaward**, photographs by Ed Hartley →



Paul Robe, above right, has been at the helm of Parr since 1984 having started the company with his Father, Ray. The affable team in West Sussex welcome any kind of Porsche work and the motorsport standards which have stood them in such good stead over the decades also apply to road-going models

**P**aul Robe is as busy as ever and relishing every minute of it. Parr's well-known proprietor has been a leading light in the independent Porsche specialist scene for more than three decades, and 2014 has proved to be one of his most enjoyable years yet. Robe, who founded Parr with his father in 1984, is as passionate about all things Porsche today as he was then, and a tour around the company's premises demonstrates just how far that has taken him. At one end stands the 2014 Le Mans-winning Carrera Cup car of Ben Barker, while at the other is a 968 – owned by a Club member – on the lift for routine servicing.

'I love providing the team with hands-on support and offering my experience to them' explains Paul. 'When you have a busy workshop, focusing on lots of different projects, it can be very demanding, so I'm there to ensure everything that leaves us is done to the highest possible standard. Parr is a very family orientated business and we pride ourselves on the atmosphere we create.'

Paul's son, Declan, is a recent mechanical engineering graduate, and the 22-year-old has a host of experienced colleagues, and it is that continuity that has helped the company achieve such longevity. 'Some of the team have been with me for nearly 30 years and because of that we have a good knowledge base across all Porsches,' continues Paul. 'Attention to detail is key, and I think that's what Parr is particularly good at. I was working on the cars myself when they were brand new, so I got to know them inside out. What went wrong with them, why they went wrong, and perhaps most importantly how they behaved when they were new.'

Paul's own Porsche connection goes back a long way. He bought his first – a 911 2.2E – in

**'Attention to detail is key, and I think that's what Parr is particularly good at. I was working on the cars myself when they were brand new, so I got to know them inside out'**

1975, and that ultimately sowed the seeds of a high-profile and successful affiliation with the brand. Prior to the formation of Parr, Paul and his father, Ray, had been involved with Jaguar, Aston Martin and Mercedes-Benz, but Robe Junior always harboured ambitions to develop his love of Porsche into a business.

'It's very simple. I adored the brand, and formed an instant connection with it,' says Paul. 'I loved the 2.2 and the 2.4. Their sound, their looks, their rally successes – everything about them fascinated me. I wanted to buy a Porsche, but in those days there weren't many around, and when I told my father of my lofty ambitions he said I was mad! I was only 17, but very determined to own a Porsche, and in the end I acquired a 2.2-litre 911E when I was 20. That was it, really. I wanted to make Porsche a business – in fact, I wanted to make Porsche my father's business, which is where I worked at the time. But his fellow directors weren't keen to follow that path, so I pushed ahead



independently and formed a client base of my own which I serviced.'

When Parr was established in 1984 the Porsche independent scene was nowhere near as developed as it is today – in fact, it was virtually non-existent, and as Paul explains it was often a tricky place to be. 'Porsche itself didn't tend to interact with us,' says Paul. 'As such, it was a struggle to make people realise that we really could offer something. For example, we didn't get the daily parts deliveries that we do now, so we would have to go and collect everything. And, incredible though it sounds today, you couldn't easily get hold of workshop manuals.'

Parr's Porsche motorsport connection came

about in an organic fashion, but Paul admits that race-preparing Porsches propelled the organisation forward, and ultimately raised its profile hugely. 'In 1986 a chap came to see me with a 911E. He had seen the preparation work we had done for production saloon racing with Ford Escorts. He asked if we would be interested in preparing the car for free, if he provided all the parts. In return, it would become the Parr race car. I thought about it for a little while and decided that it would be good advertising, and so I agreed to do it.'

One thing led to another, and within just a couple of years Parr was preparing a whole host of race cars – but now charging a fee for its time

and knowledge. Eventually its reputation and expertise became such that in 1996 it entered two 993-model 911 GT2s at Le Mans. An impressive line-up included drivers from the UK and the USA, as well as New Zealand and France. Bill Farmer, Robert Neam and Greg Murphy drove car number one, and Stefan Ortelli, Andrew Pilgrim and Andy Bagnall car number two. It was an extraordinary debut, with the lead car crossing the line second in class, and the Ortelli/Pilgrim/Bagnall car fourth.

