

CLASSIC DRIVER

DK Engineering is a sworn protector of the Prancing Horse

Lead

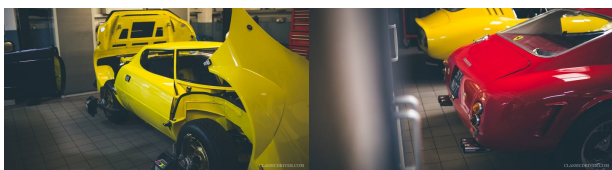
A company so synonymous with those scarlet Prancing Horses from Maranello, DK Engineering celebrates its 40th anniversary this year, incidentally at the same time Ferrari marks its 70th birthday. Before the celebrations really start to kick off, we spent a day out at the company's Chorleywood HQ...

Deep-rooted appeal



According to DK Engineering's James Cottingham, the appeal of a Ferrari harks back to the 1950s, when they weren't always the fastest cars on the track, but they were almost certainly the strongest and most reliable. "You really notice that when you restore a classic Ferrari", he comments. "With an Aston Martin DB5, for example, you'll invariably replace almost the entire body and upgrade a number of components to enhance its value. But with a 275 GTB/4, it's superb as standard, and you'll actually devalue it if you do anything other than bring it back to original condition."

Restoration to perfection



Restoration has always been a fundamental pillar of DK Engineering, ever since David Cottingham and his wife Kate (the 'K' in DK) founded the business in 1977. After a spell of restoring and racing former Works Jaguars, David's lifelong fascination with Italian componentry inevitably led him to Ferrari. Well aware of the sheer number of Ferrari sports cars — particularly from the 1950s — in dire need of repair or being reunited with their original engines, and that few others (in Britain, at least) understood these exotic machines as well as they did, the couple set about travelling around the world to find, buy, restore, and sell them. "It was like folklore", explains David, "you learned about these things by meeting other people."

Fiery, exciting





“There was serious kudos attached to Ferraris back then, because they were fiery, exciting, and different”, recalls Kate. “Unlike Jaguars, there were many different body styles, which meant you could only tell it was a Ferrari by looking at the badges.” With the invaluable help of fellow specialist David Clark, the Ferrari Owners’ Club, and a welcoming fraternity of enthusiasts in the United States, the Cottinghams were able to obtain and essentially rescue some of the most important Ferraris of them all, including Pierre Bardinon’s ex-Fangio 860 Monza. “That one was in his chicken shed”, quips David.

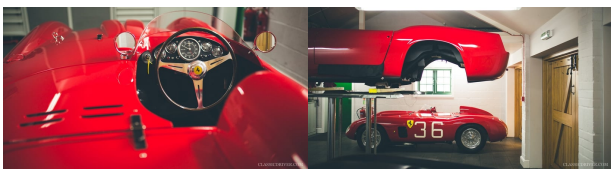
Discerning detail



To this day, ‘Restoration to Perfection’ is still DK Engineering’s tagline, and it manages six to eight predominantly Ferrari projects a year, handling every aspect in-house, save for the paint and upholstery, which are entrusted to a number of highly skilled specialists. “The simple reason for this is that we cater to owners of entirely different cars”, explains James. “The man who wants his 355’s bumper painting will require a different standard of job — and cost — to the man who wants his California Spider painting.” While originality always takes priority, each car must be technically and mechanically spot on.

Talking of California Spiders, there are two in DK’s restoration shop during our visit. One is fresh from the paint shop, before which its body was prepared for a staggering 450 hours. “While the cars are away being painted, we go full steam ahead with the preparation of parts, so that the process is quick and simple when it returns”, James says, referring to a worktop filled with beautifully finished metal work. It’s those small, intricate, and tactile details that make such a difference when the car’s finished, now more than ever in today’s ever discerning and knowledgeable market. Just look at what’s arguably DK’s current pièce de résistance, the 500 TR, chassis number 0614MDTR, as an example.

Best of Show



James admits this was a particularly complex and challenging project that took three years in total. “It had been in such a bad way, and we really fought to save as much of the original body as possible.” It’s these drop-dead-gorgeous four-cylinder Ferraris for which DK became so renowned in the early days of the business, as they’re so complicated to work on. As such, most were fitted with simpler American V8s in the 1950s and ‘60s, with the original units lost or abandoned. “No one really knew how to rebuild the four-cylinders when they broke. But Dad was intrigued, and he loved to make them work again.” The company’s hard work was rewarded with a Best of Show at last year’s Salon Privé, which was even more impressive given that David raced it successfully at the Goodwood Revival the year before.

We’re sold



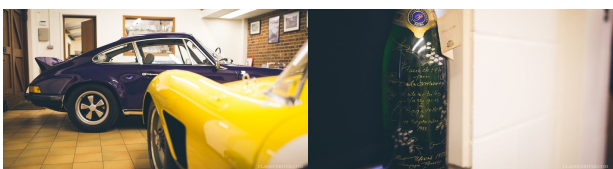
In conjunction with restoration and servicing, James leads the ever-expanding sales side of the business, assisted by Harvey Stanley and Tom Durham. There are approximately 30–35 cars in stock at any one time, 70% of which bear a Prancing Horse on the nose, spread over three different gallery showrooms. The variety is spectacular, from one of just 11 steel-bodied right-hand-drive 250 GT SWBs to limited-edition 'modern classics', such as the 458 Speciale and Porsche 993 GT2. "These air-cooled 911s are the cars of the moment", James comments, quoting their affordability in comparison to their Maranello foes and the ease at which a unique Porsche collection can be curated as reasons for their recent surge in value.

More than the sum of its parts



And what of the classic Ferrari market? The DK team is unanimous in its belief that it will go from strength to strength, thanks in part to the internet, which has equipped buyers with a new level of knowledge and access to fiercely popular events, such as the Goodwood Revival. "When we moved to this farm in 2007, we didn't anticipate the huge growth in Ferrari values over the last 10 years, and the restoration side has picked up drastically as a result", explains James. "If you've owned a four-cam for 10 or 15 years, it's now probably worth spending the extra £300,000 to make it perfect. Everyone's expectation of quality has risen massively." Kate also believes the current spell of low-interest rates has helped the market, encouraging collectors from other spheres into the car world.

Ain't no mountain high enough



You don't need to be a Ralph Lauren or an Eric Clapton (both of whom, incidentally, are former patrons) to get the full experience — James insists an owner of a 360 Modena looking for some routine maintenance or long-term storage will be treated with the same respect and transparency as someone who wants to buy a 250 GT SWB and have it

comprehensively restored.

Of course, DK has become synonymous with Ferrari over the past 40 years, and we're keen to find out how it feels to have the company's name on the history files of so many important Ferraris. "It's gratifying", says David. "I often think, gee, that's my old car, and of course, there are many that I'd like to have back!" And his favourite car of them all? "The 860 Monza — that was the peak of the mountain." Something tells us there are many, many more scarlet mountains to climb in the future.

Photos: Tom Shaxson for Classic Driver © 2017

Gallery

