



CMC goes silver

Malcolm McKay visits Classic Motor Cars as it celebrates its 25th year hand-in-hand with the exciting new Marches Centre of Manufacturing & Technology

“We’re still growing the business,” enthuses CMC’s MD, Nigel Woodward. “XKs and E-types remain 80 per cent of our business and we’re proud of our 25-year history with Jaguar. We are the biggest Jaguar specialist in the UK, if not the world. Since moving into our new building four years ago, we’ve been able to expand into other marques, including Aston Martin, but we will work on and restore any car: we have a Capri convertible awaiting restoration, and have just put new sills and arches into a Nissan Figaro! If someone loves their car enough to want it restored to CMC’s standards, we’re happy to do it.

“This is a 360-degree classic-car business: we don’t contract out anything except processes that need specialist plant, such as chrome plating. Our car-storage business is growing, alongside restoration and service. In the past few months, we’ve been cataloguing and selling some of our vast stock of used components, accumulated over the past 25 years. We have a transporter to provide individual car event support, and we were very happy to support XK70.

“We have 50 employees and are recruiting four more. With 60,000sq ft of buildings, we have more than 100 cars on site, and another 65 in storage. At any time, there are about 50 cars being worked on – including, at present, 13 major restorations or refurbs. As you know, we’re now an Employee Ownership Trust: everyone is a beneficiary and, as such, we have a council meeting once a month so members can have input into how the business is run. Peter [Neumark] sees it as a legacy project, to provide his staff with a livelihood for many years to come.

“We now have a dedicated Quality Controller: we carry out



- Top: CMC’s sparkling new premises are fronted by a superb line-up of cars, well worth a visit any time but especially on 18 August for the birthday party
- Above: this delightful 150 FHC is reaching the final stages of a full restoration – XKs remain a core part of CMC’s business

a 240-point check on every car that comes in or out, whatever it comes in for. That way, no car goes out with a serious fault unnoticed: if it came in for an oil change but happened to have a fault in the braking system, for example, we will find it. Tim the Production Manager, Nick the Workshop Controller, and I all randomly drive the cars we’ve worked on, to ensure they drive as they should – there’s no substitute for experience. Most owners have only driven their own car, and often don’t know how it really should feel.

“We have £350,000 worth of parts in the stores and while we’ve no plans to compete with parts specialists, we do sell a fair number of upgrades, especially wiper upgrades and headlamp relay conversions. We also have 14-15 cars for sale, which we now park at the front if there’s good weather, as well as in the showroom. Two-thirds are customers’ cars – they bring them to us because we are successful in moving cars.”

Walking around CMC’s extensive buildings, I’m struck by how spotless it all is, clearly organised with the staff happy and busy, from the young apprentices to the old hands: there’s a clear sense of purpose and pride in their work. It’s most impressive and gives a positive outlook for the next 25 years of this thriving classic car business – which has also taken a massive step to support that future by investing heavily in the Marches Centre for Manufacturing and Technology next door.

“The big challenge for all businesses in the classic car world is finding the right staff,” says Nigel. “The skills base is just not there. It’s the most important issue we face for the future of the business.”

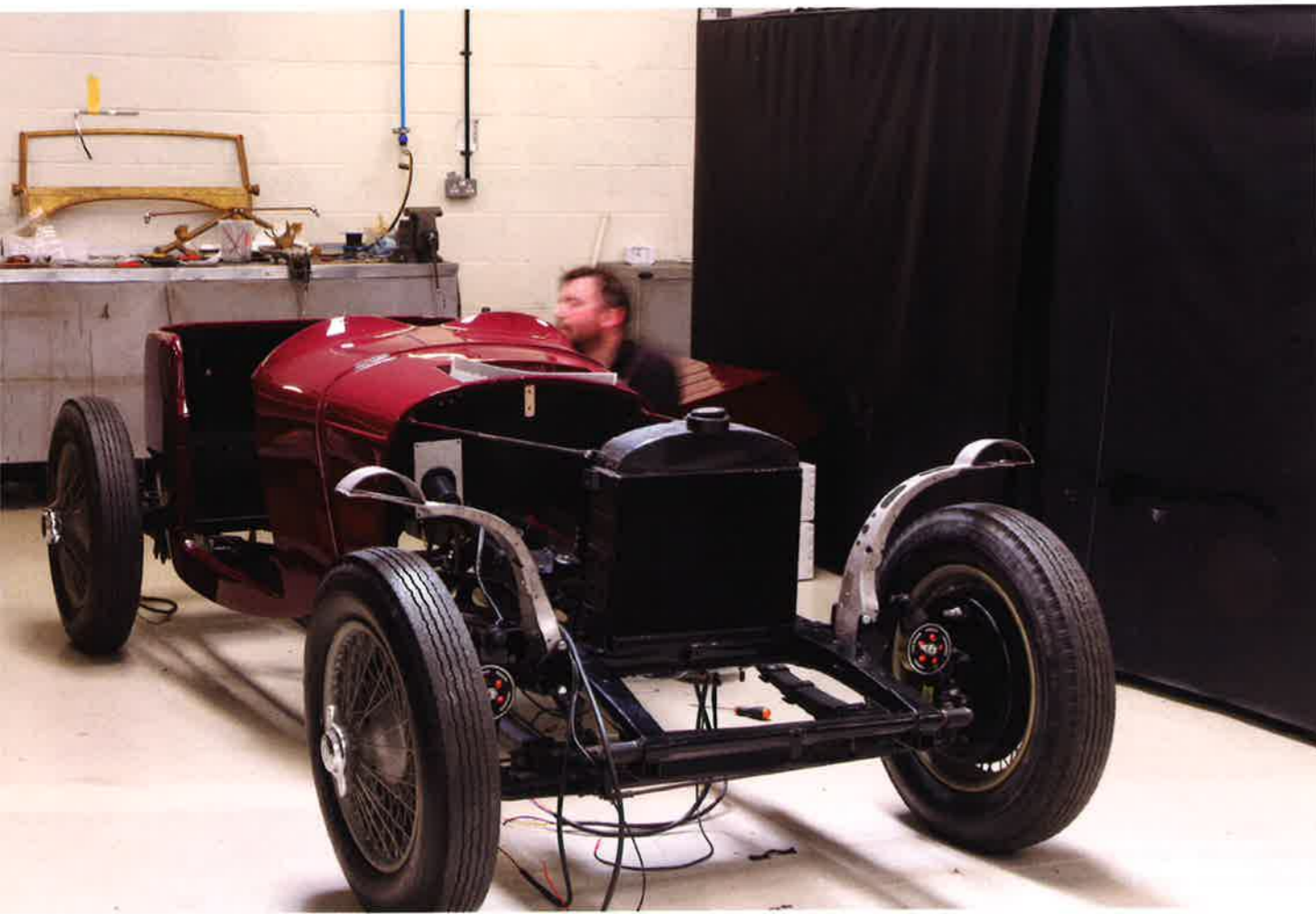
Peter Neumark joins me to explain the background to MCMT and give me a guided tour of this impressive new facility, which opened in September 2017.

