

TECH: SPECIALIST

NORTH DEVON PORSCHE

If official Porsche Centres aren't your thing and you even find some of the larger independent specialists a little impersonal, perhaps sir's Porsche would care for some old school attention from Martin Reed of North Devon Porsche

Words & Photography: Jeremy Laird



In this age of plug-in diagnostics, pre-baked decision trees, remote-guided fault finding and electronic everything, the value of hands-on experience, mechanical nous, a no-nonsense approach and perhaps a deft hand with a plasma torch are all too easy to overlook. But it's also very easy to appreciate what's gone missing of late when you visit Martin Reed of North Devon

Porsche. Martin's out of the old school and it's all for the better.

Based in Cladavin, near Barnstaple in Devon, we dropped by Martin's workshop for a quick oil change and check over of one of 911&PW's newest arrivals, a 3.2-litre 986 Boxster. It's a very early car in the modern water-cooled Porsche idiom, but thoroughly arriviste by Martin's storied standards. Not that he has any problem accommodating moderns. Martin has all the

dreaded diagnostic kit, including Porsche's PST2 (which was the system used when the 986 Boxster was on sale) and the later PIWIS system.

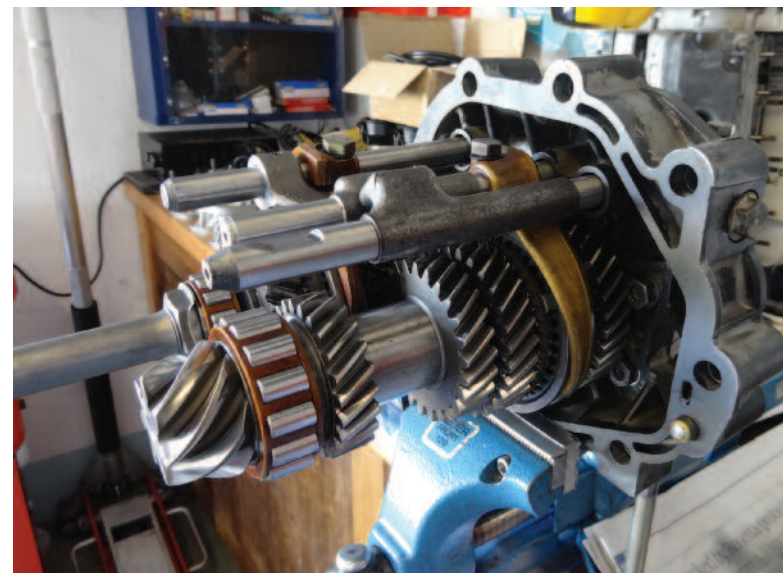
So, plugging in and investigating a slightly lumpy idle via the diagnostics was no problem. Martin will sniff ramp angles and plot graphs with the best of them. The likely solution, however, is surely illustrative of the value of experience. Pull the electronic throttle body and give it a clean.

It's not often that we get to actually road test a specialist, but author, Jeremy Laird, can speak from first hand experience having booked his new Boxster into North Devon Porsche



By his own admission, air-cooled is more Martin Reed's thing. 930 Turbo engine (far left) looks particularly purposeful sitting on engine stand

Right: 901 gearbox rebuild underway. Far right: Carrera 3.0 engine is from ongoing project



No new parts required, just a little of Martin's time. Or yours, if you'd prefer. Martin will explain how to do it and send you home to get at it DIY, if you prefer. Indeed, every day is a school day in the company of an experienced mechanic like Martin. His background in the business is intriguing stuff. Originally trained as a Royal Navy engineer, by the 1980s he was committed to cars. "In the very dim and distant, the mid '80s" he explains, "I was at the Porsche main agent in Exeter, Parks as it was then. It was an unusual place with the showroom downstairs and the workshop upstairs."

A combination of not enjoying the commute to Exeter and an increasing number of requests to do customer cars on the side, however, saw Martin independently set up shop shortly thereafter and he's been at it ever since. Initially, the

focus wasn't primarily Porsche. "Back then, there weren't anywhere near the numbers. So while I did work on Porsches from the beginning, it wasn't exclusive by any means. I was also a retained fireman at the time, too. A handy little filler!"

a few of them and then a Mercedes 230SL Pagoda. That was heavier than the big saloon, never really liked it even if it was a good car for its day. It's a pre-1965 car, remember."

