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420hp & 440lb ft

America's got Talent

This 135i was put on a carbon fibre diet, given custom ANZE suspension and 12"-wide rear CCW Classics, all in a bid to build the ultimate Time Attack car

Holy Moly

This Volvo-powered E30 turbo has more than 500bhp. It can only be Swedish!



Light Energy

Marhart Racing is back: all hail its '85 E46 M3 CSL, with twin screw blower

Stunt Pilot

We check out the new Terry Grant Stunt Academy at Santa Pod

One Up

We drive the much-anticipated 1 Series M Coupé... and it didn't disappoint





From lumps of billet to finished products, it all happens right here in the UK – just the way it always has been at Forge HQ

Forging Ahead

Despite what they tell you on the news, British craftsmanship is still alive and well. In fact, it's flourishing in the Gloucestershire area where family-run scene-legend, Forge Motorsport, has been turning out stunning automotive enhancements for the best part of three decades. Dan Clow went to investigate.

In a push-button age it's always comforting to learn of little pockets of traditionalism, where time-served craftsmen still toil away, plying unique expertise and creating one-off products that, thankfully, a machine still can't quite manage.

Gloucestershire's Forge Motorsport is one such place and offers a delightful mix of blokes in boiler suits welding by hand, intelligent looking people with clipboards, and the very latest CNC machining and finishing processes.

But first, a little history. As with all 'proper' engineering shops, Forge was started by two chaps in a garage. Juri Zaslowski and Fred Miles felt that their own high-quality brand of engineering justified its own place in the market and so, in 1985, sold everything they had to be able to buy the equipment and tools to start creating all manner of bespoke items. Thanks to a no-nonsense trading style and a real engineer's eye for detail, work quickly flowed in and before long the company's client roster even included top-secret tank projects for the Ministry of Defence!

After a couple of years two extra staff were taken on, and in 1990 Fred's son Peter joined the ranks. Peter was a qualified engineer with a background in aerospace. Having spanned on the likes of the Eurofighter as a day job, Peter was the perfect addition to the team.

