



Denis Welch Motorsport's Jeremy Welch with Julian Thomas' championship-winning E-type

Complete control

From design to manufacture and general maintenance to race car preparation, Denis Welch Motorsport offers the complete service for E-type owners. We head to its Staffordshire headquarters to learn more

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY PAUL WALTON

HANGING ON the wall in Denis Welch Motorsport's reception at its Staffordshire headquarters are three rows of beautiful black-and-white framed pictures. Taken a century ago, they show a workshop belonging to Brooke Marine, an engineering firm in Lowestoft that once belonged to the great grandfather of Jeremy Welch, Denis Welch Motorsport's managing director and son of the firm's founder.

"I like these pictures," Jeremy tells me when I arrive. "They show that they did everything back then, from design to manufacturing. It's what I aspire to." With Denis Welch Motorsport designing all its competition and performance parts, as well as producing many onsite, plus preparing road and racing cars, I can tell he means it.

Jeremy's father, Denis, was himself an engineer and in 1977 moved to the

company's current location – originally a petrol station and general garage – where he began to service modern cars, tractors and horse boxes. It was also the family home, and Jeremy lived here for a good part of his childhood. The house, albeit extended and now transformed into offices, remains central to DWM's activities.

However, Denis' real passion was for racing. Says Jeremy, "He had competed in the Sixties, starting with a Mini before moving onto a Ford Anglia in Touring Cars and then a Formula Atlantic single-seater. But, he packed it all up when he moved to Staffordshire."

In the early Eighties, Denis bought an Austin-Healey. When he found that he couldn't buy competition parts for it, he started making some himself. Thanks to both his and the car's speed, people started asking if they could buy them, and Denis eventually set up a parts department for Austin-Healeys. When the burgeoning

company became more successful, Denis stopped servicing modern cars to concentrate on preparing other people's Healeys. Denis Welch Motorsport quickly became synonymous with this classic brand, and remains so to this day.

The company focused only on Healeys until the late Nineties, when an existing customer asked DWM to look after his competition E-type. "We were surprised to discover that we couldn't get the same quality of Jaguar products as we were offering Healey owners," says Jeremy. "No one, for example, was offering straight-cut gears or Cosworth pistons for the E-type."

Because DWM was already producing its own high-quality parts for the Healey, it had no problem in doing the same for the E-type, although Austin-Healeys still dominated the business.

A turning point for the company came in the early 2000s, when the same E-type was

sold to John Clark of the John Clark Motor Group – and he employed professional driver Gregor Fiske to race it.

Explains Jeremy, "We had produced our first Jaguar parts catalogue in 2003, but when the car started to win and word got out about us; that's when our Jaguar stock became a larger part of the company."

Jeremy put DWM's success in the Jaguar market down to quality and the simplicity of its products. "Many Jaguar competitors like to do things differently, but our parts are interchangeable, easy-to-use and legal for competition."

Another important stage in DWM's history came 12 years ago, when Jeremy took over from his father. Other than a couple of periods elsewhere – including at Formula 1 engine manufacturer Judd during the Eighties – he had worked for the company since a teenager, and had even created all the drawings for the parts the company produced. "I'd always been interested in engineering the design, and up until recently we were still manufacturing off pencil drawings I'd done at school."

Looking to the future and wanting to improve the quality of DWM's products,

one of the first changes Jeremy made was to invest in CAD (computer-aided design). Today, all DWM's products, even the ones Jeremy started with a pencil, are designed with Autodesk Inventor – powerful software for creating 3D digital prototypes.

"CAD ensures the same quality of every part every time it's produced," he explains, "because products made from prototype samples can be different every time."

Today, DWM has 10,500 CAD drawings and models on file: a figure Jeremy reckons is unique in the classic performance part market. "The more drawings you have, the easier it is to make sure everything fits together, which is important since we're producing more and more peripheral products, and CAD helps us to achieve that."

Because Jeremy wants to do as much on site as possible, DWM has a 3D printer for prototypes, plus a CNC lathe that is used for small batches. Larger volumes are produced by outsourced machine shops, but to Welch's own specifications.

Jeremy reckons DWM has 270,000 items in stock at any one time, stored in a huge warehouse – a modern extension adjoining the original house. "Our ethos is

to always keep the products on the shelves, which is rare; people want to go motor racing tomorrow, and nobody else stocks competition parts." Customers can order products by speaking directly to one of DWM's experienced sales advisors using the parts hotline (01543 472244) or via an online chat room on its website.

Parts are only one section of this busy concern. Adjoining the main building is a fully specified workshop where racing cars are built and prepared for customers. These are predominantly Austin-Healeys and Series 1 E-types because that's what Jeremy knows (although he was recently persuaded to take on a Ford Falcon saloon).

"I've grown up with Healeys. There are only three or four different models and I know them intimately. I wouldn't want to be put on the spot and asked questions about XKs or Mk 2s when I wouldn't have an answer."

The most successful Jaguar that Denis Welch Motorsport currently maintains is Julian Thomas' 1962 low-drag E-type, which is in the workshop on the day of my visit, looking low and sleek next to the old-fashioned Healeys alongside. Thomas won the 2016 Jaguar Classic Challenge with co-driver Calum Lockie after coming first in an astounding four out of five races.

DWM also offers trackside assistance, transporting and preparing racing cars in its huge, bright-red articulated lorry, which has been converted into a mobile workshop.

DWM looks after a few road cars, too. In front of Thomas' racing car there is a beautiful E-type Series 1 in road trim that has just been serviced and put through its MOT.

Complete with DWM's successful engine shop, which can rebuild Jaguar and Healey engines for road or race use, and a bodyshop for restorations and crash repairs, Jeremy is close to achieving the goal he set himself: to be totally self-sufficient, just as his great grandfather had been a century ago.



David Croft under an E-type that DMW built from a bare shell for an overseas customer



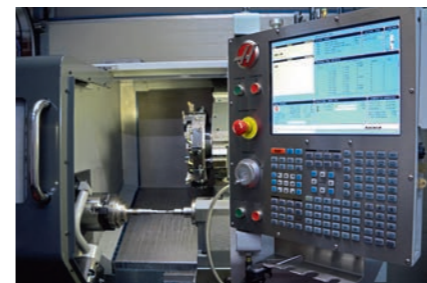
Just some of the 270,000 items that Denis Welch Motorsport has in stock



Cheryl Robson and Jeremy Welch examine a 3D printed oil transfer housing



Scott Dobson in Denis Welch Motorsport's fabrication room



The CNC lathe that Denis Welch Motorsport uses for producing prototypes and small batches



DWM has its own dyno to test engines after they've been rebuilt



Denis Welch Motorsport

Sudbury Road, Yoxall
Burton on Trent
Staffordshire DE13 8NA
Tel: +44(0)1543 472214
Email: sales@bighealey.co.uk
Website: www.bighealey.co.uk