

# A visit to PB Products at Havant

by Mick Langridge



*Reception area c/w models to amuse visitors.*

AFTER scooping the world with our exclusive picture of PB's 1983 contender in issue 12 of RRC, we were soon winging our way to Havant to find out just how advanced the new car was.

A friendly cup of plastic coffee and we were off on a guided tour, the guide being Keith Plested's right hand man, a chap by the name of Paul Pagdin. By the way I am using the royal 'we'; RRC does not run staff photographers, just me and my OM2.

The 1983 Alpha is to be called the GP. It was considered that calling the car Alpha 83 would imply a new car every year, which is not the intention. The GP is a development of the 1982 car which, in turn, was developed from from the original 1981 Alpha, and both previous versions can be updated very economically to current specification with a soon to be available conversion pack. Incidentally, all the team drivers use production kits during the season, leaving Keith to develop and try out various new ideas of his car. Anything which gives a significant improvement in performance is then tried by the team with a view to production. The three major changes for this year are toe-in rear suspension, mono shock front suspension and under slung radio plate have not all appeared at any one time on team cars, but as a package were considered to offer a major advantage over the 82 car, so production of the new car to include these was given the go ahead.

PB make all their own moulds and it was necessary to modify existing moulds to produce

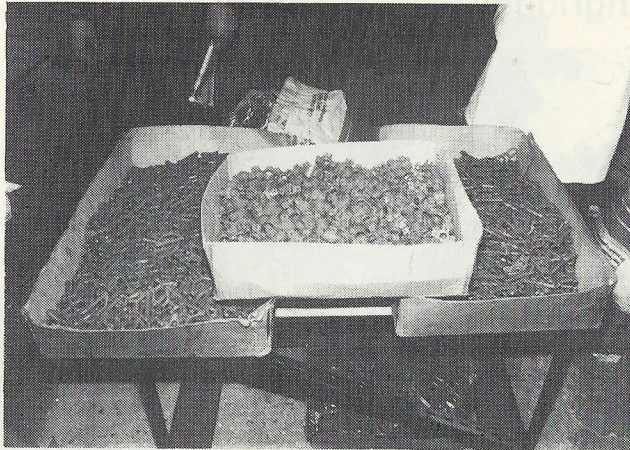
updated components thus saving a great deal of re-tooling time. Even as I write this (late December) new kits are being dispatched from the factory.

To my non-expert eye the machine room seemed very well equipped and was quite capable of producing dozens of the small components that make up a modern suspension car. It was particularly fascinating to watch the various stages of making the new type mini-pipe silencer. From the basic alloy tube to the screw-in outlet, each stage of production was recognisable for what it was - everything seemed so straightforward. Here the wealth of experience built up at PB obviously plays its part.

It was in the moulding room that the ingenuity of Keith shone through. One of the first products of PB was a one piece hollow model aircraft wheel. These were, and are, manufactured on a home made machine which heats up a lump of ABS and then, using centrifugal forces shapes the wheel in the mould whilst spinning at high speed. Another machine was constructed to weld the fuel tank halves together. Company folklore will tell you of a demonstration of such a machine which quite impressed Keith, until the price was mentioned, at which point he promptly departed and returned home to make his own.

At last it was time to enter the R & D workshop of Mr PB himself. Incidentally, whatever else you may have heard, Keith started the company himself in the late 60's, supplying model aircraft fuels, the name PB coming from Pure Blended.



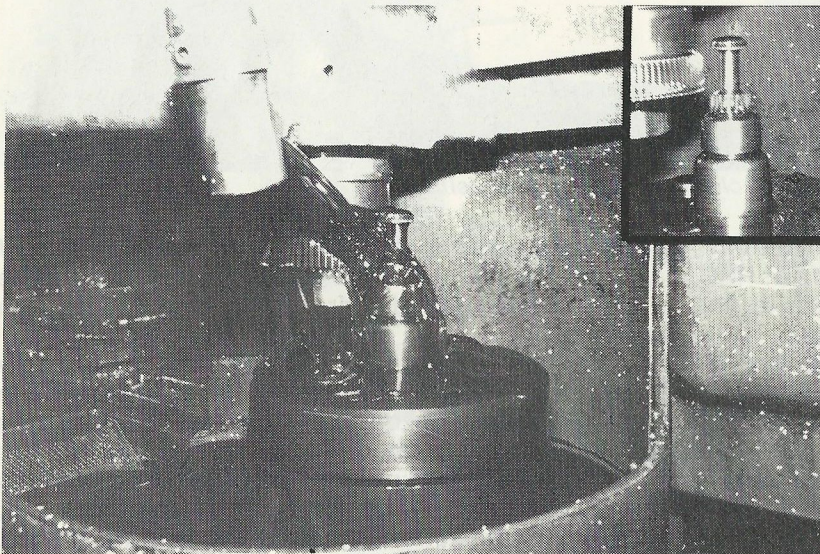


*You want wishbones, we have wishbones. High pressure injection moulding requires large machinery for small parts.*

