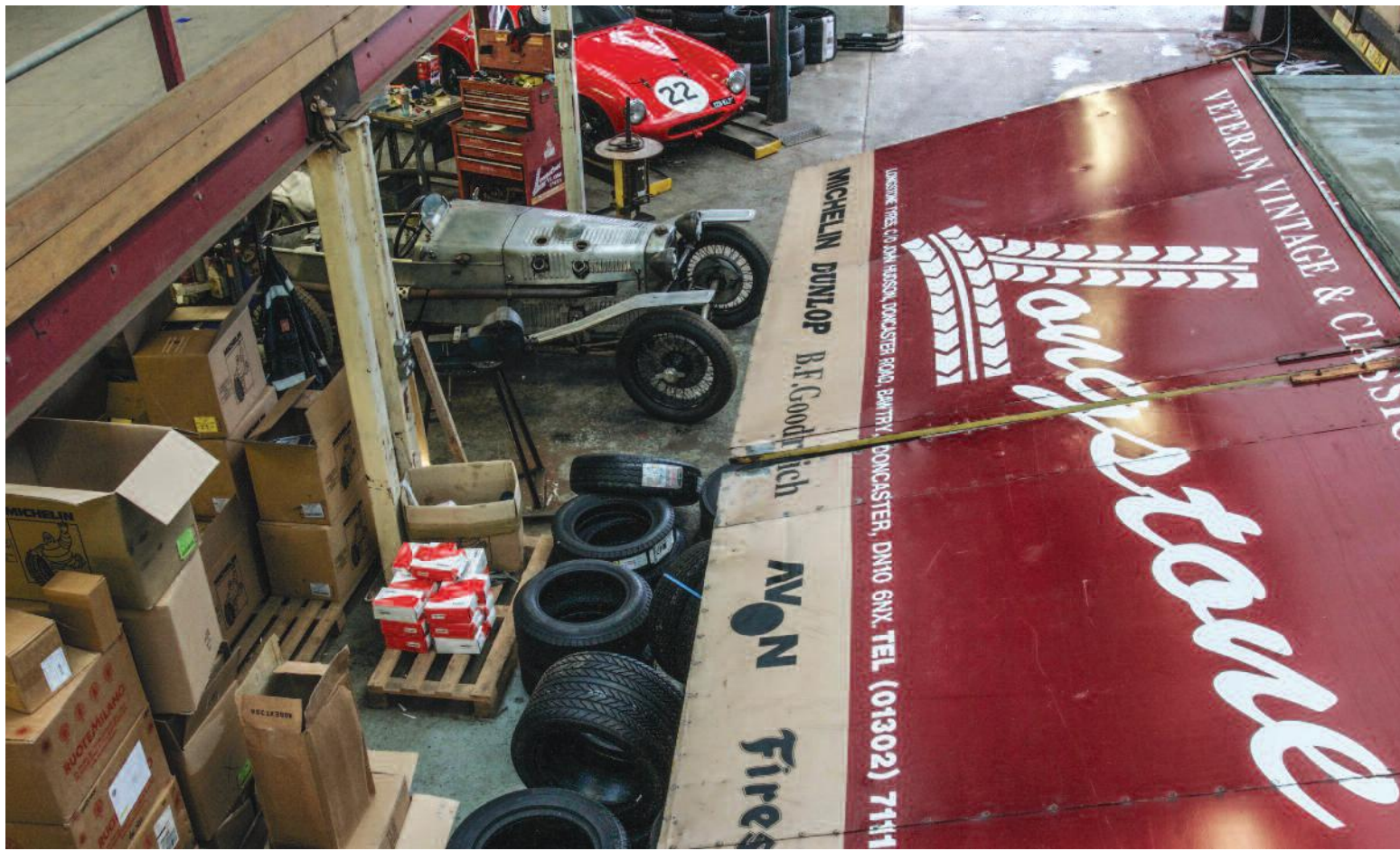


TECH: SPECIALIST

LONGSTONE CLASSIC TYRES

Classic cars and classic Porsches need classic rubber and the world's undisputed classic rubber expert is the ebullient, Dougal Cawley, of Longstone Classic Tyres. We drop in for a cuppa and some tyre talk

Words & Photography: Brett Fraser



Six-foot four, bushy of barnet and beard, and possessed of a personal vibrancy that dominates any space you encounter it in, you'll never forget your first meeting with the proprietor of Longstone Classic Tyres: Dougal Cawley is an honourable member of that rapidly diminishing breed, the eccentric Englishman.

