

VASS-TECH

Neil Birkitt visited the brand-new premises of VASS-TECH in Whitchurch near Aylesbury and was instantly impressed...

PHOTOS: NEIL BIRKITT

IT'S NOT often that we feature trade profiles in the pages of *Audi Driver*, but after visiting the VASS-TECH open day back in December and noticing the amount of interest that the pictures subsequently attracted on our *Facebook* pages, I decided to pop back early in the New Year to see how things were going.

I'd have to say that I'd been instantly impressed by the new premises when I visited previously. Expecting only a typical industrial unit, to be presented with this towering, almost warehouse-like, building was quite a surprise. Tucked away behind the Gulf petrol station on the main road through Whitchurch in Buckinghamshire, the VASS-TECH premises occupy a large fenced yard with extensive concreted

hardstanding all around, while additional buildings on one side house the clean room and tyre-fitting bay.

The good vibes only improved as I entered through the neat well-equipped reception area and was shown into the extensive workshop area with its three high-lift ramps and MoT test bay, with spotlessly light grey-painted flooring and rows of black Snap-On tool chests.

Clearly, here was an independent facility that was easily on par with some of the more modestly-sized Volkswagen Retailer workshops and it was time to find out more about the two guys who have made it all happen. Both in their early Forties, I guess, Robin Mullan and Russell Stevens have an extensive back story in the motor trade, first as time-served apprentices and



Above: Rob Mullan (left of centre) and Russ Stevens (right of centre) with Steve Lloyd, their very first customer, and techs Nick Veal and Alex Clack.

then working through a succession of official Volkswagen and Audi Retailer workshops.

Rob, now living in Calvert Green, started off with an apprenticeship at Misbourne Motors in Chalfont St. Giles when he left school in 1992 and then worked at Windrush VW in Maidenhead until 2002, then graduated to Amersham Audi until 2004 and worked at Oxford Audi until 2008.

Russ, who now lives just down the road in Wing, started off with his work experience at Contim VW in Hayes, tried parts delivery for a year, then made himself useful in the workshop at Monaco Motors from 1996 to 1998, before moving to West London Audi, took a year out travelling in 2003, and then worked at Amersham Audi, Milton Keynes Audi and then Oxford Audi until 2008. →





From the fact that their paths had crossed previously at Amersham Audi and noting that they both worked together at Oxford Audi until 2008, you don't have to be Sherlock Holmes to guess that they'd become firm friends before deciding to go it alone. Taking their considerable experience and strong work ethic with them, they used their combined savings to set up an independent service garage at the current site in Whitchurch in August 2008.

They'd only found the premises by chance, an old 1940s coach service shed behind the High Street petrol station, that had seen several small business come and go over the years, before falling vacant for a couple of years. After some polite enquiries of the elderly lady who owned the site, they took out a lease and set about tidying it up and equipping it for business.

Then, after personally putting out 3,000 promotional flyers around the area, and running a promo ad on the

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local radio station, they didn't look back, soon acquiring a large and regular client base of local VW and Audi owners, all keen to have their cars reliably serviced by the two nice lads in the shed behind the Gulf petrol station...

Incidentally, their very first customer – Steve Lloyd, who took his Alhambra there in August 2008 for a routine service – is still with them today, having become one of a great many repeat customers in the meantime.

Inevitably, though, with business booming and the motor trade becoming ever more sophisticated, Rob and Russ felt the need to enhance the facilities and improve the general appearance. Various plans for a refit of the existing shed slowly developed and then, in May 2012, when they took the opportunity to buy the whole site, their ambitious ideas took hold and various possibilities

were explored. Soon came the realisation that they had to totally redevelop the site and put up a completely new building.

Business had been good, but not *that* good, and after an early disappointment with promises of the necessary funding, one of their customers put them in touch with a much more reliable source of finance and things really started to take off. Using the workshops of TVR specialist Topcats Racing in Westcott as a 'model' target for the sort of quality premises they wanted, the plans were put into action and the various architects, subcontractors and builders commissioned. In July 2016, Rob and Russ moved out into temporary premises at Creslow Park while the Whitchurch site was first razed to the ground and then built back up again to re-emerge in its present glory.





Now occupying a substantial footprint of 23 x 10 metres (approx. 2,500 sq.ft. in old money) and a good six metres high, Rob tells us that the new workshop building is so large and catches the light so well that he can see it from his approach on the main road from several miles away, second only in height and visibility to the village church.

As industrious and multi-skilled as they are, Rob and Russ weren't going to be able to handle all the work themselves and so they've taken on the able assistance of a couple of local lads, qualified technicians Nick Veal and Alex Clack, and with some occasional help with the admin from other members of the family, they are already racing through the workload. In their very first week alone they turned around 36 individual jobs, ranging from routine servicing, diagnostics and MoT tests to some fairly extensive troubleshooting tasks.

On the morning I visited, there was a yard full of cars waiting for servicing and repair, and even at 08.30 the ramps were already busy, with an S4 Avant for routine servicing, an S5 Cabriolet with its supercharger removed for Russ to replace the thermostat, an A4 Avant in for a diagnostic check associated with an S tronic gearbox fault, and a VW T5 Camper in the MoT test bay, while outside a regular customer had just arrived with his W12-engined A8L for its regular service.

Rob and Russ tell us that a good 70 per cent of their work is regular

Above: *The majority of the work is regular servicing and repairs, as well as diagnostic troubleshooting.*

Above right: *The workshop is always busy.*

Right: *Russ removing the supercharger from an S5 Cabriolet.*



servicing and repairs, diagnostic troubleshooting and MoT test remedial work, with a fully equipped tyre fitting and balancing facility in-house, but they've also dealt with some pretty tall orders like an RS 6 engine out and a Touareg V10 rebuild.

They're not so much into the performance tuning and modification side of things, preferring to leave the re-mapping and satnav upgrades to specialists like Revo and Richter, although they'll happily fit cruise control, parking sensors, sports exhausts, brake upgrades or a suspension kit whenever required.

I couldn't help noticing, though, that out in the yard was a fully race-prepared Mk 2 GTI with the name Russ Stevens on the rear side windows, built for the Mk 2 Golf GTI Championship, and the lads also have another Mk 2 bodysell in preparation, ready for when they get some spare time out from the business to go racing again. Check out their website if you need any spare Mk 2 Golf parts.

For the time being, though, Rob and Russ will be concentrating on keeping the main workshop busy with a steady throughput, maintaining their existing faithful customer base and accommodating new customers from far and wide. Using only OEM quality parts from TPS, ECP and Schäferbarthold, they operate quickly and efficiently at a basic labour rate of £60 + VAT per hour for normal fare and £70 + VAT an hour for R8 and RS models.

For short duration work, you can hang out in the reception area, with modern toilet facilities, or watch over the workshop from the mezzanine viewing area, or even take a stroll around the village, and with a couple of courtesy cars – a Passat and a Bora – available if required, they seem to have it all covered. 🇩🇪

THEY ARE ALREADY RACING THROUGH THE WORKLOAD...

The new workshop is easy to find, located just behind the Gulf petrol station and Costcutter store on the A413 High Street through Whitchurch in Buckinghamshire, between Aylesbury and Buckingham and not too far from Leighton Buzzard, Milton Keynes or Luton. Call them on 01296 641 429 or visit the website at www.vass-tech.co.uk