

SPECIALIST

James Peene talks to people whose businesses keep classic wheels turning

CLASSIC
CAR
WEEKLY

Stuart Quickfit Safety Belt Service



Stuart Quick with a customer's Porsche 912 due to have its old seatbelt replaced with a new inertia reel system.

WHEN the gravel voiced miserabilist Chris Rea sang *The Road to Hell* he might well have been thinking about London's infamous North Circular. It's noisy, congested and innumerable speed cameras lurk by the wayside like silent yellow Triffids waiting to catch unwary motorists. There are however plenty of good reasons for venturing down this notorious stretch of road. The new Wembley Stadium is one, the resurrected motoring Mecca that is the Ace Café is another and if you care to stray just a bit further down it, you'll find Quickfit Safety Belt Service.

You don't need to be a budding Sherlock Holmes to work out what Quickfit Safety

Belt Service is all about because, as the name suggests, it is a specialist supplier and installer of seatbelts and safety devices for all manner of vehicles. But it's the line of safety belts for classic cars that a growing number of enthusiasts know it for.

Driving virtually any classic car on a regular basis is often a compromise between looks, originality and safety. While modern cars are awash with safety features, from standard three point belts to airbags and side impact protection systems, owners of most classics have to bravely soldier on with dummy lengths of static webbing that get trapped in doors, dangerous lap-belts or, at best, ancient inertia systems that inspire little or no confidence. And that's if there are any belts at all. Pay a visit to any high street seatbelt installer and you'd probably decide that upgrading for safety's sake means you

have to sacrifice looks and originality, and fit something modern and totally out of keeping with your car's character. But pay a visit to Quickfit in Middlesex and you'll discover it doesn't have to be that way at all.

Obviously, when some people hear the name Quickfit they might confuse it with

the well-known tyre and exhaust suppliers, but this Quickfit has been keeping motorists safe since 1962. Stuart Quick is the managing director now, but the company was started by his father, Bill. Back then, Quickfit was a mobile service, travelling about and fitting aftermarket belts in cars that didn't come from the factory supplied with them. That was in the days when there were around 70 suppliers of seatbelts to choose from. Today there are just two main ones left, Britax and Kangol. And Quickfit now has a large roof over its staff who fit them. With a wealth of knowledge at his disposal, and the help of his 17 members of staff, Stuart handles anywhere between 20 to 30 orders a week from classic owners and says that's just a small percentage of the total business, as Quickfit also sells and installs replacement belts for modern cars, racing harnesses, child seats and fully automatic fire extinguishers.

prefers a round of golf

STUART started working at Quickfit early on, when he was around 14 or 15 years old, and at first that was just on Saturdays. He dealt with the business side of things like sales and marketing, as he's never really liked getting his hands dirty in the workshop. In fact he told me he much prefers a round of golf, but that clearly hasn't stopped him building up an encyclopaedic knowledge of how to fit a wide range of belts in cars that many others would dismiss as impossible. Stuart said, "We do a lot of work for specialists and restorers looking to go that

extra mile. Something like the right safety belts can really make the most of a car's interior and once many of our customers have seen what we can offer and how we fit them, they come back to us again and again."

Stuart continued, "We've always sold our range of classic belts, but when we started, the cars they were going in were new. When our original supply dried up we bought a huge amount of stock from the MOD because their buckles were virtually the same as the old Britax items. We eventually exhausted that supply but have now sourced some even better finished items." Quickfit supplies and fits top quality buckles and webbing, which come in a variety of styles and colours, for all manner of customers, from private MG owners to high profile Mercedes-Benz, Porsche and Aston Martin specialists. Leafing through Stuart's collection of photographs of customers' cars, he pointed out a few of the diverse vehicles that have been worked on over the years and detailed some of the many hours of work and intricate fabrication that went into them. He said, "A lot of thought and careful design goes into fitting our belts. We often have to find a way to move a top mounting position so we can fit an inertia belt that will work properly and still look good. This can mean we have to build a steel frame to strengthen an area or spread the load. We do it properly of course, the frames are hand fabricated and we can usually have them professionally trimmed to match the rest of the interior if that's what the owner wants. It's just a case of finding out what the customer actually requires from us, how much they want to spend and then working out the best way we can do it."

Just because a system has been fitted to a vehicle in a certain way in the past doesn't mean that Quickfit will do it the same way in the future. Stuart isn't the type to rest on his laurels and if there's a way a system can be improved for the next car that comes in, then Quickfit will use it. This level of

attention to detail and meeting of customers' needs has led to all manner of weird and unusual vehicles passing through the workshop, from an impressive variety of classic sports cars, to school minibuses and even the Amphicar that Channel 4's *Salvage Squad* recently restored.

safety conscious

AS hard as it was to look past the Lagonda Rapide and gleaming Porsche 912 that were having new belts fitted in the workshop, I did notice a great many fire extinguishers littered about the place. This is another string to Quickfit's safety conscious bow and one it is keen to let the public know exists. The company has been selling its range of automatic fire extinguishers for some years now, having bought the company that produces them, but recently changed the name to Fire Flex. Even if the name isn't familiar to you yet, the technology that goes into the products could be a real lifesaver. The red bottles come in a range of sizes and are plumbed into a vehicle's engine bay, going off automatically when the flexible tubing melts and delivering the extinguishing medium to the hottest point. Stuart said a lot of these clever systems had been sold to local authorities, where they've been used to protect ambulances, Help The Aged minibuses and many static engines. They've also been a big hit with owners of rear-engined camper vans, where blazes can go unnoticed for longer, as they can stop a fire before it really takes hold.

It's reassuring to know that companies like Quickfit are still out there, doing what they've always done and making sure the classic owner can find what they need to keep driving in safety, especially in an era when larger manufacturers swallow up smaller businesses and discontinue items with niche appeal. So if you've been wondering where to go for modern seatbelts with that retro appeal, friendly advice or a dedicated fitting service that is sympathetic to your needs, Quickfit is well worth a visit.



Machinist Mary Mitchell at work on a custom-made seatbelt.



All sorts of exotica comes the way of Quickfit - a Lagonda Rapide awaits its turn in the workshop.

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