You may also be fascinated to know that in the local telephone directory they are listed as toy manufacturers, which should give the electric

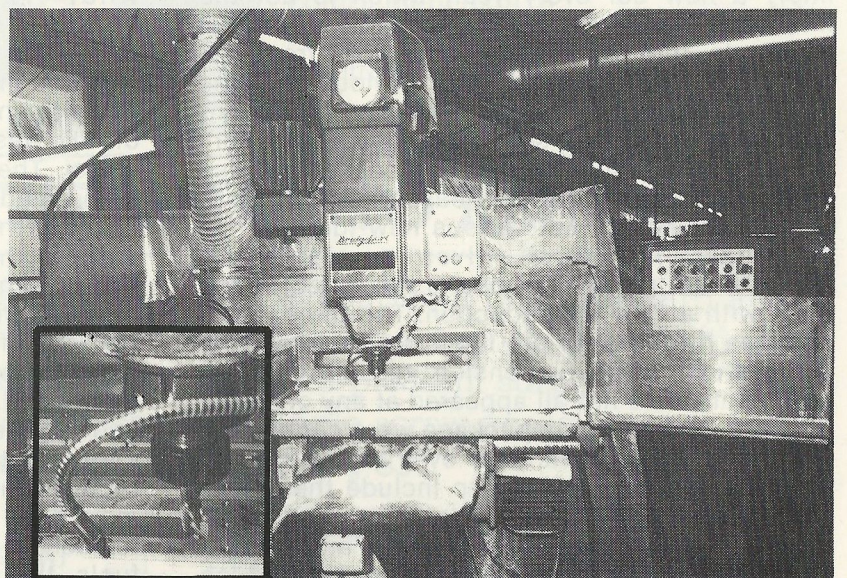
racers a chuckle. We caught Keith at his workbench with tools in hand. The first production components had just been made and he was taking off the hand made or modified parts and replacing them with nice new red nylon pieces. We didn't want to stop him working so over another cup of plastic coffee we started chatting about PB history.

So fascinating were the stories of past glories that I quite forgot to take notes, but from memory the company clicked with it's very first car. This was the PB Porsche 917, which was a suspension car, winning everything in the UK during the first six months of 1971, until the arrival of the early American kits. These were lighter and faster but PB faced the challenge—working their way through the 'Racing Double' (featuring belt drive) to the 'Expert' which was a light, flexible flat-bed chassis. By this time suspension had been passed over in the interests of simplicity, and light weight. Engine power was increasing in leaps and bounds.



*Automated gear shaper attacking shiny new clutch bell. INSET – workpiece finished.*

*Computer controlled Bridgeport CNC Mill turns out twelve identical chassis' in twenty minutes – cutting them in three piles of four, with a repeat tolerance of 1/2 thou. The rejection rate is zero; very impressive. INSET – drilling head.*





By the time 1975 came round, Dave Preston and Phil Booth were working closely with Keith to produce a new car, which finally reached production in 1978 as the International. This was the first epoxy chassis car and survived various updates and marque, culminating in the Omega of 1981. The ever-active mind of Keith had seen the limitations of the flat-bed cars in putting down 1½ bhp and started working on suspension again. The first racing prototypes were the infamous 'red herrings' and they were a direct forerunner of the Alpha, with the clever box type chassis, which enabled full Alpha suspension to be used without really giving away the final configuration. More than 4,000 Alpha's were produced in 1981, continuing the phenomenal growth over which the past 10 years has enabled PB to double its turnover each year.

Export markets are very important to PB – the Continent accounting for the largest slice, followed by Australia and Japan (Japan takes more kits than some European countries!). The Far East is expanding rapidly, especially after the summer trip so eloquently described by Ted Longshaw in issue 12.

We've been promised a test drive of a properly set up works car in the near future at Southampton; something I shall look forward to; it would be nice to drive a few other types for comparison – are you out there, Rob, Phil?

We were not allowed to see or discuss any of the things on the secret list – such as front



*Mr PB (Keith Plested) in his second favourite place – the Workshop (first favourite being the track) fitting production 1983 parts onto his development car. Also the Alpha GP can be seen.*

brakes, rubber tyres (as opposed to foam) or even the new flat mounted Picco engine which will be shown at Nurenburg. The day ended with a flash of the new PB secret weapon – a team lap counter in the shape of a portable computer with a print out facility, which will be used to monitor each car's progress – desperately needed after the fiasco at last year's European Championship.