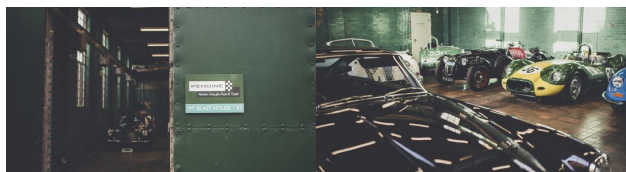


# CLASSIC DRIVER

## Stories from the Blast House at Pendine Historic Cars

### Lead

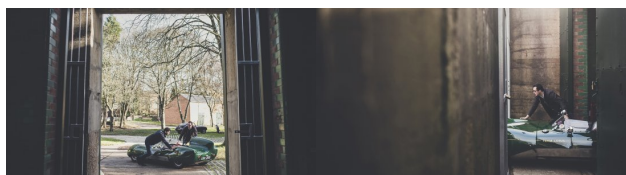
After 11 years in the trade, James Mitchell decided to go it alone and established 'Pendine Historic Cars' in the Blast House on the burgeoning Bicester Heritage site in Oxfordshire. We spent the morning with Mitchell, to learn more about his exciting new venture...



Specialising in the sale of historic road and racing cars, Pendine Historic Cars is located at [Bicester Heritage in Oxfordshire](#), the country's first retail park dedicated to the trade, maintenance, restoration and storage of historic cars, motorcycles and aeroplanes. Its showroom on the former RAF bomber base is housed in the Blast House, which was used as a defensive shelter to deflect even the biggest of enemy bombs, and has been beautifully preserved as part of the on-going restoration process across the site.

Entering through the goliath of an outer wall and seeing the thousands of green tiles lining the interior is a truly different experience, but one that lends itself beautifully to the trade of classic cars. It's also representative of the appeal Bicester Heritage holds - if you haven't visited yet, we strongly recommend you do so.

With 11 years' experience of the trade and a number of automotive books under his belt, Mitchell is passionate and enthusiastic, and has forged a business that is interesting not only for its diverse inventory, but also for its location and all that comes with it. After an unusually busy period of business over Christmas and into the New Year, we joined Mitchell at the Blast House to talk all things Pendine - over a cup of tea, of course.



### What is your earliest automotive memory?

It's of standing in the shade of my father's workshop on a hot summer afternoon, handing him spanners as he mended our Honda Monkey Bike once again, after my sisters had broken it, once again.

### How did you turn your passion into a career?

I was on a train returning from Edinburgh, having departed university sooner than I'd expected. I was reading Motor Sport magazine, and spotted an advertisement for a job cleaning the showroom in a Kensington-based classic car dealership. It was a summer job that was to last 11 years...



**What prompted the decision to establish your own business?**

I think everyone’s got an idea in his or her head about how something should be done. For me, the time seemed right to do something about it, so I took the plunge and set up my own business.

**And could you explain where the ‘Pendine’ name comes from?**

Ever since I was a toddler, I have always been fascinated by – and had huge admiration for – the story of the Land Speed Record. It was on Pendine Sands in Wales that Sir Malcolm Campbell set the first ever British Land Speed Record back in 1924. Naming my business ‘Pendine’ is my nod to Campbell’s heroic achievements.

**Why did you choose Bicester Heritage – specifically the Blast House – as a home for your business?**

It’s been just three years since Bicester Heritage opened for business, and already it seems to be the new home for the historic car movement in the UK – and the message is still spreading. I really wanted to be a part of this new and exciting venture. We chose the Blast House specifically because it is such an interesting and amazing building.



**How does the location differentiate you from your competitors?**

As almost all the businesses operating at Bicester Heritage work together, Pendine can offer a level of service that very few of our competitors can. We don’t just sell classic cars; we’re an integral part of the entire ownership experience, and the life cycle of the car.

**What criteria must a car in your inventory fulfil?**

First and foremost, I have to like it! I simply can’t represent and offer a car that I’m not properly enthusiastic about. Cars we stock need to be different, interesting and excellent examples of the marque.



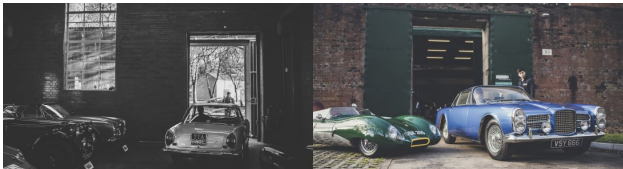


**Why don't you concentrate on one particular era of car?**

While post-War British sports and racing cars are my speciality and form the bulk of my business, sometimes I struggle to say no to good examples of cars from other eras.

**Has helping to research and write a number of automotive books helped you in the business?**

Yes, without a doubt. History and documentation is becoming more and more important in the trade, and gone are the days when a car's history file included a petrol receipt from 1983 and not a lot else. My clients recognise my enthusiasm for history, and the knowledge that comes with it.



**And given your experience, where can you see the market heading in the future?**

There's been a lot of talk of the classic car bubble bursting and, perhaps unfairly, people seem keen to knock the auction houses for some average recent results. But personally, I've never been busier. While there might be a brief plateau in the market, we're certainly not facing an apocalypse.

**What car do you drive at the weekend?**

It's a Humber Super Snipe estate. The dog particularly likes it, because of the acres of room and the huge amount of glass from which to look out.

*Photos: Amy Shore for Classic Driver © 2016*

**Gallery**

