However, in terms of rallying, it was an

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In the early 1990s, it was building historic rally cars and competing as a navigator that got most of Martin's attention. Among others, he built rally-spec fintail Mercs. "The same cars the baddies drove in Thunderball. Actually an excellent car. I did

Italian that really turned Martin's head. "The best car I built, my favourite of the rally cars, was the Alfa, a 105 Giulia coupe. It had the same floorplan and running gear as the Spider, but in a beautiful little two door coupe. They were light years ahead of their



930 Turbo will be worth the wait once it's fully restored/rebuilt

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Encouragingly, Jeremy's Boxster gets a clean bill of health

911SC is another ongoing workshop restoration, alongside Martin's own Carrera 3.0



time, too. It came out in '64 with a gorgeous little 1600 all-alloy twin cam engine, five-speed alloy gearbox with Porsche synchromesh in it, as it happens, and disc brakes all round. All in the mid '60s. Incredible. It weighed far less than a tonne,

and Martin focused more on workshop and restoration services of Porsche road cars.

Chatting to Martin as he has a good sniff around the Boxster is like mining a rich seam of hard-won experience. "Nice dry rear seal," says Martin, "there isn't even a

the main bearings and the crank and that's then fitted inside this shell, which in turn has the barrels in it. Really, it's absolutely crazy. Firstly, you're losing a lot of structural strength. Also, given production tolerances, having the rear main seal in a different body as the crank you can get slight misalignments and flex. So some engines never leak, others you can put in seal after seal and, bugger me, it's leaking again in a few weeks."

Some handy advice on exhaust bolts and how to remove the retaining nuts for the underbody cladding without snapping the studs affixed to the bottom of the floorplan, not to mention whipping off a pair of rattling heat shields and the bequeathing of a clean bill of health for the Boxster – "It's in good order" – and we're done. But as

“Some engines never leak, others you can put in seal after seal”

made about 130hp. Very quick. It always made top 10 finishes if it didn't break."

Rallying all got a bit serious in the late '90s, meanwhile the number of Porsches in need of maintenance was on the up and up

misting of wetness," he says. But why do they leak so often? "Ah, fundamentally the problem is that the main bearings and crank are not in a single unit with the block. There's a great big square housing carrying



Left: Old school 924/944 schematics add a technical air to the workshop. Martin Reed attends to the vital fluids

comfortable and conversant as Martin is with a modernist Boxster, it's really the air-cooled stuff that he enjoys the most. That's partly because Martin thinks long term and realises how the increasing complexity of later models threatens to make them impossible to maintain in the very long run. With modern Porsches full of custom ECUs dotted about the car and heavily integrated with one another, often making it difficult or impossible to simply leave parts of the system out, the long term future looks uncertain at best. "Electronics will be the end of them," Martin says.

Thus, his main ongoing project as we visit is a full restoration of a 3.0 Carrera, the engine of which is sitting bolting to a stand. Although the Carrera 3.0 is a relative

sleeper today, Martin remembers them being quite the thing back in the day. "For a long time Carrera 3.0s were very desirable," Martin reckons, "it's got a really nice, cammy engine. They were actually better than the car that replaced it. Yes, the second generation of its successor, the SC, made similar power, but it was also quite a bit heavier. They were trimming them for hairdressers by then!" We also discuss another formerly hidden gem, the 2.7 Carrera and how Porsche's finishing and rust proofing went tangibly downhill with the 3.2 Carrera series.

Currently, air-cooled restorations like that Carrera 3.0 are the core of his activities, but Martin will turn his hand to almost anything. Overall, it's not hard to warm to

how Martin goes about things. He's the kind of old school engineer that instantly gives you confidence in both his ability to look after your car and that he has your interest at heart. These days, even independent specialists can tend to be large, relatively impersonal and a little numbers driven. There are so many Porsches out there today, so many customers and a lot of money to be made servicing them. As soon as you begin to scale that kind of business up, something is inevitably, unavoidably lost. A visit to Martin Reed quickly reminds you of what, exactly, goes missing. His operation is a little smaller and more traditional and many including this author will think that's all for the good. **PW**



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