It's an eccentricity that colours the public face of Longstone Classic Tyres, too. If you're the owner of a more modern Porsche then you won't have had call to visit the Longstone website in search appropriate rubberwear as a Google search isn't likely to throw up the name, but as a reader of *911 & Porsche World* (or many other specialist car magazines) you might have noticed the company's print ads – slightly risqué black and white period photographs of attractive and scantily clad

young ladies attending to stricken motor cars.

'Ah yes, funny you should mention those,' booms Dougal. 'We've just been done by the ASA [Advertising Standards Authority] for an ad we've run for the past 13 years. They've banned it on the strength of one complaint – a single complaint! – because the girl in the picture has a "coquettish" look. Ridiculous! I get requests from car clubs all the time asking if they

Longstone Tyres takes great pride in not being a sterile, characterless operation and we applaud such a stance

Right: Unmistakeable Pirelli P7 tread pattern. A must for any early 911 Turbo and SC for that matter. Right: Longstone also distribute Borrani wire wheels



can run our ads in their magazines to liven them up.

'Since the dawn of the automobile people have been pinning up smutty posters in their garages, and we were a bit inspired by them. Sexy sells. I mean, look at Michelin's advertising – it says quality and safety and family values. All good, commendable stuff. But what tyres does the passionate driver want on their car? Pirelli! Why? Because their ads are sassier – the tyres even have cool, sexy names like Cinturato. And just look at the tread pattern on a P7...

'We wanted to sell tyres so we adopted a similar philosophy with our marketing, only with a vintage slant. And it has worked wonderfully well, made Longstone ads really stand out. If you have a look on our website you'll find a tab for posters, some a tad more risqué than our ads, and we'll send them out for free to anyone who expresses an interest.'

Eye-arresting ads are but one of the tools of the classic tyre trade: far more important is the wealth of knowledge and experience amassed within the Longstone office.

'Packed with nerds,' hoots Dougal, 'live and breathe classic tyres and classic cars. The sales team gives proper, learned advice about what tyres will work best on your car and how you drive it, and we sell on quality. We will sell a customer a budget tyre, but only after they've been subjected to criticism and scoffing from the sales staff!'

'We've had very wealthy people with extremely valuable cars ring us up asking for cheap tyres. We have to tell them not to devalue their car by fitting rubbish rubber:

we know the car will be better for our efforts, we sleep with a clear conscience.'

Dougal is relaxed about referring to his staff as nerds because he is Longstone's Nerd-in-Chief. My hand has barely touched my tea mug – 'we love a brew around here, we get through three kettles a year' – than we're off on a whistlestop tour of the warehouse and workshops, Dougal talking at the speed and intensity of a racehorse commentator. He's got a lot to tell. The

“ We love a brew round here. We get through three kettles a year ”

tyres are such a crucial component in the overall dynamics of any car, and especially good classics, that this thing that you're passionate about risks being ruined by penny-pinching. We'll always try to talk people into making the right choice of tyre so that they'll enjoy their car at its optimum – the credit card bill is their concern, but as

history of car tyres in general, and of individual car tyre makers. How the technology of tyre construction has changed over the decades, from the barely wider-than-a-bicycle-tyre rubber fitted to pre-war (that's pre-First World War) motor carriages, through to the advent of radial tyres and on to the pioneering of low-profile



Far left: Some of the more obscure tools of the trade. Left: Michelin race rubber

Longstone Classic Tyres' self-confessed tyre nerd, Dougal Cawley



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Dougal's 'chain gang' Frazer Nash is a regular on the historic race scene. He often drives it to and from events. He has a half share in the Lotus Elite, which he hopes to race at Goodwood in 2019

Packed racks of tyres. Longstone has everything covered for including historic race rubber (right)



high performance tyres by Pirelli and Michelin. And on the subject of that latter company, he explains how the French maker despised the widespread acceptance of imperial measurements for tyre sizes and hung on to millimetric dimensions for as long as it could.

harmony with the chassis dynamics. Cars from those decades rolled through corners much more than modern suspension setups allow, and the contemporary tyres had construction and tread design that complemented that roll. Rear-engined Porsches are often accused of being

the racks, checks their sizes and markings, and from his internal data bank is able to say if they're appropriate for a Porsche, and if so, which model. Very early 356s, for example, roll on a 525 x 16 crossply tyre, the best of which is an Avon Tourist. Later 356s were supplied with a 560 x 15 crossply, but a superior 165 x 15 radial alternative is available – and preferable – these days. Up until 1968 Porsche's 912, 911 and 914 models ran on a 165 x 15 tyre, of which the Pirelli Cinturato CA67 (introduced in 1952) is a good example, as is the Michelin XAS (from 1965).

