



**CASE STUDY:  
CATERHAM PRODUCTION  
FACILITY**

# DARTFORD X: A NEW CHAPTER FOR CATERHAM

For the first time in the history of Caterham, every element of the company was coming together under one gigantic roof. It's new 54,000sqft facility offered huge potential for the legendary British sports car company, but it posed significant challenges, too. The new facility would firmly bring Caterham into the 21st century, but it also had to retain the company's legacy.



## FIT FOR PURPOSE

Caterham was previously spread across several facilities but it's main production facility at Kennet Road was seen as the brand's 'home'. Caterham first moved there in the 1980s and whilst the building gave the company a certain charm, it was well overdue an upgrade. Put simply, the old 1960s buildings were no longer fit for purpose.

## FROM THE 1950s TO TODAY

Caterham can trace its roots to 1957, when it was a major dealer for the Lotus Seven. Launched in 1957, the small two-seater sports car was designed by Lotus-founder and legendary design engineer Colin Chapman to be 'fit for purpose'.

In 1973, Lotus announced the discontinuation of the Seven. Caterham's founder, Graham Nearn, purchased the manufacturing rights of the Seven to continue building the iconic British sports car. In the 1980s, production moved to Kennet Road, where it remained for four decades.

Today, more than 65 years after the model was first launched, the Seven remains a celebrated sports car the world over, with Caterham upholding Chapman's original philosophy.



All bays are consistent throughout the facility.

Whilst this approach remains relevant for the car, Caterham's production facilities were becoming a limitation. Kennet Road was built in the 1960s and could no longer support the company's ambitions. Where Caterham's legendary sports car is still thriving, the low roof, dark lighting and cramped interior of Kennet Road was restricting everyone within.

The start of a new exciting chapter for Caterham began in 2021 when automotive distributor and global dealership network VT Holdings purchased the company, providing the brand with long-term investment.

In October 2023, a new factory facility was approved and just six months later, Caterham moved into its brand-new building known as Dartford X.



Kennet Road - previous Caterham workshop.



All bays are equipped with mobile toolboxes, mobile trolleys and bespoke nose cone holders.

## DARTFORD X

The move was more than just upgrade; it was a complete step change for the business. For the first time in Caterham's history, every function - from marketing to production - would be together all under one roof.

The new facility, a colossal 54,000sqft blank canvas, could easily accommodate every aspect of Caterham's operations however, if the business was to meet global demand and increase output by 50%, the space needed to be effective and efficient.

Most importantly, the new facility had to embrace the legacy of the brand. Just like the Seven, Caterham has always been something of the 'David' of the automotive landscape, a niche British marque taking on the might of the big brand goliaths.

Part of this character came from Kennet Road; whilst the building was restricting, it also provided a structure that had developed and evolved over many decades. Moving to Dartford X was a massive change for Caterham, taking the brand out of a cramped 1960s building into an expansive new space, but the company's construction and production practices had to be preserved. It was essential its legacy, something that had remained unchanged for near seven decades, wasn't left behind.

The new space, had to enable Caterham to retain its methods of working, protecting the brand's unique position in the market, whilst also enabling the company to grow. At the very heart of the building is the production area, where every Caterham Seven is constructed by hand by Caterham's skilled workforce.

The vast 50-bay workshop would dominate the building, responsible for the production of 750 sports cars per annum. The importance of the space cannot be exaggerated; it is bedrock of the business, responsible for most of the company's revenue. It's impact would extend into every area, and reach every person in the business, setting the tone and the standard of every department.

The space would reach beyond Caterham, too. It could impact sales when customers and prospects visited the site, as well as the recruitment and retainment of talent in the business. Above all else, it is the place the company's iconic sports cars are created, the product everyone would measure the brand by.

This space would become a key pillar for the business for years to come. There could be no compromise. It simply had to be fit for purpose.

## APPROACH

The first step with every commercial project is to understand the business and its processes. Never has this been more critical than with a brand as historic as Caterham.

This client-lead approach combined with Dura's in-house expertise and global experience would ensure every requirement and every ambition would be met.

Caterham was entering uncharted territory, moving from facilities that had long dictated the layout, structure and processes to a vast open space with few reference points. Dura's expertise here was essential, just one misguided decision or poor design choice could have a catastrophic impact on the company. With a tight deadline to meet, there was little room for error.

Dura worked closely with every member of Caterham's operations, taking time to understand each area, each of which had its own unique requirements. Having designed and delivered hundreds of automotive workshops around the world, the Dura design team combined each team leader's desires with the building specifications and business requirements to create a bespoke workshop plan for Caterham.



Every element of the workshop was installed by Dura.



Every detail was checked to ensure perfect fit.



The entire installation was completed in one month.

