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Porsche 944 and 968 owners have discovered Project Nine: Cliff built Gary Duckman's 2006 924 Championship winning engine

# PROJECT NINE ENGINEERING EXPERIENCE COUNTS

A compact but well engineered Porsche specialist on a farm down a country lane in the Garden of England. How do we find them?

Words: Paul Davies  
Photography: Michael Ward

It's a bit of a responsibility really. We publish something about a company, you take the love of your life along to them for service, repair, or whatever, and hopefully you leave as a satisfied customer. Rarely do we get complaints, so we can only assume most people end up happy bunnies. So, how do we find the Porsche specialists that feature in these pages, and how do we know they are worthy of inclusion?

There's word of mouth, of course; often someone recounts a good experience they want to 'share' and we follow it up. Then there are the advertisements in this and other Porsche publications (dear reader, the hours I have spent turning over the pages on your behalf) and, of course, the internet. The motoring forums (I'm thinking Pistonheads and DDK here) can be a valuable source of information, some congratulatory some necessarily critical.

Take Project Nine Engineering. It was an advertisement that first brought the name to notice, then a bit of web-based research threw up some favourable comments, then we went knocking on the door to find out more. Result: it's a fairly new outfit, based deep in the Kent countryside, which – we think – deserves your attention.

Clifford Lowe is the man in charge at Marden, near Tonbridge. In fact, apart from apprentice Kieren he's the only man at Project Nine, and it seems that – for the time being anyway – he's happy it should remain like that. He's



993 Turbo (top right) is in for a Bilstein PSS10 upgrade. Background includes a 911SC, Carrera 2.7, and a 2.4-litre that spent 10 years without moving

been fettling Porsches for some 20-plus years, and is very much of the opinion that it's his personal, hands-on, attitude that keeps the customers coming back.

Go back a bit. Straight from school Cliff wanted to work with cars, and a release scheme from college had him learning the ropes at Phil Wells Engineering south of London. Wells' involvement in karting and racing an Alfasud had the inevitable result, and over six years Cliff got the motor racing bug.

That ailment suffered by many of us at some time or another led to Cliff moving into motor sport, firstly with Elden Racing, which was preparing and racing Formula Ford 2000 and Formula Renault cars. Then followed a number of other postings in the racing world – including a time with a team running (later) Porsche star Johnny Mowlem in Formula Vauxhall Lotus – before ending up with the top-ranking Edenbridge Racing Formula 3 team.

All the time Cliff was learning more and more of the oily end of the motor sport engineering business, gaining valuable experience and expertise. The financial downturn of the early nineties (that one) saw many teams crash, and our man Lowe took a 'year out' in the building trade and working at an engine re-conditions before he landed a job as a technician with a central London Porsche specialist. His first Turbo engine re-build, he recalls, was achieved with the workshop manual by his side. More experience though.

But big-city and big-company life didn't appeal, and



before long our man was back in the Kent area, still with Porsches obviously. Cliff's wanderings ended when he signed up with Joe Austin (now of HP Motorsports in Hainault, Essex) at La Rose Porsche, where he was to remain for some 14 years, ending as workshop manager and head technician, and all the time learning the marquee inside out. The crunch came at the end of 2008 when, age 40, he decided it was 'now or never' to set up his own business.

Project Nine Engineering is a Porsche-only outfit, servicing, repairing, and upgrading, all models of road car, plus carrying out engine and transmission re-builds. Cliff has the diagnostic equipment in the two-ramp workshop to deal with the latest in the range, and the experience to know what goes wrong with earlier models. It's a compact business, with Cliff hands-on all projects and Kieran learning fast.

Workshop rate is £48 per hour, excluding VAT, and Project Nine – like most people – operates a 'menu' of servicing prices with, for example, a 24k check on a 944 at £220 through to a similar mile service on a 996 at £450. Cliff will report back on any recommendations for further work that surfaces at the same time – it's part of the personal approach philosophy.

A good idea of the sort of Porsches that go through the workshop doors at Marden can be gained from the cars you'll see in the photographs on these pages. Project Nine still sees a fair share of front-engined 944





Cliff Lowe (bottom middle) has been hands on in the workshop and trackside for over 20 years looking after Porsches

models – it seems once owners learn of a reliable and not-overly-expensive source of attention for their cars they gravitate towards it – and early 911s.

More modern machinery in at the same time included a 996 Turbo for service and a 993 Turbo for the fitting of a Bilstein PSS10 suspension kit. In the engine shop, a 930 Turbo unit was being completely rebuilt after suffering a traumatic experience at a non-Porsche specialist.

Cliff is somewhat scornful of the high-and-mighty attitude of some dealers. If you've got a minute or two he will recount, blow for blow, his recent battle to secure a factory recall job completed on a 993 that he could plainly see had not been carried out despite a Porsche

motor sport side of things. He's in regular demand building race engines for a number of customers – he was responsible for Gary Duckman's 924 Championship winning engine of 2006 and his successful 968 engine a few years later – and will also carry out race or trackday preparation of a customer car.

On the name-dropping front, former touring car ace and now historic race and rally driver Patrick Watts is a local owner who brings his (two) Porsches to Project Nine for attention. The restoration, in previous years, of both a Martini 911 RSR and a 959 supercar should also not go unmentioned in the Lowe c.v. Can't say much more than that can we?

## “Cliff is still very much involved in the motor sport side of things, building race engines”

Centre's insistence it had.

In fact, on this subject, it's worth mentioning that the engine wiring loom originally built into the 993 can overheat and self-ignite – hence a no charge to customer manufacturer mod that should, by now, have been carried out on all cars. Check for a part number ending '07' or later, and a couple of surplus terminals, which should indicate the original has been replaced by a post 1996 version. It's this sort of information that makes for a good independent.

Although it's primarily road cars that go through the workshop doors, Cliff is still very much involved in the

Project Nine Engineering has been up and running less than two years. The first 12 months, Cliff admits, was 'a bit scary', but he seems to have survived and built up a loyal and regular customer base. Experience counts, and it's one sure way to find the way onto our list of specialists.

(Oh yes, Cliff's actually got a guilty secret! Tucked away on the mezzanine floor of the workshop – which also serves as the engine building area – is a classic Fiat 500. It's a long-term project, converting the little car into an Abarth replica for a Porsche-owning Project Nine customer.) **PW**

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