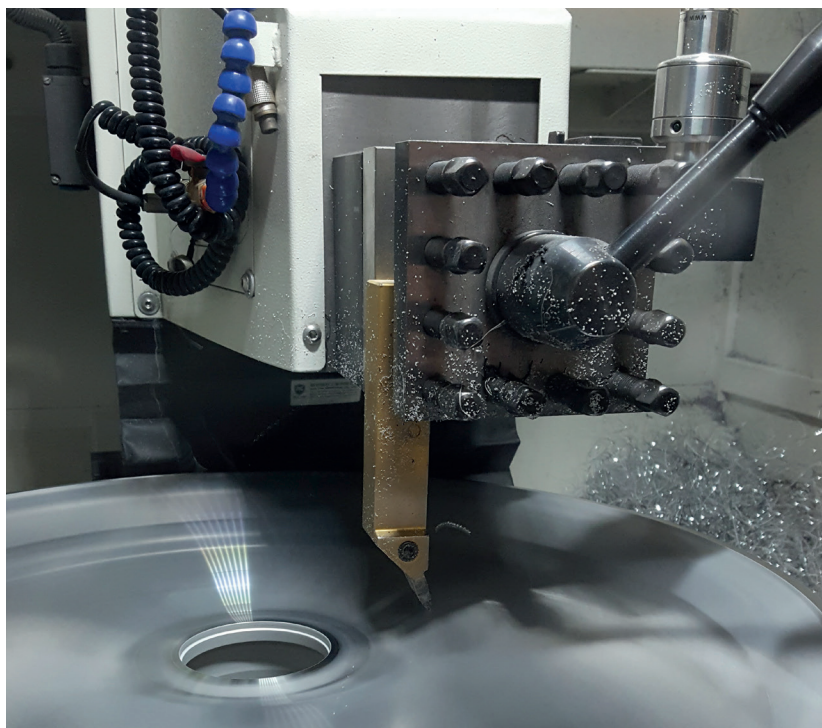




AS EASY AS A, B, C...

To write about the crash repair industry takes a certain aptitude. To actually do the work we write about takes a completely different type of brain and one, I have to admit, I don't possess. Alan Feldberg reports.



So, when Andy Baylie from Mint Alloys confidently assured me he could teach anyone – even me – to refurbish a diamond cut wheel inside half a day I was dubious. However, I accepted the challenge and made my way to the company's Bedfordshire workshop.

My weapon of choice for the day was the TY30-VS Diamond Cut Alloy Wheel Lathe. You might expect a piece of equipment that has enabled Mint Alloys to refurbish approximately 25-30 diamond cut wheels a day (instead of the 15 they were managing before it was introduced 13 months ago) to require a lot of behind-the-scenes expertise but the beauty of this custom-built lathe is its simplicity and ease of use.

Unlike the cockpit appearance of predecessors, the control panel is as simple to understand as an autobank, reducing a complex process into a handful of easy-to-follow steps.

Once the wheel is locked in place, the technician can scroll through a database of hundreds of wheels to select the correct one. An accompanying image will then appear on screen to ensure the match. New wheels can be added to the database at the start simply by typing in the make, model and dimensions of the wheel. The probe then digitises the wheel and the profile is stored and saved for future use.

The digitising process in itself is very straightforward; the technician uses up, down, right and left arrow keys to move the probe to the edge of wheel, while the machine has different speed settings for even greater accuracy. Once five separate points on the wheel have been saved, the machine does the rest. It takes between three and four minutes for the machine to digitise a wheel and once complete will automatically store this profile in the database for later use.

Actually cutting the wheel is simplicity itself. Once the profile has been stored in the database the technician

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25-30

number of diamond cut wheels refurbished per day

selects the file name and then moves the cutting tip into position, again using the arrows keys. A dry run option offers the chance the double check that the cutting tip will follow the curvature of the wheel and, once satisfied, all the technician has to do is press green for go.

The wheel will then start spinning automatically on the spindle, and once it reaches the required speed, the cutting tool will begin moving towards the centre of the wheel.

I set my first run at one millimetre above the measured points and just trimmed an edge off the outer rim. Subsequent runs of 0.5mm, 0.2mm and 0.1mm completed the job. And that's all there was to it. Fool-proof. I had expected my natural inability to win out and prove Andy wrong, but, with only the most fundamental of instruction, I had finished my first scuffed wheel – from a BMW 4 Series – in time for lunch.

And even that was slow – Andy says 10-20 minutes a wheel is typical.

Mint Alloys has sold the TY30-VS Diamond Cut Alloy Wheel Lathe to dealers, alloy wheel refurbishers, defleet centres as well as bodyshops, backing it up with a dedicated aftersales service. The lathe is fully supported via a remote link which allows software diagnostics and upgrades which removes the need for costly engineer visits and downtime. Andy says if customers need any further help after the two-day instruction process he's always just a phone call away.

Based on my brief experience, I'm not sure how many customers will need to make that call. I'd like to be able to claim to have unearthed a talent I didn't know I had. However, the truth is that the real credit must go to TY30-VS Diamond Cut Alloy Wheel Lathe.

A bad workman always blames his tools? The reverse is also true.

