Mind-boggling. Magnificent. Mini manufacture

Join PEIMF+ as we take our annual two-day get together to a whole new level.

Late in February, we met at the BMW/Mini iFactory in drizzly Oxford. After surviving the complications of the coffee machine, we were split into 3 groups and spirited away to be given a health and safety briefing plus a potted history.

We were then togged up in hi-vis jackets, protective glasses and listening devices. We were told to lock up our phones and prepare for the experience.

We were entering a state-of-the art car plant, which has been a factory for motor manufacture for over 100 years. This site has had over two billion pounds invested in it and the tension in the air was palpable.

As our "apprentice style" people carriers whisked us over to the building, we were given the stunning fact that over 90 HGVs appear every day laden with chassis.

Futuristic robots

We entered the amazing "white building" where our guide Graham told us it was the size of 17 football pitches square. Frighteningly, it was populated almost solely by scary, monster-like robots, over 2,000 we were reliably informed. We really felt like we'd entered one of those futuristic film sets (or maybe the O2) where dinosaurs or monsters ruled the roost. The apparent cost of each one ranged from £80K to half a million quid.

Our professional tour guide at times had to fight for our attention, as there was so much to look at. Quite often, we had 4 levels of conveyors operating above or below us and numerous operations of spot welding, glueing (yes glueing) twisting, turning and blowing your mind.

As we watched, the adjectives were coming thick and fast:

Sensational

Unbelievable

Phenomenal

Genius

And more

The finish line

It seemed sad that there were hardly any people working in there (or associates as they call them!!) but we were to bump into plenty more staff in the assembly plant.

One other crazy fact was that the whole place was timed to ensure no single process would last more than – wait for it – 60 seconds with buffers and signals ruling everything.

The factory is working 20 hours a day, 4 days a week, and they totally maximise every available space. The other 3 days are used for essential maintenance.

EMU – not that one!

Then into the paint shop. Although, we couldn't go in and view the actual paint dipping, we were given chapter and verse on colours, and the whole process. An interesting aside was that the electromagnetic unit – or EMU for short, actually utilises ostrich feathers as a large duster, not unlike a rollover car wash. And they use upwards of 2,500 feathers per quarter (so I imagine a few ostriches are looking pensively over their shoulders).

As part of the iFactory's drive towards greener credentials, all water used in the paint process is harvested from the roofs, then filtrated so purely that you could drink it with your lunch – if you really fancied.

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Very happy looking bunch

Yes, signed by Miss Caine

Great for motor sport

Kindly sponsored by

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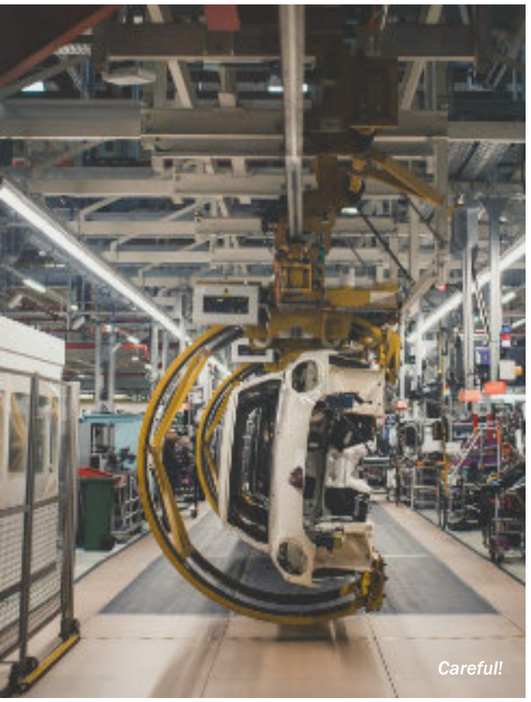
You were only supposed to...


Careful!

Final Assembly

Now we get to see many of the 4,000 “associates” doing their stuff, as many of the finer points of the vehicle are brought together. Almost unbelievably, the application of the wiring loom is allowed a monumental 67 seconds to complete!

The management try to avoid the team drifting into production line boredom by making sure each person is trained in 4 disciplines on each line, so they are rotated round during each shift.

As you stroll around the perimeter of this building, you feel like you are taking your life in your hands; as driver-less trollies wend their way around on special tracks. No need to worry though, these Automatically guided vehicles (AGV’s) are designed to stop before mowing down any unsuspecting pedestrians – and it seemed to work.

Each car is literally driven across the finish line, with a customary toot on the horn.

A few quick facts and figures:

They import parts from 26 different countries

70% cars are left hand drive for export

100% automatic transmission

Over 700 associates per shift in assembly

90 HGVs arrive daily containing chassis made in Swindon, from steel imported (since the shocking closure of the steel works in South Wales).

As has been reported recently in the news, the intended production of electric vehicles here has been put on hold, and they are looking to utilise the new building in a different capacity.

PEIMF+ AGM

Our members’ dinner was a jolly affair, as always, and a few of our guests were nursing sore heads the following morning.

We managed to get through the business of the day quickly and efficiently. Our Chair, Siobhan Keogh, and David Honeyman, PEIMF+ Business Manager, gave their annual roundups; and Treasurer Tom Burns offered the same on Finance.

We were delighted that Adam Ruck of Project–A was elected to join the committee. He will be a major asset to the team.

Full details of the minutes are available of the PEIMF+ website.

The official AGM was followed by 3 excellent presentations; Peter Jackaman asked the question to contractors: “Are you underinsured?. The devil is in the detail”.

John Garnett introduced AI powered forecourt protection from Vars Technologies and our very own Robin Futcher gave an insight into the development of guidance for hydrogen installations.

So we look forward to next year’s event with anticipation, and we thank all of our attendees for taking part and to our excellent sponsors for chipping in with their support.

Dream team

Pay attention Jeff

Dodgy geezer

Beautiful

Maybe break a bit earlier

I’ve seen the future