



# Building an identity

Over the course of its 50 years, Melksham Motor Spares has come to understand how it can best fulfil its role in the supply chain. *PMF* visited the factor to investigate what it is about the business that gives it such a self-assured identity.

On arrival at Melksham Motor Spares, you can't help but be struck by the blue and yellow signage that is so clearly visible to anyone who happens to pass by. Once this has been taken in, you enter the factor shop. This is immaculately laid out in tidy rows of consumables and other handy items to draw the eye of any curious customers that step through the factor's doors. After coasting by the aisles, you approach the countertop, where a polite staff member greets you and then asks: "How can I help you?"

## 'We know who we are'

This whole episode, from spotting the factor's signs, to being greeted by its staff, takes less than a couple minutes. It is so fine-tuned and professional, it could only be a product of many, many years of experience – 50 of them to be exact. Although every interaction with a factor should be like the one just described, this is sadly not always the case. Not every establishment pays as much attention to the finer details of dealing with people.

Such care has led the factor to become a well-recognised presence within the local community. The late Bryan and Mary Mattock started it all in 1968, from a small office and stockroom in a car park five minutes down the road from the current





premises. As humble as these beginnings may have been, this has meant those who now look after the business have a very strong grasp of the Melksham Motor Spares identity.

Phil Dodd, Managing Director, explained, "I could tell you all about our delivery times, range of products, stock management processes, etc. but really, our greatest asset is our strong identity. We know who we are and we know what we can offer. Bryan and Mary understood that there was more to factoring than simply shifting product, and I think this outlook is very much ingrained in the fibres of the business."

### Working with people

When asked whether there were plans to open a new branch any time soon, Phil provided another glimpse into how Melksham operates. With a smile to his colleagues, as if he'd been asked this question many times before, he said, "You never know, but the issue with opening a new branch is that you will always be moving into a new area, which means you won't know your customers. Not only that, but by spreading out your business, you risk diluting the relationship you have with the customers you already have. From our perspective, we would much rather focus on what we have."

Reinforcing bonds with customers is a fundamental aspect of Melksham's success. During the summer months, the factor celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a trade show, inviting 350-odd customers and 50-plus suppliers.

Alison Cook, Financial Director, and the event's coordinator, commented, "Honestly, this was as much work as organising a wedding, if not more. But it was 100% worth it. I believe motor factors should make an effort to bring suppliers and customers together, to discuss business, industry topics, etc. It's fairly uncommon for the two levels of the supply chain to come face-to-face, so why not put on an event geared towards doing this?"

"We also decided that the event would be a great opportunity to raise money for a good cause. Before the trade show, everyone at Melksham nominated a charity that is close to their heart, and on the day, managed to raise £7,500 in total, with each charity receiving £500!"

Although the anniversary trade show was a special occasion, it was by no means the first time the factor had organised an event for its customers. Melksham regularly hosts training evenings for technicians to polish up their



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skills, as well as learn new ones. For example, recently, the factor hosted the IMI-standard hybrid and electric vehicle training, as well as an informative evening focused on the Digital Service Book. Both of these topics are new to the aftermarket and ones that will likely play a significant role in the future of the industry.

Phil provided more detail. "As a factor, we should not just be selling vehicle components, we also need to provide our customers with the sort of information and training that will safeguard their businesses, and subsequently ours, for years to come. Especially when it comes to hybrids and EVs, I believe it won't be long before we see the wholesale uptake of these vehicles, so we need to prepare the supply chain for this upheaval."

### Exercising foresight

Despite having such a long history, Melksham is very proactive in adopting new aspects to the factoring business. Not

only does the company engage with recent technological developments, like the hybrid and EV training evenings previously mentioned, but it is also quick to try out new business processes that may improve the overall running of the factor.

Take social media for example. The factor regularly updates customers on the latest goings-on through Facebook and Twitter – a form of communication many in the aftermarket are yet to adopt. When asked about the factor's online presence, Tanya Elling, who coordinates the marketing for Melksham, explained, "Our focus has always been on nurturing our customer relationships. Social media just happens to be the newest method of doing this. Not only do we use the platforms to communicate important information, we also like to post things that are a little more light hearted. I particularly enjoy going through the company archives for our 'Throwback Thursday' posts. They're just a nice touch to our online presence that makes Melksham more approachable to our customers."

This all just goes to show that understanding and selling components is one thing, but to find success and become an established name, there needs to be more to a business. Although it is fundamentally a parts supplier, Melksham Motor Spares has built its identity around its customer relationships, which is sure to be the reason why it is still thriving today; 50 years after it was first established.