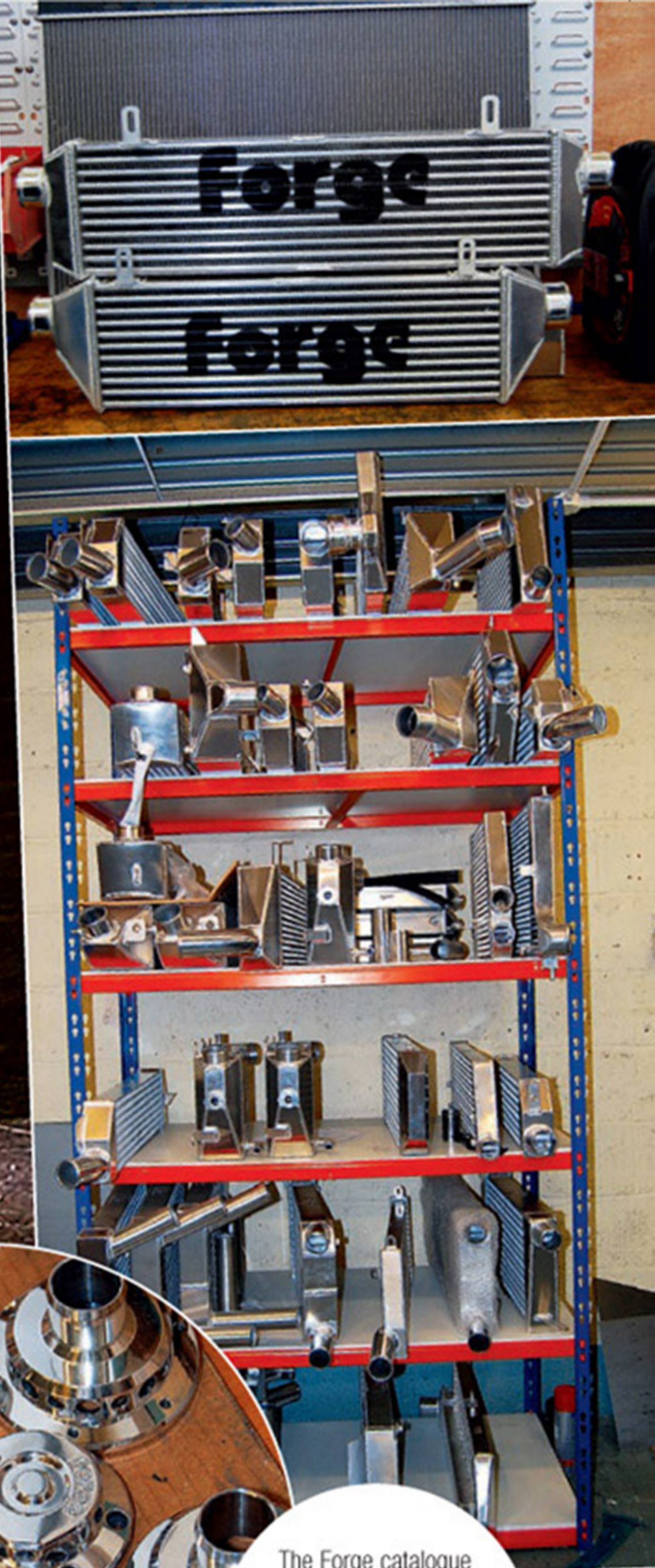
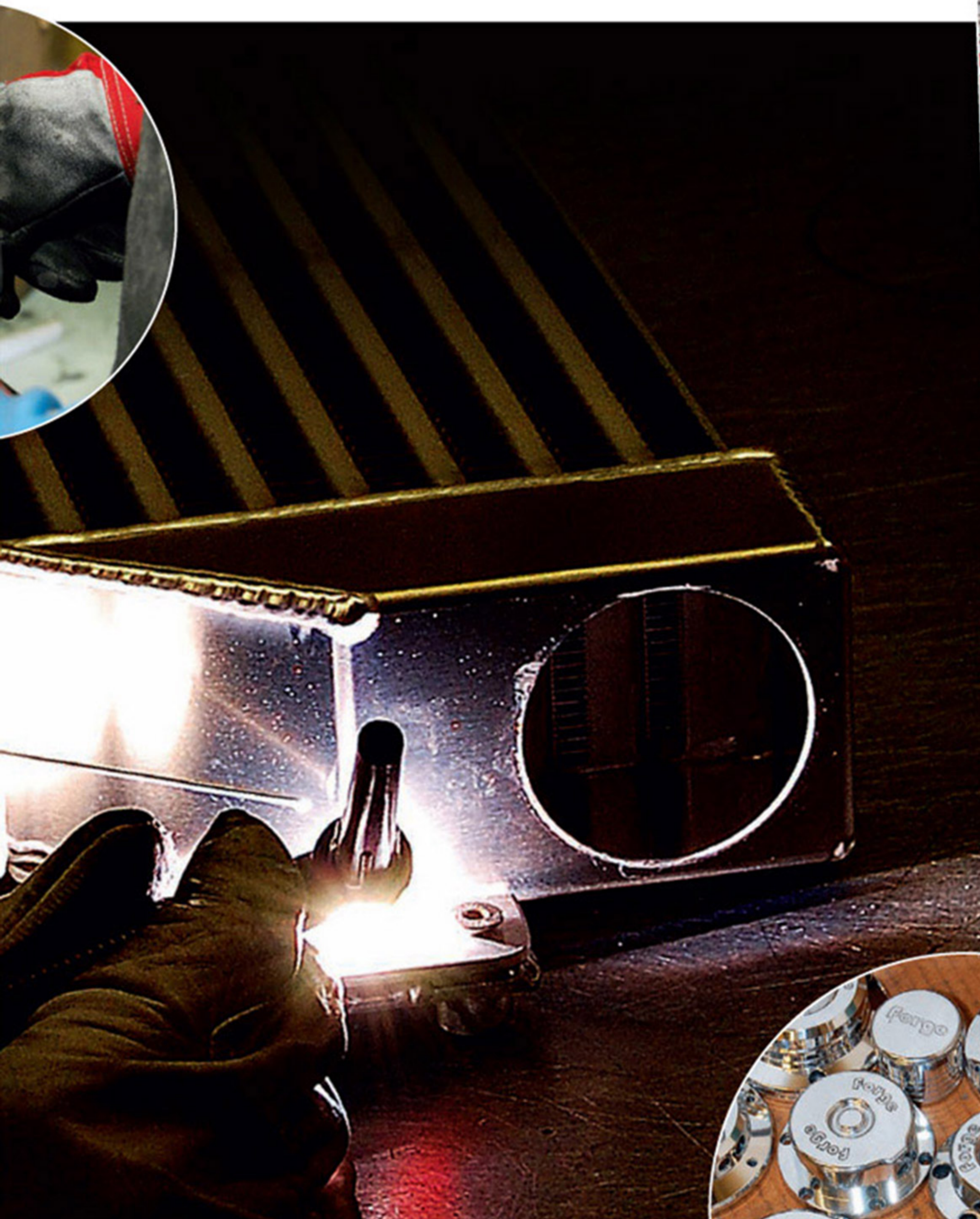
The transition to the Forge we all know and love today came when a team member wanted to buy a dump valve for his cherished RS Turbo. "At the time, the choice on offer in the marketplace was limited, and quite expensive," explains Peter. "We bought a few samples to examine how they were made and, after a few tests and material analysis sessions, we thought we could do it better." By starting with a clean sheet of paper the Forge team created the iconic part number FMDV001... or 'Forge Motorsport Dump Valve, number 1' – a part designed to work on the RS Turbo, and with a small tweak as the 002, the Renault 5 Turbo. Initial tests went well and consumer reaction seemed very positive.