To support the review and development of the design, both detailed plan diagrams and photo-realistic renders were created for the client. This visual aid supported the client understand their space and enabled them to make confident decisions efficiently and effectively.

With the design approved, production of Caterham's workshop furniture – including all of the bespoke items – could begin at Dura's UK manufacturing facility. Much like the Caterham Seven, every single piece of furniture was built by hand in the UK, with all items stored at our facility ready for transportation and installation.

In February 2024, all of the workshop furniture was transported to Dartford X, with a team of expert installers from Dura remaining on site for four weeks, completing the entire install whilst working hand-in-hand with other trades on site.

### Project Management: The Difference the Delivered

From the outset, the demands of Dartford X required exceptional coordination. Dura immediately took responsibility for gathering technical details directly from Caterham's other suppliers, ensuring information flowed without the client acting as a middleman. This direct collaboration with multiple trades became a defining feature of the entire project.

The design and drawing phase alone saw more than 20 layout revisions, triggered by both client requests and ongoing changes to the plans. Throughout, we aligned with multiple stakeholders to ensure each adjustment was captured accurately and acted upon quickly.

Because Dura's offer includes every stage, from design and manufacturing to installation and aftersales, we could deliver the rapid decision-making and total transparency this project required. Unlike product-only suppliers, this integrated approach was essential for a project of this scale, pace and constant evolution.

Even post-handover, our rigorous reporting ensured every detail matched Caterham's expectations. This depth of project management underpinned the entire project to ultimately deliver a truly exceptional result.

## WHY DURA

Following a rigorous tender process, Caterham chose Dura as it's partner for the provision of it's entire workshop facility, including the design and installation of its workshop, and for the manufacture and provision of the workshop furniture.

Aside from the sheer scale of the project, there were several challenges that Dura was uniquely positioned to deliver against:

### Tight deadline:

The entire project, from initial design to final handover, was just six months.

### Hybrid Construction:

The workshop was to be installed whilst other trades were constructing of the facility.

### Bespoke Solutions:

Several unique designs, including custom-made trolleys, nose cone holders and a made-to-specification engine room, were required.

### Installation:

The entire workshop needed to be installed in stages, working directly with, and around, several other trades and services.

### Customised:

All of the furniture needed to be finished in Caterham's vivid brand colours.

### Logistics:

Furniture needed to arrive at the right time for installation without impeding on other construction.

### Post-install support:

After handover, Caterham required immediate response to any issues as to prevent impact on production schedules.

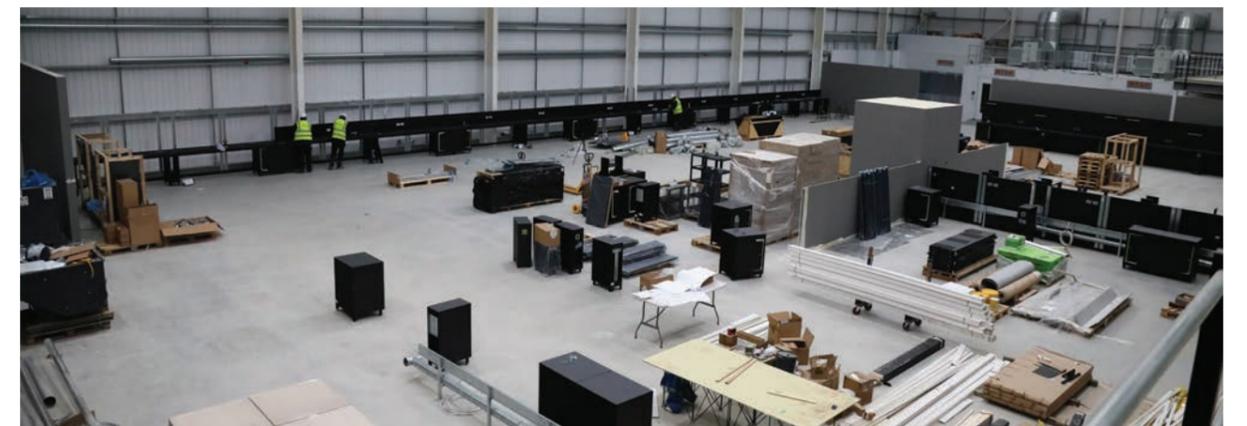


*What was key was working with someone that would be reliable, someone with a proven track record of providing quality cabinetry and equipment to specialist manufacturers and workshops. Dura stood out as being the most reliable. It was a very easy decision to go with Dura.*

**Trevor Steel**  
Chief Finance Officer and Operations Director



With more than 25 years' experience delivering workshops for major automotive brands around the world, Dura's experience, expertise and capabilities ensured Caterham's new home would be the foundation of success for years to come.



Furniture was installed alongside other trades and services.