“It came about through a chance conversation with Ed Grainger,” Peter explains. Grainger & Worrall is a huge, successful and forward-looking foundry and engineering company on the same Bridgnorth site. It casts most of the Formula One teams’ engine blocks, among many other projects.

“There are four companies involved,” continues Peter.



- Top: other marques feature increasingly now that CMC has the space and capacity to diversify
- Above: a 120 OTS on the ramp: the workshops are always immaculate, with a dedicated cleaner working flat-out to keep them that way



- Above: this SS100 3.5-litre is undergoing a full restoration, with great attention to detail
- Left: CMC changed to Glasurit paints last year and is delighted with the results, which include a global warranty so that wherever a car goes, a local Glasurit specialist can attend to warranty claims to the exact standard used by CMC

“CMC, Grainger & Worrall, Shropshire Design & Engineering, and training business In-Comm. We raised £2.5m to get it off the ground, with investment now over £4m including EU funding, and we are talking to American universities that have a policy to disseminate their teaching remotely through satellite links.

“We couldn’t have restored the Pininfarina XK 120 to the same standard without modern technology. With only photographs to help us recreate original components such as the lights and bumpers, we were able to scan the body and use CAD on the photos to recreate these components accurately. For the lights, we could 3D-print the surround and get it chromed, while the lens was machined out of solid acrylic: hugely expensive, of course, but at least it was possible, and the results are superb.”

MCMT is therefore at the forefront of modern technology, but it also will provide a crucial service to the classic car industry, by providing training



- Above right: apprentices Thomas (left) and Harry are restoring this Lancia Aurelia. Their enthusiasm is clear – as Nigel says: “You recruit for attitude, and train for aptitude”
- Right: another XK chassis takes shape, alongside a fine MKV. Thirteen cars are currently undergoing full restoration at CMC
- Below: the trim shop is exceptionally busy – Luke is putting the chrome trims in an E-type hardtop that will shortly be shipped out to Japan



in all the skills that are dying out as existing tradesmen such as panel beaters, trimmers and mechanics reach retirement age. MCMT's Heritage Engineering Apprenticeship course is fully formulated and Government funding has been agreed, and it is hoped this will be a trailblazer scheme that can be rolled out at other training centres around the UK.

Other classic car specialists need to engage with it to ensure the future of the industry, because it will involve a traditional apprenticeship with probably a City & Guilds qualification on a block release scheme. The first year will be an overview of automotive, aviation, marine and steam engineering, then in the second year apprentices will focus on their chosen speciality and learn special skills such as panel beating, precision welding, etc.

This extremely exciting prospect for the industry will definitely go ahead; the details will be confirmed imminently and the course tutor, Rob Hanquist, has already been recruited. For more information, contact MCMT on 01922 457686 or CMC on 01746 765804. Both are at Stanmore Industrial Estate, Bridgnorth, Shropshire WV15 5HP.

CMC invites all XK Club members to its 25th-anniversary event on 18 August. It's an open house from 10am to 5pm: you can tour the workshops, the Training Centre will be open, there will be a special beer, food stalls, autojumble, booksellers, toy cars, live music, a Scalextric track in the showroom and even a bouncy castle for the kids – everyone is welcome. On display will be 25 cars restored at CMC, one from each year, including the Pininfarina XK 120, D-type OKV 1, XK 140 PWT 846 and other special XKs. A concours will be held, geared towards pride of ownership: while there's no need to book to attend the day, if you'd like to take part in the concours or have a stall at the event, email lucy@classic-motor-cars.co.uk to let them know; there's no charge.



- Top right: CMC keeps a substantial stock of new parts, necessary for ongoing service and restoration work, and also sells various upgrade kits
- Above right: just part of the magnificent Marches Centre of Manufacturing & Technology premises: future plans include the addition of a mezzanine floor to cope with further expansion
- Right: from left, Peter Neumark, Matt Snelson (MCMT MD) and Nigel Woodward (CMC MD) are rightly proud of the tremendous training facility that they've brought to life