



Midweek motoring: MS-RT Ford Transit Connect

Published: 2nd October 2019

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Online version: <http://www.wheelswithinwales.uk/midweek-motoring-ms-rt-ford-transit-connect/>

A Welsh vehicle builder is bucking the trend with a successful new model programme, boosting jobs and home-grown skills.



MS-RT of Pontypool secured Ford approval for its bespoke Transit Custom Conversion last year and has now followed with its version of the smaller Transit Connect.

Later this year a long wheelbase version and double cab will be added to the line-up, and there are still more models in the pipeline in 2020.



Founder Edward Davies is enthusiastic for the business where most van makers depend on huge volumes to make money and MS-RT builds on its motorsport heritage with M-Sport and high quality individual models for discerning business owners and individuals. The business in Mamhilad, on the outskirts of Pontypool, started with 15 people about four years ago but securing the Ford Transit Custom approval meant it could take on more and currently has 55 employees, including apprentices, but this will rise to approximately 80 inside 12 months as new models are added.

CV CONSTRUCTION SURGES

UK commercial vehicle (CV) manufacturing output surged 47.9% in August, reversing four successive months of decline, according to the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders.

New model production coming on stream positively impacted volumes in the month, as 5,544 units rolled off production lines, nearly 1,800 more than in the same period last year, marking the best August since 2012.

Edward Davies has learned a lot in the last four years and that includes the need to employ people with the right attitude to learning and developing skills in computer aided design, plastic moulding and vehicle engineering as well as painting.

“We have been working with Cardiff University and our local college to ensure we have the right training courses on our doorstep, “ said Edward. “We want to do as much as we can in-house to add-value to the vehicles we are building because that’s not only good for us but the people we employ and the local economy benefits as well.”



Ford dealers send the basic vans for customising at Pontypool and a skilled workforce transforms them in 75hrs if it's a Connect or 105hrs if it's a Transit, replacing some parts and adding



bespoke sections it makes on site, adding OZ wheels, new steering wheel and tuned exhaust and decals. Each is finished with a distinct plaque on the b-pillar.

Edward has privately funded the business and has earmarked another £1M investment over 12-months to upgrade the factory and build a new customer welcoming centre and improve facilities. The current 85,000sqft factory will increase to 105,000sqft over the next few months.

Brexit doesn't hold any concerns for him either as his vans have full Ford approval for sale throughout Europe and around the world with a three-years or 100,000 miles warranty.

"If we leave the EU with a deal we can make everything we need here even for LHD models and if there is no deal we have plans to create a satellite operation in Holland and ship out complete kits for assembly there and distribution onwards.



“We are also looking at the US market because Ford Transit Connect is very popular over there and we think our MS-RT versions would go down very well with American customers who want something different to the other guy on the block.”

The hand-built latest Ford Transit Connect is available now from £23,995 with six-speed manual gearbox and £24,995 in automatic form, both plus VAT. Standard equipment includes LED



loadspace lighting, premium infotainment pack with nav, reversing camera, bi-xenon headlights and twin side loading doors for convenience.

MS-RT built 800 Transit Custom Conversions last year and is building 70 a month at the moment before adding 25 Transit Connect each month as well. Future models will see these totals rising and more people will be needed.

“We have an ideal site here and just renegotiated a longer lease so we want to upgrade our facilities for planned work and we have room to expand if we need to,” he added.

“We want to be as self-sufficient as possible and source what we need from within the



supply chain and UK and may even start looking at our own branded parts.”

MS-RT models are businesses' mobile advertisements because they are eye-catching, there are enthusiasts who love vans and also the booming leisure business with active



pursuits such as mountain-biking, sea-sports or camping and these are all potential opportunities for MS-RT to explore.

First impressions: Ford Transit Connect MS-RT

The MS-RT Transit Connect is obviously a Ford, but not as you know it.

The traditional boxy shape with few embellishments has been transformed with bespoke front, side, rear and aero panels, finished with unique decals and head-turning wheels and ear-pleasing exhaust notes.

Inside the highly specced standard package has been uplifted with an optional carbon fibre



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finished wheel and individual cloth upholstery.

It looks attractive and felt very well put together.