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My excursions to the local scrappy were once the highlight of my week and the customary haggling over price an unrivalled game. But not any more – I now hate scrap yards. My regular visits have become more and more of a chore. Why is the car I need parts from always in the muddiest spot? And why, when I've dragged my heavy tool kit from one side of the yard to the other, clambered over obstacles and covered myself with mud and oil, has the part I've come for been cannibalised by the person before me when removing another part from the same car?

At first it was an adventure, like searching for hidden treasure but the whole process has become an uncomfortable waste of time and even when I do strike gold it seems to be tarnished. The two main problems with sourcing second hand parts are that it takes up a lot of time only to be followed by the inevitable process of refurbishing and reconditioning.

Thankfully, most of that is behind me and no matter how many cars I build in the future I doubt if I'll ever visit a scrapyard again. Not that I've found a fairy godmother, or a new piggy bank for that matter, so new components are still out of the question on cost alone. I shall still buy secondhand parts at scrapyard prices but next time there will be no wasted time, no sloshing about in the mud and no cut or bleeding hands. Parts will be tested and

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checked, reconditioned where necessary, every single item guaranteed and down to the last component, everything will be pre-cleaned for me. Come to think of it I might even turn up in my suit.

Unless all new parts are to be used throughout a build there is



● Headlights for cars of all ages and nationalities are available. Each one has been tested and prices are a fraction of the cost of new items

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A major task for the kitcar builder is sourcing parts, especially if the car he is building requires components from more than one donor car. However, the problems that are involved in crawling around grotty scrapyards may soon all be in the past, if a company based in the northwest has its way. Words: Vic Marelle/ pictures: Ian Bennett.

bound to be some degree of scrapyard activity. It is my bet that this aspect and the subsequent time spent sourcing good secondhand parts is a major factor in many abandoned projects. Perhaps it's also the reason that many potential kit builders never even start in the first place.

The concept of selling reclaimed components at a lower cost than their unused equivalent is not, in itself, a new one. This is the very basis of the traditional vehicle dismantling industry with the various engine and gearbox reconditioning companies being the final development.

Even though some dismantlers now offer a counter service for limited faster selling lines, most components still remain to be sourced individually in the scrapyard. What is new is the

Centrepart concept recently put into operation by a northwest company Autohypersave Ltd.

A man called Mike Rainy came up with the idea that there was a market for selling secondhand parts but that many people didn't like going to scrapyards. If in fact you were able to clean and guarantee those parts, and lay them out in the way you would expect to find them in any other retail environment, then this would be much more acceptable to the customer.

The idea seems brilliantly simple and the parts supermarkets operated by the company are very impressive. The first of these opened just ten minutes from the centre of Manchester at Droylsden in March 1985. The pilot scheme was an instant success although, as Marketing Manager of the go ahead company, David Morris, told me,

mistakes were made from which they have learned.

At the time cars were being dismantled on the same site and it didn't look much different to a scrapyard. Customers had in fact to thread their way through a jungle of cars being dismantled to get into the shop and it wasn't ideal. The shop was however a success and it was obvious that the concept could be the start of something quite substantial.

Substantial indeed, for although David was reluctant to divulge projected turnover figures, the company already operate three magnificent sites with plans to open seven more within twelve months. The existing delivery service is also to be upgraded from the present six to around 29 vans by August 1987.

There can be no doubt that being able to purchase parts in this way is likely to be even more attractive to the kit builder than the DIY motorist for whom the operation was conceived, because in the course of constructing his car he will need a diverse range of components. To be able to source every single item from the same place, all under the same roof and without getting wet, dirty or cold is a quantum leap forward in my estimation. That all those parts will be cleaned, checked, painted or reconditioned and then fully guaranteed is surely beyond belief.

David Morris seemed well rehearsed in his answers to my questions. I rather suspected that I was not the first to have asked him why this concept had not been tried

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before and would the reconditioning and preparation process not push up the price of components to an unacceptable level.

The traditional scrapyard business of course does tend to be

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(cont)

a family run concern and this is the first noticeable difference in the Centrepark operation.

'Most scrap businesses reach the point where the people running them enjoy a fairly comfortable living with neither the financial expertise or business acumen to be able to develop the business or to grow any further.

There is plenty of capital available to develop other ventures but there is such a big gap between the people who have that money and those with the knowhow, that the traditional scrap business would

have great difficulty in getting backers' said David.

Not that I can imagine many scrapyards owners wanting a stock market listing but I take his point. When I bought an Alfa engine and transaxle from my local dismantler I turned up with my trailer on four consecutive weekends before he finally found time to remove what I had purchased from the defunct vehicle. All along I gained the impression that the yard was run for his sole benefit and that the customer just did not matter.

