



JZ Machtech

The sum of many parts

Words: Paul Davies Photography: Peter Robain

Some of us – guess that's me I'm thinking about – tend to think of Porsches first of all as classic cars. To us, there's a great wide chasm between real Porsches and the modern stuff. One side of the yawning gap is 1989; the other – arguably – is 1996. Between them there's a big rift, only capable of being crossed by a stuntman like Evel Knievel.

The same can be said of the specialists who prepare and maintain the cars. On one side there are a number of highly-regarded independents, sometimes one-man bands, which have made their niche in the market, restoring and fettling the 356 or the early 911. On the other there are the Official Porsche Centres, unashamedly concentrating on the vehicles that remain within the new car warranty period. The space between these is even more enormous than the model gap – and how do you fill it with any degree of competence?

Jonas Zambakides and Steve McHale of JZ Machtech (explanations of the name later) have the answer, as witnessed by their company at

Kings Langley, Hertfordshire, which has an ever-growing customer base, stretching from early 911s to the latest 997 GT3 RS. It has already undergone one major upgrade since its formation in 1999, and has been selected as the UK distributor for top German tuner Manthey. And, with an increasing demand for its services, the company says it is 'looking at new initiatives for the coming years'.

The trick is that JZ Machtech has recognised that there's a problem (always a good start) – and has taken positive steps to address it. The gap is not just the car, but also the customer, as Jonas explains:

'The last few years have seen a different breed of owner. Today's customers have, in many cases, bought their Porsche for the performance, prestige and lifestyle it gives them. They are modern enthusiasts with greater expectations and ever-diminishing time available for the traditional hassles of garage servicing. Much of their knowledge is gained from the internet or hearsay – and it's not

Jonas Zambakides (left) and Steve McHale combine marketing and engineering talents to good effect at JZ Machtech



always accurate.

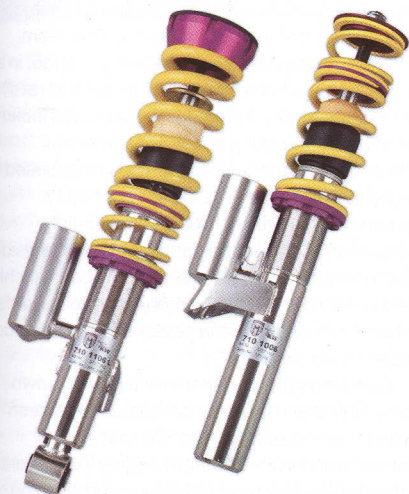
'They are quite tricky at first, and sometimes need a little help to understand the history or background of Porsche. Waving a magic wand does not fix complex cars in an instant – and sometimes customers need to appreciate the specialist equipment needed, the technical awareness required, and the time involved. We have to help them and explain that a job will take a little time. We will diagnose the car and then call the owner with a complete assessment – and we won't spend their money until they are happy. This way we're not letting the customer down.

'Enthusiasts with older cars tend to have more Porsche experience, are often mechanically minded and more demanding of expertise. It's a very niche market. Really, I think there are four or five Porsche independents in the UK capable of doing a good job, and another four or five who are getting there – then you've got the rest. There are people who deal in specialist areas in small volume, but when you're trying to deal with vehicles from 1965 to 2007, you need a hell of a lot more than some expertise and a bit of equipment.'

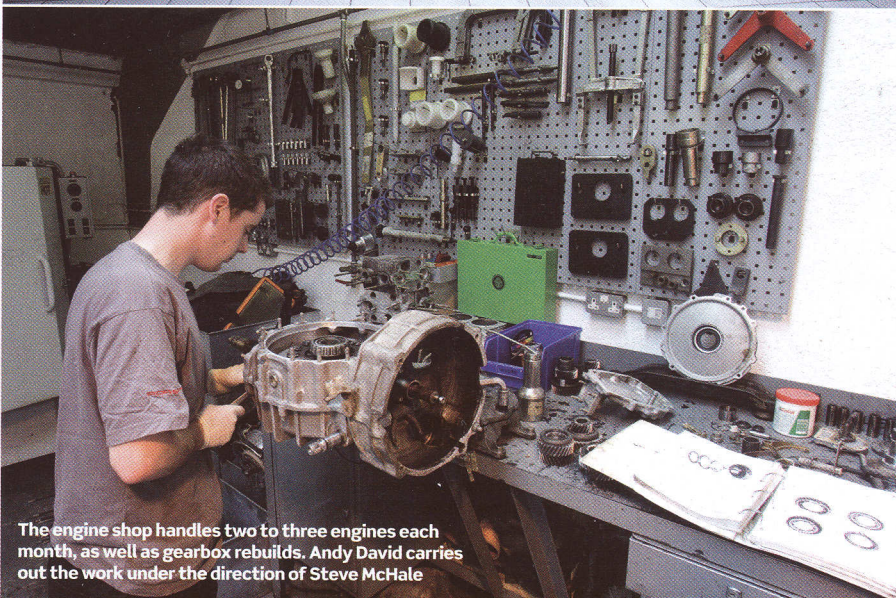
Managing director Jonas has recognised that the solution is two-fold, structuring his business to provide expertise to deal with all ages of Porsche and the many varying problems that can arise, and communicating with the new type of customer.

