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Prestige Engineering, the designers and makers of the famous Carp are one of the few companies still manufacturing carp fishing products. Their high-quality designs have a strong reputation, and their barrows among some of the country's top carp anglers. We met up with Alan, Director of Prestige Engineering to find out more about this unique company.

**Good morning Alan, lets start at the beginning. How did you become involved in manufacturing carp barrows, and how did Prestige Engineering start?**

I've been involved in manufacturing tubular steel products for about 20 years. I originally made items for the disabled and elderly people, such as walking aids and frames. The barrows started really because I couldn't obtain what I wanted from tackle shops. I remember going into a

shop to buy a trolley, but they had such a poor selection, that I decided to design my own. I'd always been interested in the possibility of making fishing tackle, and because we had the technology and the machinery here to manipulate steel, we began making fishing trolleys. Our initial products were the basic upright match trolleys. This was in about 1985.

One of the first shops we took our products to was Bromages in Essex. Rex, who

ran the shop, liked what he saw, and that's where it started.

Although we started with match fishing trolleys, the core of our business is producing trolleys for carp fishing. We have Lee Jackson to thank for much of that. We always knew of The Tackle Box as being one of the foremost shops in the south, and I had a conversation with him about ten years ago when we were considering producing tackle transportation products for

interview



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carp fishing. Lee was using a wheelbarrow for his fishing, and I asked him what he thought of us designing something that would do the job better than the wheelbarrow, and that could fold down and fit into the back of a car. Lee felt that there would be a great market for this, and we weren't aware of anybody else that made such a product. So we went ahead with it, and this became the Mk1 Carp Porter. We took it to Lee and he absolutely loved it, and started selling them at the shop. From there we developed the slightly more advanced Mk2. The Mk2 has been a very successful product, and many of the originals that were made ten or twelve years ago are still being used. We haven't changed the design much either during that time.

So really, we developed the first Carp Porters for Lee Jackson and The Tackle Box. At first it was a bit of a sideline to what we were doing with the disabled products and the match trolleys, but soon Tackle Box started buying them in quantities of ten, and then twenty, and soon we couldn't make them quickly enough.

For the first five years there was no major competition, barring a few copies, but we had a patent on certain aspects of the design. Soon we had ten shops around the country and it snowballed from there.

**What is different about Prestige Engineering's Carp Porters from other trolleys and barrows on the market?**

The MK2 Carp Porter – Still going strong after 12 years in production.



Below: Prestige still manufacture their flagship products in England at their own engineering workshop.



We are one of the few companies that specialise in making trolleys for carp fishing, rather than this being just one of many products. We design and make them, rather than just importing. It's our core business. We have the expertise, the machinery and the experience. We like to think we are number one in this field, firstly because we are specialists, secondly because we have resisted the temptation to diversify, and thirdly because we manufacture most of our products here in England. I think we sell on reputation and brand, and we are getting a very good brand name out there now.

**Can you tell us why you have maintained a British manufacturing base, when so many others have sourced production overseas?**

One of the reasons for retaining our UK production is that I am an engineer by trade, and my satisfaction is derived from buying in steel in its raw

state, then cutting it, bending it, welding it, and producing a finished product. I love the environment of an engineering workshop, I enjoy the design aspect, and I like the smell of the oil and the noise of the factory. I get satisfaction out of this, and seeing our products on the banks of rivers and lakes.

We make virtually every single part of the products. We press the brackets, we turn the anodised knobs, we cut, bend and weld the frames. We don't make the wheels though, we buy those in.

By designing and manufacturing the products ourselves, we understand the products, and know them inside out. We also have the power to change things if there is a fault. If we produce a batch of fifty or a hundred and we discover a minor fault, we can change it immediately for the next batch of fifty. When you are importing from China you are bringing in at least five hundred at a time, so if a batch is faulty you've had it.

Although we are a British manufacturer, and most of our stuff is designed and made in England, I wouldn't like to mislead anybody. We do in fact buy some items from China, but this is only with the lower-end products. We have to do this in order to compete with other companies who have basically copied or modified our ideas and concepts, and taken them to China to have them produced cheaply. I must say that with luggage, the Chinese factories are spot-on, because they've got years of experience in sewing. But with metal work, the quality isn't always top-end, although we have found a way of achieving the best possible quality from our Chinese manufacturing.

**How have you achieved this?**

There are only a few factories in China who make products for all the English companies. In the first instance, I went to one of these factories. They knew about Prestige Engineering, and recognised that we are a quality company.

I told them that I wanted the top quality, and that I wanted them to produce my designs properly. This factory make many products for other companies and I wouldn't have been happy with the quality of these, so I spent a week in meetings explaining how we wanted our items made, and pointed out some of the things they were doing wrong. I even told them how to set their welders. We do pay a bit of a premium because of this extra attention to detail, but it's worth it. I've been happy with the products. Another thing that we do, is that every time a shipment is due, I fly out to China and personally inspect it to make sure it is up to scratch before it leaves. Having said all this, the quality will never be as good as our English-made products, and these do outsell those we have made in China by a long way.

**Can you tell us a bit about the Carp Porters themselves?**

One of our most important products is the Mk4S. It is different from anything else. It folds up flat, it has a big fat wheel, and comes with a bag which lowers the centre of gravity. It is around £200 and is



Prestige Engineering are currently increasing their promotional activity with adverts and features in the magazines. This consumer brochure is just one part of their marketing strategy.



Above & right: The Mk4S – serious quality!