The original idea for the



● A kitcar builders dream. A range of immaculate seats for only £15 each

Centrepark operation came from Mike Rainy who at the time was operating a free fit bay. After teaming up with accountant David Levy the pilot scheme was set up.

The key is of course volume. This is crucial to the whole scheme of things and would, in theory, enable high quality prepared parts to be guaranteed and yet sold at scrapyards prices.

Armed with the success of the pilot, David Levy put together his business plan bringing in a hand

picked management team, each man being a professional in his own particular area and with substantial venture capital backing.

In referring to the Droylsden shop, David Morris effectively underplays what has been a mammoth stride forward in the retailing of used car parts. Even the term supermarket seems inadequate because the original complex now totals over 20,000 square feet of display with a claimed one million parts in stock.

A tyre fitting bay is already in operation and adjacent to this a new component fitting workshop is under construction where engines, gearboxes and other parts can be fitted for non DIY types.

All dismantling is now carried out at the Wigan HQ facility and, while this part of the operation forms the reassurance behind the company claims of quality, my short tour convinced me that this whole concept could, and probably will, revolutionise kitcar construction. Not just by making parts sourcing easier but by the integrity and awareness of the management.

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The massive Wigan factory has a theoretical capacity to dismantle a staggering 80 vehicles each week but even this figure was exceeded with 96 per week during November 1986. The Keynote however is not just quantity but quality of vehicles if guarantees are to be given.

The huge building, formerly a saw mill and around the size of a football pitch, has been divided into two specific areas. Dismantling/reconditioning is complemented by merchandising/storage with a factory shop also on site. Sub division of the dismantling area gives a well planned flow line starting at vehicle reception, almost unbelievably, with a full electronic

diagnostic check on the car to be dismantled. The computer readout from this gives an accurate condition report of all major components and is another pointer to the efficiency of the company.

Everything is entered into the computer at each stage of progression through the system.

There are five initial dismantling bays where skilled fitters (or should they be called unfitters), systematically strip the vehicle in a pre-planned order. Every part is labelled and the condition of major components entered on a chart attached to the bodyshell. With great precision the vehicle is reduced to a collection of parts in a short space of time. Every part is degreased in what appears to be an oversize dishwasher, after which they are thoroughly inspected.

Suspect items are immediately discarded while those passing this initial test progress to the next stage.

Sandblasting is carried out prior to yet more testing before any reconditioning takes place. The system really is thorough and the investment in up-to-date equipment, backed by skilled operators, is colossal, running literally into millions.

It would almost be inconceivable to see a scrapyards quoted on the stock-exchange

Even when it is not possible to run an engine in the car at the initial reception test stage, when there has been frontal damage to the car for example, a test rig is available so that the engine can still be put through its paces and thoroughly tested. The same goes for other components too, like alternators and coils.

But how valuable is that guarantee? Is it worth having? If for example I bought an engine and it wasn't up to scratch, would it be replaced without question? Obviously a hypothetical question but David responded positively seeming genuinely hurt that I should cast doubt on Centrepark integrity.

'Not only would we replace it, our fitter would remove the faulty engine and then fit the replacement, all at our cost, even though we had not fitted the original. That situation is unlikely to happen though because each engine has a full report fixed to it detailing its condition'. On checking this claim I saw only one engine without such a report and a quick tap tap on the computer brought me the relevant details.

Not everybody wants a fully rebuilt engine of course and these reports are invaluable as a guide to what one is buying. All the usual doubt that accompanies normal scrapyards buying has been removed but don't get the idea that everything is old, for right next to

elderly Mini and Ventora units were up to the minute Granada Scorpio and Escort XR3 engines, all fully detailed, some brand new and all very low priced.

The trim stock is vast and surely a viable option for the kit builder. Two immaculate matching Audi high back seats caught my eye priced at only fifteen pounds each and David suggested that the owner of a perfectly standard base model Escort could uprate the interior to Ghia specification with all trim and new seats front and rear for an outlay of only eighty pounds.

The kit car builder figures highly in the company future plans, 'We've noticed' said David, 'a demand from kit builders at our supermarkets, particularly for Ford suspensions and for BL A series engines. Where components form an assembly on a sub frame, like the Cortina, we usually keep at least one example available complete'.

The company are much more aware of the needs of our industry than that statement would imply however, because special services are contemplated just for kit constructors. Already they are quoting special, all embracing prices for complete assemblies while if the builder supplies a list of his required components then Centrepark will source, recondition and guarantee the whole package.

At scrapyards prices that must be good news. Of course there are benefits to the company as well, for some traditionally slow moving items are much sought after by kit builders.

