

# Medway team gives alloy wheels new spin

## LEPSONS

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**Staff** 12 **Specialism** alloy wheel refurbishment **Prices** from £35.25 per wheel, £41.13 with tyre; same day service for five wheels £240.88

Nothing sets off a car like a nice set of wheels – you're more likely to notice them than the odd blemish in the paintwork. Which is where Lepsons comes in: it gives tired and chipped old wheels a new lease of life.

Brothers Andy and Tony Lepenwell, who both run classics – a Granada Ghia and a Merc 500SE – set up Lepsons in 1994 when, as Tony puts it: "We saw there was a niche in the market, and we've grown gradually ever since." It now refurbishes about 25,000 wheels per year, about 30 per cent of the business being for classics – an area where it sees potential for growth, after taking a stand at the International Classic Motor Show. "The main appeal for people with classics," explains Tony, "is that they can keep the original alloys, rather than trying to find a set of unused old wheels, which would work out a lot more expensive."

"We do no end for Escort RSs," says Andy. "Stags and Jensens have been popular recently. It's like buses, really, you don't see any for ages, then three sets of one type in as many weeks."

"Besides," adds Tony, "it's more satisfying doing older wheels because the difference is so great between before and after – particularly if they've lost the paint and got all corroded."

The process starts with stripping in a chemical bath (for about 1½ hours) – or bead-blasting for steels – followed by checks for distortion or buckling, after which kerb marks and dents are removed on a lathe on which wheels are trued up. Any cracks are alloy welded and gouges filled.

"We prefer to build the wheel up," Tony explains, "then trim it back, rather than taking too much off in the first place." Then it's into the powder coating room: primer



From top: powder coating; typical examples, steel and Wolfie; diamond polishing Stag wheel



and flattening followed by the main coat, diamond-tip polishing and back on to the line for lacquering. "About 99 per cent are lacquered," says Andy, "which is also powder-coated because we've found that it gives a more durable finish." The only ones that aren't tend to be for show cars that never go out in bad weather. Hundreds of colours are available but, as Tony points out: "They don't suit all cars – we've done BBS cross-spokes for

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BMW's, Porsche Fuchs and a lot of gold Subaru wheels recently." Even with more than 3000 templates for polishing, they still come across odd designs that need new ones cutting.

"We've always kept pricing keen," he adds. "We do a lot of work for a body shop in Scotland, which, even with shipping, works out cheaper for them to use us than a local firm. Word-of-mouth referrals are important too – if we do one set of RSs, say, we often see another couple soon after."

Lepsons has regular contracts with Morden Classic Cars and Affordable Classics and is getting an increasing amount of work from continental Europe. Lead time on bookings is about a week, and wheels are balanced using inside weights. "We don't whack them on the outside," explains Tony. "Because you'd be back to square one within a month."

Green issues are also being taken into account, with its new semi-automated line, using an alcohol-based stripper, which, as Andy explains: "Is safer for operators and the environment yet can clean wheels in about a third of the existing time." **David Evans**