



# NOT JUST A ROLLING ROAD...

Northampton Motorsport may be best known as a rolling road specialist but, as we discovered, there's plenty more going on in a typical day...

Words and pictures: Ian Stent



Left to right: Steve Wooding, Troy Robinson, Chris Robinson, James Hatfield and Alex Goddard.

## VITAL STATISTICS

**Company:** Northampton Motorsport  
**Location:** Northampton, Northamptonshire  
**Number of employees:** 6  
**Unit size:** 6500sq ft  
**Main services:** Engine tuning, suspension set-up, race and rally prep, carburettor servicing, ECU remapping, vehicle diagnostics

**D**oors open at 8.30am at Northampton Motorsport, and waiting to be let in is new Ariel owner Peter Collins and his latest spec Atom. Peter's in to get a quick power run on Northampton's rolling road, just to check that his new toy is delivering the 310bhp claimed for its supercharged Honda engine. He's the first, but he won't be the last, to use Northampton's Superflow AD30 two-wheel drive dyno facility today (capable of running cars with up to 1200bhp!). Ben Marriott is bringing in his Caterham Roadsport later this morning, while Chesterfield based Dansport should be here from 1pm for mapping of a Life Racing ECU controlling the 3.0-litre air-cooled engine in a Porsche 911.

These three very diverse cars epitomise the variety of machinery that Northampton typically comes into contact with during any normal day, either on the rollers or on the other side of the sound-proofed doors in the large workshop space. Kit car enthusiasts may be most familiar with Northampton Motorsport for its rolling road facility, but this is actually only one cog within a much more diverse business.

Wheel alignment is one of the more obvious facilities on show within the workshop, not least because of the impressive lift on which cars are set up with the company's Hunter HD 4-wheel alignment system. A Westfield is getting a thorough check-over this morning, but once again demonstrating the diversity of machinery being worked on is a VW Transporter booked in for alignment this afternoon!

What strikes any visitor walking into Northampton's facility is the sheer number of cars parked up. Northampton's Troy Robinson, who runs the company with business partner Steve Wooding, explains that it's an inevitable consequence of the work they do. Because much of their work is investigative it means that when cars come in, often specialist parts have to be ordered (or even made) in order for them to go back out again, and therefore there can be a pause while these vital components are accumulated.

What's very apparent is that, despite all the diversity of machinery in evidence, Caterhams and Westfields are here in numbers. The company knows both models inside out and has been main

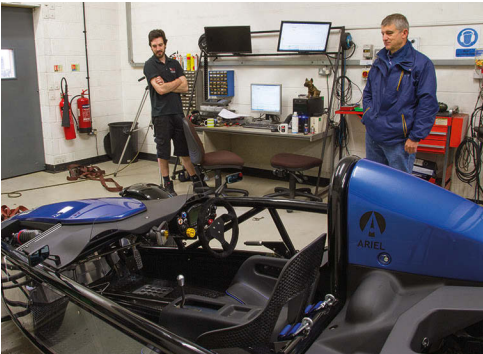




Ben looks on as Troy puts the car through several power runs



Workshop area is packed with cars.



Atom owner Peter Collins and technician James Hatfield.



Supercharged Ariel Atom in for a power run.



Westfield on Northampton's four-wheel alignment platform.

sponsor of the Westfield Sports Car Club Speed Series for many years. No surprise, then, that some of the cars here are race cars, but others are fun road cars too. As if to prove the point, shortly after we arrive Ben Marriott drives in with his Caterham road car. Peter's Atom has delivered 298bhp and seems in rude health...

Ben's K-series Caterham is in for an engine health check before an imminent run down to Le Mans. It's recently had a full rebuild with K-Series guru Dave Andrews of DVA Power. Now run in, Ben wants to check it's doing what it should and, if necessary, any tweaks to the DTA ECU can be done. The specification of his engine is high, with the 1800cc twin-cam delivering 215bhp on its last visit to Northampton some four years ago. This is Ben's second Caterham, and he's a serial kit car owner, having previously built a Tiger Cat back in 2000, followed by a Stuart Taylor Locoblade in 2002 before buying his first Caterham (a pre-owned Caterham Superlight R) in 2006. Typical of a serial kit car builder, although his latest Roadsport Caterham was pre-owned, Ben's almost completely rebuilt it, injecting lots of unique features to suit his requirements.