'I've lost count of the Jaguar suspensions we have thrown away' was a rather unexpected comment from David.

The local van delivery service is of course ideal for customers in the north west but all parts can be sent by carrier nationwide.

The developments which interested me most though were



● Wheels are available for most makes of car, this little collection includes wheels for Ford, Colt and Simca

David's plans for future servicing of the kitcar industry. He is looking towards a time, perhaps not too far in the future, where a customer could just order components for his chosen project and Centrepark would source everything for him without lists or negotiation.

'Our computer software alone cost over three hundred thousand pounds so we have the capacity to store the component requirements of every kit on the market, greatly simplifying the operation for our customers. But it would need the co-operation of the kit manufacturers to put into operation'. A natural progression from this would be for an associated in-house build up operation. 'We have the expertise, the facilities and a vast store of guaranteed components', said David.

So could this be the end of the conventional scrapyards? I think not but certainly it is the start of a new era in secondhand car parts retailing, and it is very beneficial to the kit car builder. The success of the delivery service which runs parallel to the self-selection supermarkets shows an acceptance by the trade and a plastic credit card style trader scheme is working well.

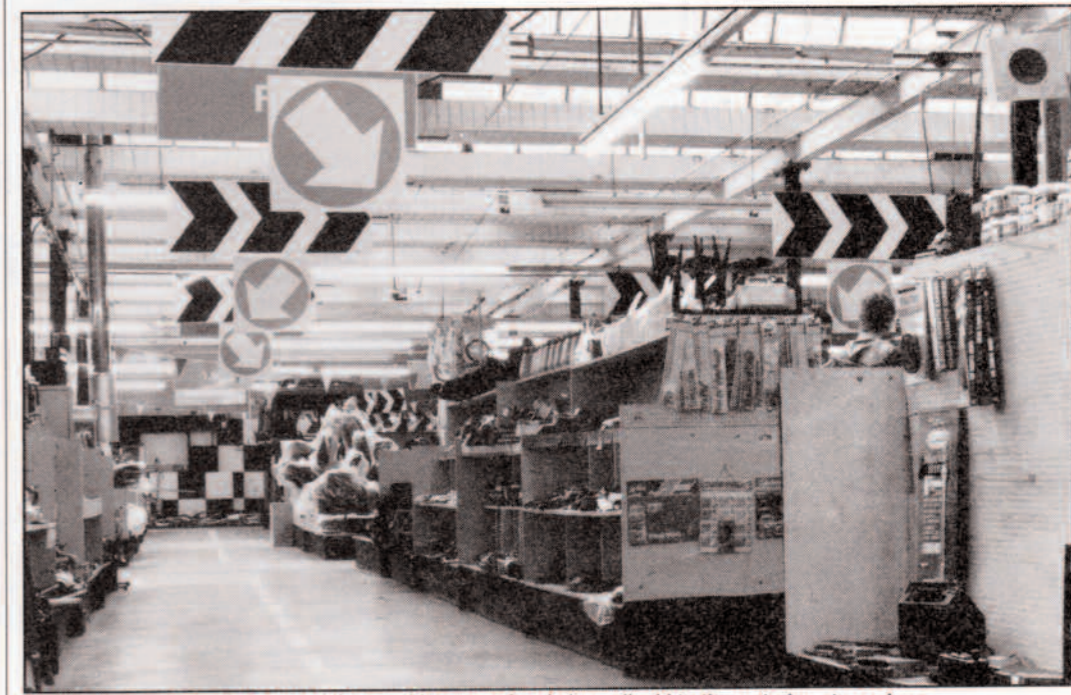
After the original mistakes, the Manchester shop at Droylsden has now come on stream and there have been few problems. Widnes however, just a few minutes from Liverpool Airport had some initial teething problems brought to a head during the opening launch campaign which centred around a Frankenstein figure and his monster savings.

Two local scrapyards had gone out of business although it is understood that they were in difficulty anyway and Centrepark did little to influence their demise. It remains a fact however that somebody cut the mooring cables of the Centrepark advertising helium balloon blimp flying over the supermarket and up, up and away it went, closing the nearby airport for over three hours. Thankfully trade relationships are now on a much better footing.

So will Centrepark expand nationally? Will Centrepark become the first scrap based listing? Who knows, but for me the prospect of being able to reduce my component sourcing to the words 'a JBA Falcon package please' or 'Jag based Cobra replica package please' seem most exciting to say the least. ■



● Engines are available from £50 and each one is tested and carries a written condition report



● Wide aisles with realistic dotted lines and large overhead signs all add to the motoring atmosphere