

CLASSIC DRIVER

A designer's day off, starring Matthew Humphries

Lead

At just 21 years old, Matthew Humphries was appointed Morgan's head of design, having penned the Aeromax. He created the 3 Wheeler soon afterwards. Since leaving the company three years ago, he's been a busy chap – so we spent a (rare) day off with the talented 32-year-old...

We meet Matthew at [Shelsley Walsh](#), the oldest hillclimb venue in the world – and also the designer's childhood playground. He grew up just a stone's throw away and, as a child, he'd attend events such as Bentley Drivers Club meetings here, clutching onto his father's coattails. But today, with the legendary venue free of competition traffic for the morning, he's come along for a little fun with his girlfriend and business partner Penelope, and their 'his and hers' [Alfa Romeo Spiders](#).

Adding strings to the bow



After a few leisurely runs up the hill in the morning sunshine, Matthew tells us what he's been up to since his seven-year stint at [Morgan](#) – and he's certainly been busy. Alongside numerous car design projects (most of which he can't discuss, as they've not yet been revealed to the public), he's also dipped a toe into the world of watch design, setting up his own bespoke watch company while also creating new designs for revived Swiss brand, Lonville. And all the while, he's been lecturing students at the Royal College of Art, the prestigious springboard for many of the world's top designers.

Four-cylinder party



As the [Alfas](#) tick themselves cool, the morning silence is broken by the thrum of another twin-cam inline-four. Matthew's father Mark, a successful architect and also an avid car enthusiast, has brought along his [3 Litre Bentley](#), one of the 71 TT Replica models originally built. "I thought I'd bring this along to show just how advanced Bentley's technology was for the time," he says, cheekily mocking his son's hillclimb steed before storming up Shelsley in the Vanden Plas-bodied behemoth.

A varied collection



We make our way back to the Humphries home, where we're introduced to the family fleet – and it's an eclectic one. The Bentley and matching Alfas are joined by collector staples such as more [Porsche 911s](#) and a [Porsche 356 A](#), but there's plenty of diversity beyond that. Tucked away in the garage, we also find a stunning, pin-striped [Bentley S2 Continental](#), a [Citroën Traction Avant](#), the [MGB](#) that was Matthew's first daily driver, and even a [Saab 96](#) V4 rally car. Once we've been given the guided tour, we sit down with Matthew to ask a few questions.

Talking shop



You have quite an eclectic collection – which car are you most attached to?

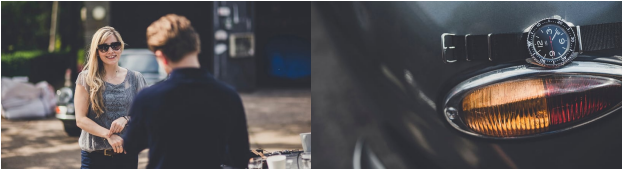
That would be the grey Porsche 911T 2.2. Dad and I went on lots of tours and historic rallies in that car across Europe when I was younger. Then, shortly after I'd passed my driving test, he took me to Donington for a track day and threw me the keys. I'd never driven a rear-wheel-drive car before, let alone a rear-engined one. Of course, I lost it on the first lap at the Old Hairpin – I made the classic mistake in an old 911, of lifting off as it started to oversteer. Luckily, the cars following managed to avoid us, and from there I was determined to learn how to drive it properly.



You clearly like your classic cars. Do you ever use them as inspiration for your own designs?

Definitely. I designed the Aeromax when I was still a university student on a work placement at Morgan. I loved the teardrop-shaped [Talbot-Lagos](#) and [Bugatti Atlantics](#), so

there are elements of them in the design. It was intended to be a private project for a customer, but it was so successful when we launched the car in Geneva, Morgan decided to build a limited run of 100 vehicles. It was at this time that Charles Morgan offered me the design director job.



When did you first become interested in watches?

I've always had a personal interest in cars and watches. When I was designing the [3 Wheeler](#), I was wondering how we could replicate the design of a nice watch in the dashboard design. I found the perfect ignition switch, which was the bomb release button from the Eurofighter jet. From that, I decided to design the instrument binnacle around it, with big square dials, an aluminium backing plate and big, exposed fixings in the corners. I layered it up so it would give you the feeling of the B52 bomber, and from that my interest grew. I started playing around with watches and taking them apart, and then I found there was a huge craze for customising Seiko watches.



So that led to the creation of your watch company?

Yes. I like automatic watches, and I like the mechanical fascination behind them. I bought up a load of Seikos, took them apart, and began customising them with new bezels, dials, chaptering and hands. It started out as a hobby, but I soon realised there was a business case. My partner, Penelope, had been working in textiles, and she particularly liked experimenting with different fabrics and materials. I'd got some custom cases, bezels and other parts made up, and Penelope began creating the straps. Then, almost a year ago, we founded [MHD Watches](#).



Sort of what Bamford does with Rolexes, then, but at a more affordable price?

Yes, I guess so. We're completely honest about what we do: they're Seiko watches, which are then customised with a range of different parts. It's similar to Morgan - they used a tried-and-tested BMW engine and then created the car around that. We take the reliable Seiko movement and allow customers to choose their own case, dial, bezel, strap, chaptering and hand designs, all put together by hand. We do bespoke colours, too: one chap came to us with a request for three watches, all with the same design but different-coloured second hands. He had a 911, his father had a [964 RS](#), and his brother had a [Lotus Elan](#), so we colour-matched the hands of each watch to their cars. I like the idea of creating an item that's personal to each customer, but isn't necessarily going to cost the world.



You've already accomplished a great deal in a relatively short career. What does the future hold?

More cars, definitely. I'm working on various projects at the moment, and that'll always be my main passion. I'd also like to develop the watches, and eventually create my own watches from scratch, with my own movements. Ultimately, I just like products that have been tailored to the individual needs of each customer.

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Gallery

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