



Sussex-based Parr marked its 20th anniversary with a podium finish in this year's Britcar 24 Hour race. We discover how it grew into one of the most respected Porsche specialists in the country.

**C**hances are, you weren't one of the 95 or so people that bought tickets to see September's Britcar 24 Hour race at Silverstone. Let's face it, if the weather didn't keep you away the lack of organisation and promotion probably did.

Yet for the handful that did attend, the residing memory of the weekend is more likely than not to be the sight of Kelvin Burt at the wheel of Parr Motorsport's 996 GT3 Cup,

pushing 10-20 per cent harder than every other driver on a treacherously sodden track. The weekend's inclement weather had resulted in a cautious approach from the field's majority, but Burt was fully committed right from the start, on the limit and in the lead. It was a crushing demonstration of not only Burt's skill as a driver, but of a car set up by a company that knows exactly what it's doing.

Having seen the race car in action it's no

surprise that Parr has made a bit of a name for itself when it comes to finely honing Porsche's most track-focused 996, the GT3. As with any car Porsche builds – even a supposedly no-holds-barred machine like the RS – there are always compromises, the most noticeable of which manifests itself as a degree of understeer engineered into the setup.

"What we aim to do with the car is bring the handling back to the driver, so our first priority





Parr Motorsport's GT3 Cup races in 2005 Britcar series and picked up third overall at this year's Silverstone 24-hour





when setting up a car is to look at geometry," explains Parr's Lawrence Stockwell. "The camber is critical, as is toe and we can look at castor too if customers want us to. It's as much about knowing what to do with the parts as it is about fitting them," he says.

As with many of the top Porsche tuners, Parr has developed links with suppliers that can build parts to the company's specifications. For Parr these include Brembo, Michelin, BBS, and perhaps most notable of all, JRZ, the Dutch suspension specialist supplying Parr with its adjustable dampers, tuned to the company's specification. From here Parr also has equipment that can test and fine-tune a car's suspension settings, optimising them for different drivers' needs.

Since November 2004 Parr has traded from an impressive 12,000sq ft facility in Crawley, West Sussex, which has finally given the company the ability to carry out its road and motorsport work side by side.

"We have four service ramps, one four-wheel ramp for inspection and one dedicated wheel



alignment ramp, so we can carry out a lot of servicing work," explains Paul Robe, owner of the business (pictured above left). What strikes you as most impressive about this setup is that the road cars, which may be brought in for no more than a service, are given just as much space and attention as the several racing machines. Bringing your Porsche here must feel like the equivalent of dropping your Mercedes off for an oil change at McLaren.

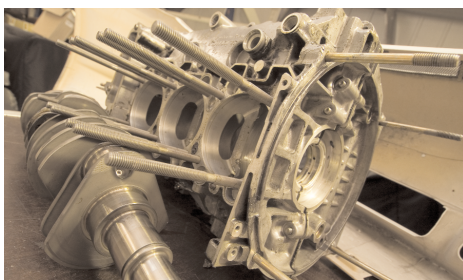
The truth is that servicing road cars in fact makes up the bread and butter of Parr's business, and you only need to glance over the selection of metal in the car park to realise that Parr isn't solely a motorsport and GT3 specialist. Parked up and waiting for inspection are all manner of Porsches, including 944s and air-cooled 911s of various vintages, not to mention a healthy dose of Boxsters to boot.

All of this isn't the work of a moment though, nor the fact that Parr now employs nine full-time technicians, along with a brace of admin staff.

It was in fact 20 years ago that Parr Garage

first began trading in Old Causldon, Surrey, set up by son and father team Paul and Ray Robe (hence 'Parr'). During the early years it was decided that Parr would not only dedicate its time to Porsche, but also begin what would become a long association with motorsport, the team of Paul and his three colleagues taking on the challenge of preparing a 2.4-litre 911E for the Giroflex Porsche championship. "That was a labour of love for us," recalls Paul. "We did the work for cost only and a bit of sponsorship on the car, and ended up fighting with some of the top racers, people like Mike Pickup and Bob Watson."

By 1994 the time had come for the company to expand, and so it headed to a new 4000sq ft site in Godstone, where it further developed the motorsport side of the business, competing in the BPR Championship in 1995 and '96 and even tackling the Le Mans 24 Hour in '96, where it finished an impressive second and fourth in class with its two 911 GT2s and a driver line-up that included Robert Nearn, Greg Murphy and Stefan Ortelli.



