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Mercedes-Benz classic sports car restoration by Hemmels of Cardiff

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A Welsh car business is going out new for old gold

Robin Roberts tells a

Hemmels of Cardiff is probably one of the least known success stories in the Welsh automotive sector but it is rapidly gaining recognition around the world

It specialises in nut and bold regeneration of classic Mercedes-Benz sports cars, and prices for their year-long rebuilt models begin at £225,000.

For that an owner with a post-war Mercedes-Benz sports car hands it over to the 45-strong craftsmen at Hemmels and sits back while the Neugeboren Process is completed.

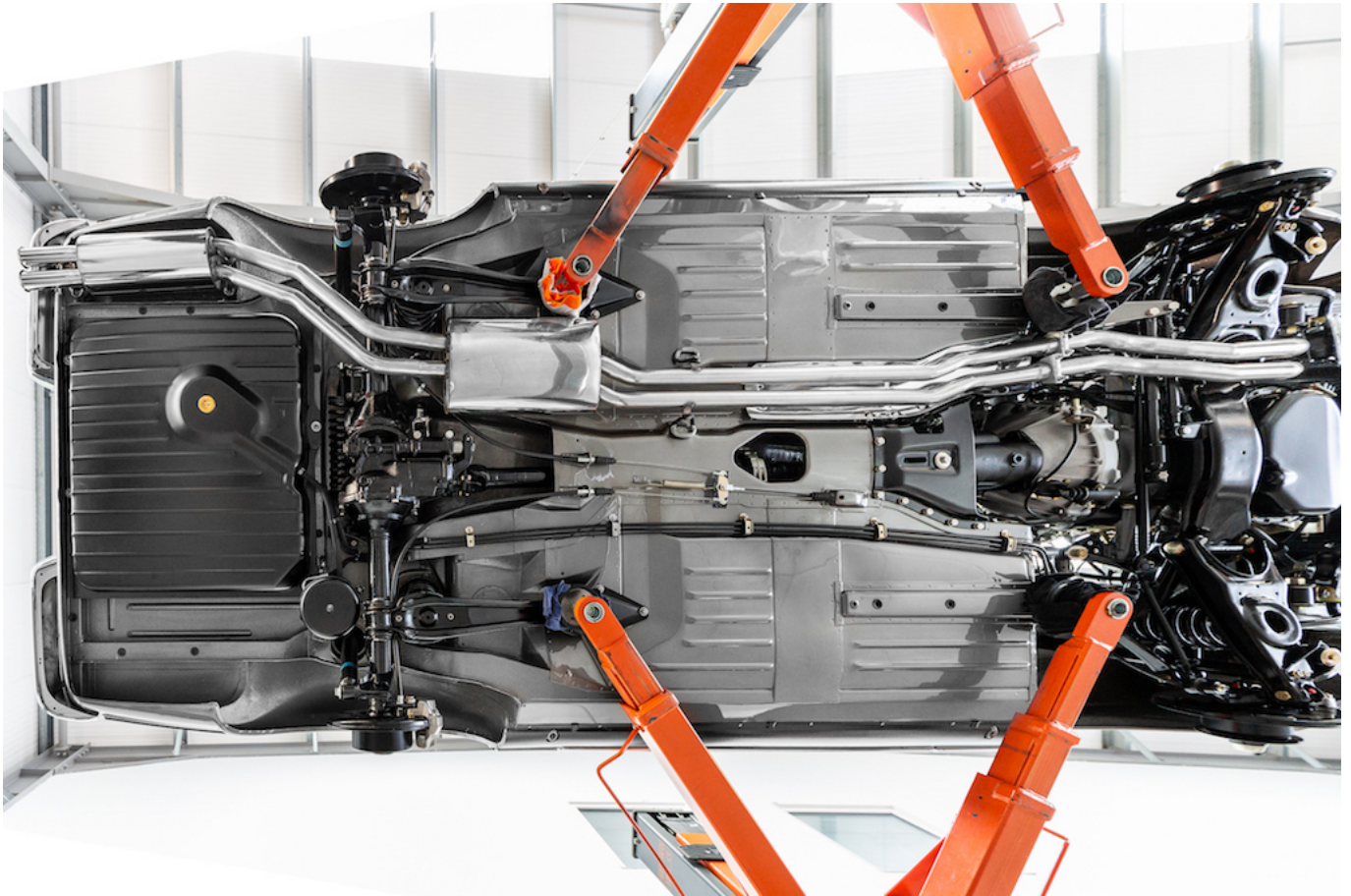
The owner can watch on-line the gradual strip down, cataloguing, and painstaking



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rebuilding with genuine Mercedes-Benz parts, retrimming and repainting before it's handed back, often better than when it was first built half a century ago. Hemmels can even include modern additions such as USB ports, or state of art sound systems which retain the car's original look, and upgrade performance.



"It takes 52 weeks to complete a project," said Ian Wood, marketing director with Hemmels. "But the effect it has on the owners is remarkable and they cannot believe it is the same car."

Hemmels started as a two-man renovation company in 2016 with a 1968 Mercedes-Benz 280SL Pagoda sports car and the quality of its bespoke workmanship spread among enthusiasts to whom money was no object so more enquiries and projects came in.



Two years on and the company now employs over 40 craftsmen and has six apprentices on its payroll who are learning traditional automotive skills.

There are over a dozen Mercedes-Benz models in their secure workshops and more in a holding warehouse awaiting the go-ahead.

Every car which comes into them is carefully documented and as it's stripped down the parts are allocated to boxes ready for renovation and refitting. New or repaired items are refitted once the body is stripped to bare metal, cleaned, renovated and repainted. Each process is audited and recorded and this is where the Neugeboren Process takes its name as a car is reborn or regenerated.

A trim shop can replace plastic seat covers with high quality leather and then fit matching sunvisors and cover the windscreen frame as part of a carefully considered and approved upgrade, discussed in advance with an owner.

Modern electronic ignition is often suggested and some owners want to retain the look of the old radios but with a modern sound-system including hands-free phone, which can be incorporated. More down to earth, an owner recently asked for a dog ring to be fitted so their beloved pet couldn't leap out of the sports car when it was going.

Apart from the apprentices, the craftsmen have spent a lifetime in the automotive trade and have been hand-picked for their skills in mechanical, bodywork, electrical, and painting.



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“Quality before quantity is what we strive to achieve every time,” said Ian Wood. “Some have come to us from businesses where they had to push out a number of jobs each day and the temptation was to cut corners to achieve targets, but that’s not the way we do things at Hemmels.”

He said even the approaching Brexit did not worry them although they don’t carry huge parts stocks.

“We import parts from Germany on a just in time principle but even if they are held up a few days at HM Customs that’s not a issue when a car takes a year to build.”

Fortunately, most of its custom comes from high-net-worth UK individuals but also



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Australian, Canadian, and Hong Kong based owners have commissioned work as well as Americans. Ironically, one was even from the home of Mercedes in Germany.

The quality of Hemmels workmanship has been recognised by Mercedes-Benz and Hemmels will supply a model for exhibition for them. Importantly, all regeneration models carry a 12 months full warranty.

“Some of our clients are pure Mercedes-Benz enthusiasts and want original specification restorations without any modern features, but others have a number of highly desirable classic cars and want to add to their collection for their personal satisfaction and appreciate the individuality we can offer with a project,” added Mr Wood.



After each rebuild every model is comprehensively road-tested by the Hemmels engineers to



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make sure it performs as it should before it's signed off and the company's own badge is added to the car.