'Consequently, JZM has several divisions: Technical Director Steve McHale, who has been in the performance car business for 25 years, is an engineer and manages our tuning side. Dave Lee – who's been working on Porsches

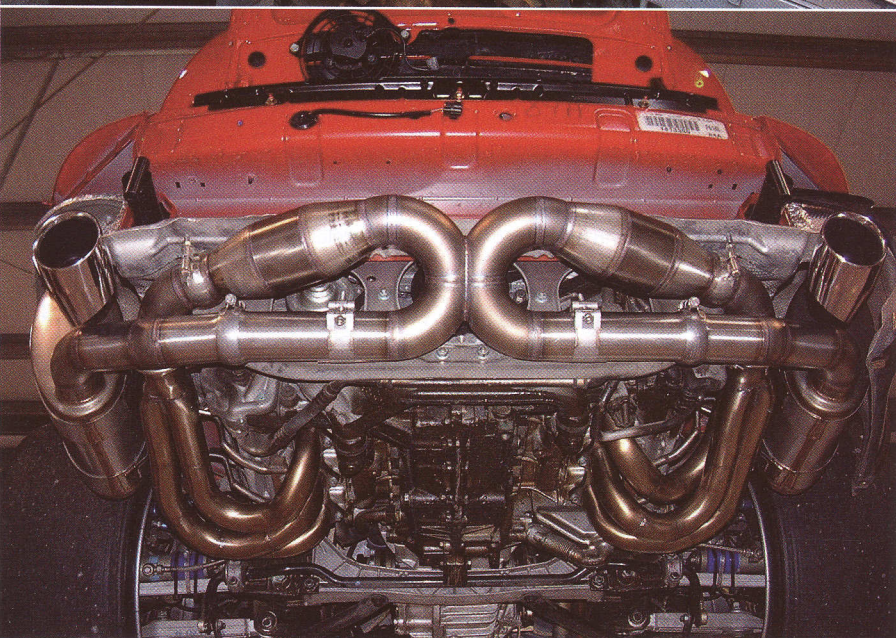
Manthey Motors tuning equipment is some of the best available for 964-on Porsches. The K410 kit for the GT3, with upgrades to the manifolding and exhaust system, induction and engine management, delivers nearer to 420bhp at a fitted cost of £8032.75. Manthey's clever boot lid and rear wing assembly features cool air ducting through the wing pillars to the intake system and separate air intake to the engine bay – the cost is £3445.92 fitted. The company also offers suspension upgrades: the Sports kit (below) consists of a set of 14-position adjustable dampers with coil springs on height-adjustable platforms and costs £3348.88. A geometry set-up is a must, of course! (All figures exclude VAT)



The new JZ Machtech unit at Kings Langley has four special two-post lifts that lower flush to the floor, to allow even the lowest cars to climb aboard



The engine shop handles two to three engines each month, as well as gearbox rebuilds. Andy David carries out the work under the direction of Steve McHale





The original workshop also has four lifts and a rolling road, which can handle up to 320bhp, and is used mainly for trouble-shooting. Labour is £65 per hour

for 15 years – oversees work with older cars, while Mike (Etherington) and Mario (Balducci), who have come to us from Porsche Centres, focus on newer cars like the Boxster and Cayenne,' Jonas explains.

Predictably, a significant part of the organisation is the company website. Jonas – with tuition at art college and two years of handling marketing for Barnet Football Club behind him – clearly knows how to make the internet work for JZM. Last year (2006), the site had 35,000 visitors, of which 21,000 were 'new'. That's real people, he explains. The number of individual 'hits', or clicks from one item to another, was over two million, and the pattern this year is ever upwards.

'When we looked at it, the new customers were mainly younger people, perhaps working in the City of London, and all were fluent with the internet. We realised that the best way to talk to them was by the means they wanted: by electronic communication.'

The website is a work of art, and obviously something that Jonas revels in. He's devised it, writes a lot of it, and is constantly updating it. In fact, what with running a business, as well, you wonder if he ever sleeps.

Take a look. There's the usual basic company information on the home page and its associated links, and then, if you register (1200

people have done so far) with your car details, there's access to custom-made lists – with prices – of parts, service and repair work, and tuning equipment applicable to your specific car. Jonas says that the lists contain some 6000 'menu prices' to cover almost any job the customer may require.