The Power Porter is a truly awesome barrow which makes light work of heavy loads over all terrains. Demand for these is expected to grow incredibly over the next couple of years.

a good seller. It is one of our flagship products, and it is on these kind of items that we have built our reputation. People are still prepared to pay for quality. We find, from speaking to the shops that stock our Carp Porters, that many customers come to our products after being disappointed with the cheaper ones from other companies. They tend to find that despite most barrows looking roughly the same, so many can either be uncomfortable to use, or fall apart very quickly. If an angler goes into a shop,

loads up one of our barrows and tries it out, he'll soon see the difference. Although we've resisted the temptation to produce luggage as such, we are now doing a range of purpose-made Carp Porter Luggage, specifically designed for use with our barrows. These are very well-made from waterproof nylon, with a hard-wearing leatherette base. They secure onto the barrows with Velcro. We also do other accessories such as the Puncture-Proof Wheels, and the Universal Water Carrier Kit.



Ian Chillcott, just one of the many top anglers who swear by Prestige Carp Porters.



It's a race! Lee Jackson prepares to take on a Honda with his Power Porter.

### **I'm particularly interested in the Power Porter. Can you tell us a bit about this?**

Again, Lee Jackson was key to the development of this product. I asked Lee if he thought an electric barrow would be the kind of thing that would sell. His response was "Make me one, and I'll try it," so I did just that. Lee was very pleased with his Power Porter, and now won't go fishing without it. The first version we made was a bit unreliable because the electronics weren't right. We came away from the original company and now have the electronic components produced by a company who make things for the MOD, and for wheelchairs, which obviously have to be very reliable.

Of course, being quite an expensive product, it has a bit of a limited market, but many older anglers have found it invaluable. I've had a lot of older guys phone up, who want one because otherwise they just can't go fishing. Even with a normal barrow the strain can be too much for some, and it just takes the fun out of going fishing. But it's not just older anglers who are using them. It makes everybody's life easier, and the more they are seen on the banks, the more we sell. When ordinary barrows first appeared there was some resistance. You know the kind of thing, guys saying "I don't need a barrow, I can carry my gear on my back" or "Only wimps use barrows," but nowadays virtually everybody uses one, and I think it will be similar with the Power Porter.

### **What promotional activity do you undertake?**

In the last few months we have started to increase promotion in several areas. Our brand is already well-known and respected, but we aim to increase this further. One of the areas where we have put in a lot of work is with the website, which is very good. Of course

we need to make potential customers aware of the website, so we plan to have more advertising in all of the carp fishing magazines, along with reviews.

Another aspect of promotion is the brochures. All our stockists will be given the new catalogue, which includes all our products. Customers can then take these home, browse through them and choose which item would best suit their fishing and their wallet. Then they can come back to the shop and try out the ones they are interested in.

We already sell more barrows for carp fishing than anybody else, but our aim is to make carp anglers even more aware of the fact that Prestige Carp Porters are the number one carp fishing barrows. Therefore, a customer who wants to buy a barrow is going to want to have a proper look at our products alongside all the others, before he makes his choice of what to buy. Shops that don't stock our Carp Porters, are, in my opinion, at a disadvantage, because these customers will inevitably go elsewhere to try them out. So retailers who stock them, are missing out.

### **Do you involve any well-known anglers in the the promotion of your gear?**

Yes, many of the top carp anglers use Prestige Carp Porters. I've mentioned Lee Jackson already, but there's also Terry Hearn, Frank Warwick, Nick Helleur, Danny Fairbrass, Damien Clarke, Ian Chillcott, Matt Hayes and Steve Spurgeon, and these are just the ones who have agreed to appear on our brochure. We don't pay anybody to use our barrows or to put their names on them, and we don't employ them as field testers. We only want these guys to use our barrows if they think they are good, and prefer to use them over other barrows.

### **Can you tell us about any new products – do you have anything currently under development?**

We are developing new products all the time. The only way we can maintain our market position is to stay one step ahead, because of all of the copying that goes on. By the time our competitors get their products out, we'll have our next ones available.

We now have the MK4S Evo ready. We've improved on the MK4S by using a lighter but stronger bicycle tubing in the manufacture. This makes the barrow 25% lighter. Bicycle frames are obviously round in section, but we've used it in square section for even more strength. There are also Kevlar bands in the tyres, which help to eliminate punctures. We've also got the barrow-specific luggage, and the new tri-porter wheels. These can be fitted to MK4, the Mk4S and the Power Porter to eliminate the need to lift the barrow when pushing over flat ground. So we are still ahead of the competition.

### **What is your policy with regards to retailers? Is it a case of the more the merrier, or are you more selective about who stocks your products?**

I feel that one of the most important things that we can offer is customer service. We want our products to be sold and to be demonstrated, so we prefer shops that are able to do that. Also we try not to have too many outlets within an area. We prefer to work with one or two of the better shops in an area who can give the customer the best service, and promote the products for us. It works for us and it works for the retailers. That way, we are loyal to those shops, and hopefully in return they will give us loyalty.

### **Finally, how do you see the future of Prestige Engineering?**

I see Prestige, with the aid of the new catalogue, and the fact that our brand name has become synonymous with genuine quality, as having a great future.

We have been one of the few companies that have survived up until now by making our products in England. We've carried on and survived, selling quite expensive

products, and we've done that on the reputation of our brand and our products. We have recently started having some of the lower-end products made in China, and by combining our reputation and brand with very good value, good quality lower-end products we are now destroying the competition at their own game. So as long as we continue to innovate, and stay one step ahead, the future looks extremely good for us. **Thanks for talking to us, Alan** It's a pleasure.

### **For further information on Prestige Engineering, or to enquire about becoming a stockist, contact Prestige on tel: 01268 726661**



Carrying water bottles has always been a problem with all fishing barrows. Once again, Prestige have a solution with this Universal Water Carrier.



Triporter additional back wheels take away the need to lift the barrow when pushing over flat, firm ground.



A puncture proof wheel – what a great idea!



Dedicated Carp Porter Luggage is one of the latest additions to the range.