From 1968 Porsche started to go wider with the tyres for the 911, shifting to a 185/70 R15 specification (one of the first ever 70-profile applications) that Pirelli supplies as a Cinturato CN36 and Michelin as an XWX. For 1973 911 Carrera and RS models were treated to even broader

Below: From 356 to 993, the full gamut of classic tyres suitable for Porsches, with Pirelli CN36 in foreground

“ Dougal's internal data bank is able to say if they're Porsche appropriate ”

He also details – with considerable passion – the importance of fitting period-correct tyres to even quite modern classic cars. 'Today's tyres will fit some cars from the 1970s and '80s,' Dougal explains, 'but they're just wrong, they don't work in

snappy at the limit – and comparatively speaking they are – but on tyres that match the suspension's characteristics they are much more manageable and enjoyable.'

As we wander between the towering racks of rubber, Dougal picks tyres from

rubber, 215/60 R15, a size catered for in the CN36 range. And then in the mid '80s changes to the suspension of the 911SC saw a switch to 195/65 R15 tyres, a size that today seems pitifully narrow and tall and most likely to grace a modest hatchback. From 1985 Porsche started to offer 16-inch wheels for the 911, a rim size sufficiently popular that Michelin makes an SXX3 in 205/55 ZR16 and 245/45 ZR16 formats to fit them.

If, like me, you're of a vintage where you had an Athena poster of the 911 Turbo on your bedroom wall, then a pitstop at Longstone's Pirelli P7 racks is likely to stir old emotions. That evocative zigzag tread pattern can be found on 205/50 ZR15 and 225/50 ZR15 carcasses, and Longstone also stocks a smattering of monster 285/40 ZR15 and 345/35 ZR15 examples. Meanwhile, Pirelli is in the process of finishing development and testing of 16-inch P7s in 205/55, 225/60 and 245/45 profiles for 911SCs, amongst others.

What's interesting here is that both Pirelli and Michelin collaborate with Longstone for the distribution of their respective classic tyre ranges. Which is testament to Longstone's deep knowledge of, and passion for, the classic tyre market.

Because when the sharp-suited executives from Italy and France first rocked up at Longstone HQ, I'm guessing they might have been wondering what they'd let themselves in for: you approach Longstone through what looks like a grubby truck stop in a small town on the edge of Doncaster, and the premises are a section of old factory surrounded by faded shipping containers. And chances are they were picked up from the railway station in a slightly rusty and time-worn Rolls-Royce Silver Shadow with bright red velvet upholstery...

Dougal's strength of personality and boundless enthusiasm clearly convinced both parties that what really counts are experience, understanding and contacts, because Longstone now advises them on what sector of the market they should focus on next. And both Pirelli and Michelin also work directly with Porsche and its testing team to ensure that their classic tyres can be branded with the 'N4' marking that denotes official Porsche approval.

Despite his in-depth knowledge of Porsche tyres, Dougal doesn't own one. His great automotive passion is a battered, paintless and barely-bodied 'chain gang' Frazer Nash special from the early 1930s,

nicknamed Piglet. 'It does have a tenuous Porsche connection,' he chuckles, 'as AFN (Archie Frazer Nash) garage was Britain's first Porsche importer.'

Dougal and his wife Liz – Lucky Liz, as he refers to her – race and hillclimb Piglet extensively in Vintage Sports Car Club (VSCC) events the length and breadth of the land, with Dougal often driving it to and from even quite distant races. He also has a half share in a race-prepared Lotus Elite in which he hopes to compete in the Goodwood Revival in 2019, an Elite road car which may well have been sold by now, and a decrepit around the edges 1930s Ford Model A, in which the family goes trialling.

The rise of the internet means that Longstone does most of its business online and ships around the world – within Europe that shipping is free. It's also a distributor for Borrani wheels, 'probably the best wire wheels in the world'. Dougal concedes he could operate Longstone from anywhere on the planet: 'But I like England, the rain and a bit of dirt; I like grubby old sheds with shithouse cars in them. And as a team we like people, we like them to visit us.'

Should you ever be in the Doncaster area I urge you to take up Dougal's offer; you won't be disappointed. **PW**



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