The JZ Machtech Club aims to get website users more involved. There's the opportunity to ask technical questions – and get prompt answers – in a Q & A section hosted by Jonas, Steve, and other members of the JZ Machtech staff. You can have your own say on almost anything in a forum page, and read Porsche-related news items in another section. (Jonas has been part of this magazine's question and answer panel for some time, and he's man enough to admit that's what gave him the idea for the section on his own website!)

In fact, you can diagnose a problem, select some tuning gear, find out all the relevant costs, and book in your car to have the work done all on-line. If you are in the City of London, you'll probably do it all on your BlackBerry...

So, how did it all come about? As we've said, Jonas was an art student but, in fact, switched to a mechanics course at Watford College ('Mum's advice') before his time was up. Soon after he first delved into an engine, he knew he was hooked – and also realised that he had a knack for fixing

cars. He worked as a general mechanic, but decided the best business move would be to concentrate on one make, so he chose Porsche almost at random and got a job, helping racer Paul Edwards. Three years on, at the age of 23, he left to help get Pickup Motorsport off the ground.

Jonas's work for Mike Pickup ended when he moved to start his own company, Jaz – and soon another Pickup employee, Steve Winter, joined him. Not too long afterwards an amicable split saw Winter take over Jaz and Jonas leave for a two-year sabbatical from Porsches, to that job of looking after marketing the football team.

The JZ company came into being in 1996, in a small lock-up ('with a pit full of water and rats') in Shenley, Herts. Before long, Jonas was looking to expand, and along came Steve McHale, already in his family Machtech business based in larger premises at Kings Langley. A highly experienced engineer, Steve raced mainly saloons in the Seventies and Eighties, alongside such names as Gerry Marshall, Tony Lanfranchi and Gordon Spice, and – amongst other awards – has three class wins in seven Willhire 24-Hour races to his credit.

Steve was the ideal partner to Jonas's own mechanical and marketing skills. JZ Machtech was formed in mid 1999, in one unit of the former warehouse at Kings Langley. Four years later, the company added a new workshop on



This Steve McHale-developed disc-brake conversion for GT3, GT2 and Turbo cars utilises a cast-iron Alcon rotor of 362mm overall diameter, compared to 350mm for original equipment. The rotor is floating - separately mounted to the inner bell - to reduce vibration, and will accept Porsche six-pot caliper assemblies. The assembly (£507.00 excluding VAT for each rotor/bell) has better heat dissipation than Porsche's carbon disc and typically heats to just 600 degrees C, compared with 800 degrees for the factory option. Much longer life is promised and the larger rotor (6mm spacers required to fit the hub) means increased braking efficiency because the pads operate at a greater distance from the hub centre

Correct suspension set-up is essential, especially to get the best from a GT3. JZ Machtech has invested heavily in its geometry-setting system that uses two independent Maha 4.5-ton ramps (normal 2-ton ramps can twist when raised and so upset calculations) and a Hunter 611 electronic diagnostic alignment system. Lasers constantly check the alignment of the ramps to within 0.2mm. The system records all corner weights, plus camber, castor and track at the front wheels. Camber and track at the rear, and the thrust angle - which can cause rear-wheel steering - can also be checked. The system is way in advance of that used by most Official Porsche Centres

the same complex, custom-equipped to its own requirements. Approximately 45 cars pass through the premises for servicing, mechanical repairs, upgrades, and track-day preparation every week. JZM has developed a reputation for sorting the GT3, and it's not unknown for the number of these cars at Kings Langley to reach double figures on some days. At the last count, there were 198 GT3s on the books - almost half of the UK-specification models produced.

The link with Manthey Motors - which were selected by Porsche Motorsport to debut the latest 997 GT3 RSR on behalf of the factory at last year's Spa 24 Hours - has allowed JZM access to some of the very best tuning equipment for later model Porsches. Additionally, Steve McHale has been able to

expand the range of equipment on offer with the development of some of his own ideas, particularly with improved braking systems.

Jonas brought a business mind to the world of independent Porsche specialists, and with that came the marketing skills missing from many of his competitors. He reasoned that there was a big gap between Porsche Centres and the specialists, and owners of four-year-old cars might feel uncomfortable making the switch. Advertising and creating the right image were all-important.

'I think we were the first Porsche specialists to produce full-page advertisements. I come up with the ideas and write the copy, and an agency puts it together. We've run several different campaigns and have just started a new 18-advert campaign, which is based on direct

messages to the Porsche owner. I got the idea from the famous 'I want you' US Army recruiting poster from the First World War,' says Jonas.

Which, in a way, sums it up. Who'd have thought that a 90-year-old image by an artist called James Montgomery Flagg would provide the inspiration for a Porsche advertising campaign. It's this thinking outside the box that makes JZ Machtech unique. **12**

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