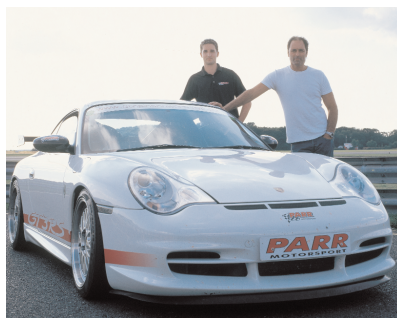


## THE PROOF OF THE PUDDING...

It's difficult not to be impressed when you visit Parr's headquarters. The bright white lighting, almost operating-room level of tidiness, the way the engineers go about their work in such a quiet, dedicated manner all add up to a very professional-looking outfit. However, none of this means anything if the end product is no good, which is why we headed to Bedford Autodrome to experience a Parr-fettled car for ourselves.

Steve Rance has used his GT3 RS as a serious track day machine, and with a fair bit of racing under his belt is also pretty handy behind the wheel. "This car has the full Parr package," Steve explains, "the dampers are JRZ single-way adjustable, the car has had a full geometry change and been balanced using Parr's corner weight scales." The result of all this is razor-sharp turn-in on track and a car with much more of a tendency to use its tail to get round a corner than a standard RS would indulge. Equally as

impressive as the handling are the car's brakes, with Steve having gone for Parr's recommendation of Brembo floating discs behind the front wheels with Pagid RS29 racing pads. The floating disc setup utilises an aluminium bell rather than the traditional hub, which as well as saving a useful amount of weight at each corner of the car allows for tireless stopping power as the floating disc is free to expand as it wishes, rather than being bolted directly to a hub (hence it is much less prone to warping under extreme use). Stopping power itself feels as strong as any ceramic system and, as Parr found out at the Britcar 24 Hour race, the floating discs are also very durable, the company's 911 lasting the race distance on just one set. The brakes don't come without fault – in particular they have a tendency to clatter when cold – but for a serious track day addict they are well worth consideration.



Parr's Lawrence Stockwell and customer Steve Rance pose next to Parr-fettled GT3 RS. Car even more focused on track than standard RS, with full geometry change and floating discs

Next challenge was the British GT championship, which Parr competed in from 1997-2000, including a two-year stint in Chrysler Vipers. "That was character building," sighs Paul, breaking into a laugh.

As Parr would soon discover, its efforts were to attract the attention of Porsche UK, which in 2001 gave the company – whose motorsport department was now based in Crowhurst – the contract to run its 911 GT3 RS in the GTO category of the British GTs. It was a great season's racing for Parr, with the Porsche UK cars finishing first and second in the championship, the team of Kelvin Burt and Marino Franchitti taking the spoils. It would be the same two drivers that would take Parr's 996 Britcar contender to an eventual third place at the aforementioned rain-hit Silverstone 24 Hour race. Nowadays Parr also runs the Porsche GB VIP car in the Carrera Cup Great Britain, a contract that began back in 2003 and sees Parr as Official Technical Support for the series.

It hasn't all been a smooth road for Paul and his team though. Disaster struck in 2003 when a fire destroyed Parr's old race shop three weeks before the start of the racing season. The blaze is thought to have originated from an electrical fault in an adjoining building, and having lost everything bar its race truck, Parr was forced to seek temporary accommodation before moving to its impressive new base in Crawley, where it has continued its reputation as one of the leading Porsche authorities in the UK. It would seem a natural evolution for Parr to now move into car sales, to complement its servicing and motorsport work, and although keen to do this Paul is likely to stick to models from 993 and onwards.

The new facility in Crawley has also allowed Parr to build a name for itself in the field of engine and gearbox rebuilds, with a dedicated engine room on the top floor of its workshop, as well as a hub-mounted dyno that allows the company to measure and, crucially, prove engine power up to 800bhp. The dyno also allows Parr's engineers to tune a car to the owner's needs, something that Lawrence stresses the value of: "It's not all about peak power, it's about where the power and torque are delivered, that's what can make a car feel and go fast. Having the dyno also allows us to control the running in of any engine rebuilds that we do, so is a really useful tool."

The company's connection with motorsport also means that new products and developments are always being worked on, and can be proven on track before making their way to the road.

Developments in the pipeline include a new lightweight exhaust for the GT3, which combined with a carbon fibre bumper is said to reduce weight at the rear of the car by 25-30 kilos. Parr has also been finalising the development of a set of upgrades for the stock 997, aimed at improving the car's performance on track. "It's a great car", says Lawrence of the latest 911, "but people are finding that it's very hard on its tyres out on track, scrubbing the outside edge particularly badly." To solve this Parr has been working with JRZ to produce a new electronic damper for 997 application, as well as fettling with geometry settings and finalising a Brembo brake system to use on the car. It could just be the perfect stop-gap until the arrival of the 997 GT3... ○







Hub-mounted dyno (top left) allows Parr to prove power up to 800bhp. The company has specialised in Porsche for 20 years