'We had a fantastic year in 1996. I had previously been a regular spectator at Le Mans, and had even helped out a bit in the paddock, so taking a team there was very special, indeed. →



# ‘We didn’t get the daily parts deliveries that we do now, so we would have to go and collect everything. And, incredible though it sounds today, you couldn’t easily get hold of workshop manuals’

Needless to say, when we got the opportunity to go back in 2014 it was absolutely fantastic – my son was there, and my father was there, as well. So it was *our* return last summer, just as much as it was Porsche’s, and to take victory in the Carrera Cup race was simply wonderful.

Away from the glamour of Le Mans, Parr spent many years racing with the Porsche Club GB Championship, and Paul himself was at one time a member of the Club’s Motorsport board. ‘At one stage we were running six or seven cars with Porsche Cars GB. That was at the time when Porsche was trying to introduce Carrera Cup to the UK, and in 2000 the company approached me about the series in the UK. I tendered for the job. They knew I was involved with the Club, and my they wanted to get the licence to run Carrera Cup. In 2003 they got the go-ahead.’

Impressive as Parr’s competition heritage undeniably is, the company has much greater depth than motorsport alone. It offers Porsche restoration, servicing, sales and personalisation work at its large West Sussex facility. Indeed, maintenance and servicing remains an important

cornerstone of Parr’s business. Up to 20 vehicles can be accommodated in the workshop at any one time, and it is encouraging to know that the same technicians who work on 991 GT3 race cars also turn their hand to routine oil and filter changes on one’s road car.

On the day we visited, a newly restored and absolutely stunning 911 Carrera 2.7 RS stood tantalisingly close to completion in the workshop. Engine rebuilds and gearbox work are dealt with in-house by Parr’s experienced team, with engines then tested on the company’s dynamometer. It is an impressive set-up, and one that welcomes all type of Porsche work. ‘We want people to understand that we are not into motorsport alone, and that we are happy to look after literally any model of Porsche,’ says Paul.

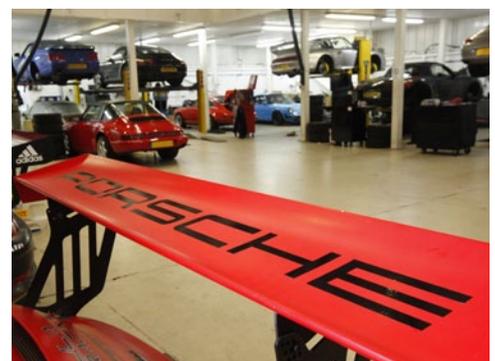
With that 2.7 RS in mind, and Porsche values rising at a seemingly unstoppable rate, it is no less interesting to hear Paul Robe’s take on the market’s current trajectory. ‘It feels to me that we are at a very special moment,’ he suggests. ‘We don’t know where the automobile itself is heading over the next 20 years or more, and we

are not even sure if the internal combustion engine will persist. All of us car enthusiasts still love the noise and smell that are such an integral aspect of the motor car. So we have to look towards electric propulsion. But that’s boring. Fast, yes, but boring.

‘That’s why cars – Porsches, that is – from the 1970s have become so sought-after. Back then they were built to be both fast and exciting, not just fast and economical like they are now that they are designed almost entirely by a computer rather than a human hand. Modern cars don’t look as exciting as they did in the 1970s, and they don’t feel the same. They don’t even *smell* the same. It’s a bygone era.’

Who knows what the future holds? One thing is beyond doubt, though. Parr will continue to be at the forefront of the Porsche movement. Its deep understanding of the brand, its attention to detail, and above all its infectious passion will ensure that true marque enthusiasts can always find a safe haven in West Sussex. **PP**

**01293 537 911**  
**www.parr-uk.co.uk**  
**e-mail: service@parr-uk.co.uk**  
**Parr, 5 Faraday Centre, Crawley,**  
**West Sussex, RH10 9PX**



For any Porsche enthusiast Parr’s expansive workshop is a great place to be and there is always plenty to catch the eye. Trophy cabinet (left) showcases some of the company’s motorsport heritage and includes a collection of awards from the Porsche Club GB Championship