Walking around the Autosport show in

1996 with a suitcase full of valves in one hand and an order pad in the other, Forge received a warm welcome from industry stalwarts. With a few orders to keep them busy and favourable comments ringing in their ears, Forge's new motorsport arm was properly up and running.

As the product range grew, so did the customer base, allowing the motorsport side to slowly eclipse the more traditional engineering side of the business. One by one, new lines appeared – header tanks, swirl pots and dress-up parts. By now Forge had 15 staff working around the clock just to keep up with demand.

"From day one Forge has always been about quality and customer service," Peter explained. "You can't have one without the other. We have always been prepared to do whatever it takes to make the customer happy. Not just in terms of product quality but, more importantly, in the way that enquiries are dealt with, making sure the phone is answered promptly and that e-mails and quotes are returned on time. There's no



point offering the best products in the marketplace if your customer service and sales teams don't mirror that quality."

This obsession for perfection also helped to shape the direction of many new lines. "We realised fairly early on that the future lay in creating bespoke parts specifically for each model, rather than trying to make a universal part 'fit' with a kit, like our competitors' did," Peter explains. An early example of this was the company's tailored Subaru Impreza dump valve that aped the factory fitting position for perfect function and aesthetics. After it proved to be a runaway sales success, it was clear to everybody at Forge that this was the way to go. With VAG-specific parts soon added to the range, Forge's niche in the market place was becoming well and truly established.

Walking around the impressive facility today, it's clear that every single component is still made here in the UK. As previously mentioned, the plant is a delightful juxtaposition of traditional hand-finishing and cutting-edge CNC machining. But how

does the company justify keeping production here in Blighty, when it would clearly be far more cost effective to manufacture overseas? "Control is everything," smiles Peter. "We have looked at China in the past, but weren't hugely enamoured with the quality. I like to be able to walk down onto the shop floor at a moment's notice and just see what's going on, to inspect and check for myself. I can't do that if it's happening thousands of miles away. Besides, if we run the factory on double shifts to maximise efficiency, as we do now, the savings overseas aren't as great as you would imagine. Plus it all goes back to the 'quality and service' argument. As our customer, you can speak to the guy that's actually making your part or, better still, come and talk to him about it! That negates any saving to my mind! Also, UK production allows rapid speed to market. We sometimes



The Forge catalogue spans far and wide, covering all sorts of parts for many models, with the customer service to back it up

have an idea in the morning and we can have it prototyped before we go home. That kind of thing takes weeks in China."

This speed has allowed Forge to be first out of the blocks with many of the latest must-have tuner applications, with a range of accessories and upgrades for cars like the Nissan R35, MINI Countryman, Fiat 500 Abarth and Scirocco all available within weeks of the cars hitting the showrooms. "We know we're playing a waiting game in these markets sometimes," says Peter. "People understandably don't always want to tune a brand-new car in case they invalidate the warranty, but we've found, over the



Forge has always been about quality and customer service

years, that if you're patient the market always comes to you, eventually. As the cars get older we're there ready for them."

With such a diverse range, it didn't take long for export markets to come knocking, with the US, unsurprisingly, being the largest customer base. This led to the formation of Forge USA in 2000. These days, over a third of Forge's UK factory output finds its way to the States with a useful two-way flow of feedback and information to allow Forge to take a unique view of the global scene.

Walking around the well-stocked storerooms, we were astounded to learn that these days, Forge has over 2000 live part numbers being produced on a regular basis.. a figure that grows by four or five each month. "We never delete a part number or make something obsolete," Peter explains. "It may come out of the catalogue if it's not the greatest seller, but if a specialist or club wants us to create a short run of something that we haven't made for ten years, then we're only too happy to help them."

The factory is a mix of cool, old school engineering and state-of-the-art CAD equipment with good staff morale to boot

More recently, the firm has also moved into related product areas, such as silicon hoses, which it markets under the siliconhoses.com brand and, from 2010, the impressively comprehensive line-up of brake hoses that fall under the Hosetechnik moniker. Both ventures arose from the company's desire to be able to control the quality of the products themselves, but also their ability to be able to iron out any supply shortages or shipping issues. Again, all these products are developed in the UK, with both brands taking up a significant space in the Forge factory. In the case of all three brands – and based on the success of the recent Nissan R35 product range – Forge plans to create a number of new lines for high-end cars like Porsches and the various Italian exotics to allow their customers to grow with them as their taste in cars – and pockets – grow in stature.

So after a thorough tour, countless cups of tea and several hours with the affable Mr.

Miles, we're left with an overwhelming sense of a company that looks in epic shape for the next quarter of a century. Everybody in the factory seems genuinely pleased to be there, with many of the staff from the original '80s start-up still happily clocking in every morning. There's a unique atmosphere about the place which, while totally professional, suggests that no-one takes themselves too seriously. "You have to have fun while you're at work or it's a long old day!" laughs Pete. "And you're sure I can't get you another cuppa before you go?" With the man at the top obviously keen to balance quality with staff retention, and as hands-on at making the tea as he is inspecting and developing the product, we get the feeling that Forge is in very safe hands indeed ●