After being carefully strapped into place and with Northampton's electronics plugged into the DTA ECU, the engine is fired up and left to idle for a few minutes. Troy feels the idle is a little rough and tweaks the settings even before the rollers are put

into use. By the end of the morning some further tweaks have fine-tuned an already impressive package and Northampton gives the K-Series a clean bill of health, giving Ben peace of mind before the long run to La Sarthe in a few weeks' time. As he reverses his car off the rollers, Dan Sutherland of Dansport is ready to come in with the 911. There's little time to pause.

Northampton Motorsport has been an agent for Life Racing ECUs for around three years and it's a premium product that Troy and the team are proud to represent. Life Racing supplies all the engines and electronics for GP3, is the mandated ECU for Formula Ford and also has cars using its technology in disciplines as varied as endurance racing and rallying. For all that, Northampton also works closely with other ECU manufacturers, in particular Omex Technology.

Back in the workshop, rally and race preparation is Northampton's bread and butter, and today a Ford Fiesta Stock Hatch race car is in for a general spanner check. It's a regular at the unit, with the owner getting Northampton to look after it between events. Also elevated on one of two two-post lifts in the main unit is a Mk2 Cortina. In for a cylinder head repair, when it was being pushed around the unit a track rod end snapped off the front suspension (thankfully happening at walking speed rather than on a public road!), so one of the team is replacing it this morning.

Other jobs for today include installing an Omex ECU in a BMW race car and removing the engine

and gearbox from a Caterham that has a mystery problem within the gearbox.

These jobs should keep the three main technicians at Northampton (Chris Robinson, Alex Goddard and James Hatfield) busy for today, but if there's time then one of the various long-term project cars can always get some love. A Jaguar E-Type is in for almost total recommissioning, while a unique Caterham is a regular at Northampton... shipped back from Dubai where it resides, this car features an RST V8 up front (using two bike cylinder heads on a bespoke block). It's currently got a bent front stub axle and there's an issue with the gearbox that needs looking into before the owner drives it down for the Le Mans Classic. It's a crazy looking machine with massive wheelarch extensions over the back wheels.

Other cars we can't ignore but which are unlikely to see attention today include a Jaguar straight six powered Ronart, a Spirit Racing Norma M20 single seater, a meticulously created classic Mini and a gaggle of front-engined Porsches parked outside.

In addition to the services already mentioned, Northampton is an old-school carburettor specialist too (business partner Steve Wooding's speciality), so rebuilding/restoring carburettors is a regular feature, while setting-up twin carbs comes as second-nature. But for those looking to move onto something more modern, but without losing the classic look, Northampton has also taken the significant step of recently developing its own

DCOI in-carb injection system, meaning modern driving dynamics with a distinctly old-school under-bonnet look. Other services include ECU remapping, vehicle diagnostics and more generalised spannerwork... it's not just about engine tuning.

As the doors close at 5.30pm (12.30pm on Saturdays) it's been a typically busy day. The Westfield and VW Transporter had alignment issues sorted, three cars came off the rollers with happy customers, while in the workshop several other cars progressed in readiness for competition success or on-road entertainment. And in the office Amanda Lockwood has been booking in more work for the boys... it never stops!

What's impressive with a visit to Northampton is the distinct absence of bodgery. You get the sense that at every level this company knows exactly what it's doing and is looking to do it well. And if you needed any evidence that it has succeeded in this mission, then a look in the workshops should satisfy you... the sheer volume and diversity of cars here demonstrates perfectly the confidence others already have in Northampton Motorsports' ability. ■

## CONTACTS

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