**INTEGRATED SERVICES**

Each bay includes air line and exhaust extraction.



**CORPORATE COLOURS**

Every piece is finished in corporate colours.



**BRANDED TROLLEY**

Custom-made heavy-duty mobile storage trolleys.



**50 BAYS**

Consistent throughout individually numbered.



**ENGINE ROOM**

Bespoke workbenches and toolboxes.



**CUSTOM NOSE CONE HOLDER**

Made-to-order addition protects bodywork.



**SERVICE & PDI**

Vehicle inspection bay also feature Dura furniture.



**MOBILE UNITS**

Increase flexibility and improve efficiency.



Every bay is consistent, providing uniformity throughout.

## SOLUTION

The final design – both layout and aesthetics – was tailored to Caterham’s exact requirements.

Within the main workshop area are 33 final assembly bays, each consistent throughout the entire space, enabling uniformity throughout the business. Each work bay includes two mobile toolboxes, a mobile trolley, integrated airline and exhaust extraction and a 2.4m wide worktop space.

Dura went beyond its extensive existing design catalogue for the workshop furniture, designing multiple unique pieces for each bay.



On the rear wall panels are custom document holders, providing a dedicated space for paperwork, keeping worktops clear and build sheets secure.

There are also bespoke nose-cone holders, designed specifically for Caterham and the Seven. This essential addition provides a dedicated space for one of the most important, delicate and valuable parts of the car, preventing damage with secure storage. It also makes use of all the available space in the workshop, preventing technicians from placing bodywork on floors or on worktops where it could easily get damaged as well as taking up a considerable amount of valuable space.



*The mobile trolley is a massive help. There are so many times you need something to hold a few tools and consumables and this is perfect. I can take what I need to the job and complete the task much quicker.*

**Conor Jux-Chandler**  
Production Team Leader



*It’s great to have your own space which is the same as everyone else, but it’s also helpful having someone next to you. Now, if you have a question, you are only a couple of steps away from asking for help.*

**Reece Baldwin**  
Production Builder



Cabinets finished to exactly match the brand’s CI.



Custom mobile storage trolley.

Unique three-drawer mobile toolboxes were also specified, providing three deep drawers for larger tools, sundries and multiple small parts containers. This enables technicians to keep a greater supply of the components and consumables they use most often, preventing time-consuming trips to a central part stores.

Between the bays are three mobile storage trolleys. These were designed from scratch specifically for Caterham. Each provides vast storage for multiple items, with high load capabilities for even the bulkiest items. Mounted on castors, these trolleys can also be used to transport items throughout the facility, or repositioned to create smaller working spaces within the workshop.

Dura also developed an entirely custom solution for the engine build room. This sealed space, separate from the main workshop area, is totally bespoke, with heavy duty workbenches, engine cradles, storage and toolboxes throughout.

In total, there are 50 workshop bays in the facility, including several dedicated PDI and vehicle servicing bays. Similar to the production bays, these benefit from custom Dura tool boxes and workbenches, with the addition of vehicle ramps and integrated services, such as air and fluid lines, and exhaust extraction.

Every piece of Dura furniture was finished in Caterham’s corporate colours, with the main body of all furniture powder coated in textured Jet Black with contrasting Nitrous Green Semi-Gloss accent for bars and handles.



Completed workshop, ready for production to begin.

## RESULTS

The final result is nothing short of breath-taking, a night-and-day change for the business that enhances existing processes, preserves the company's legacy and ensures it is fit for the future.

Moving to Dartford X offered huge potential for Caterham, but it could have easily changed the company, losing some of the essence of what makes it special. Whilst its old facilities were limiting, it also gave the company and its products a unique character that has been inherent to the brand for decades.

“There is almost no comparison to what we had previously. Now, I have enough space for everything and it's a lot more organised.”

**Reece Baldwin**  
Production Builder



By working directly with colleagues across the business, Dura designed a space that retained Caterham's ways of working, whilst removing the drawbacks and limitations of the old building.

Now, when any guest visits Caterham, they see one of the very best manufacturing facilities in the UK, where some of the very best cars in the world are produced.

For all staff, Dartford X is a profound moment in the history of Caterham, with those building the iconic seven experiencing the most dramatic improvement.



The iconic Seven.



*The Dura design team worked with every single one of our departments and managers to give them exactly what they wanted, and what was delivered has met the needs of every single one of our distinct operations within the business.*

**Trevor Steel**  
Chief Finance Officer and Operations Director



Scan the QR code to hear the full interview



Previously, the space available to a vehicle production technician was dictated by their toolboxes. Each person had to provide their own, and those with larger toolboxes commanded the greatest space. There was no conformity between working spaces, and where some had larger toolboxes with greater storage, others had to perch their smaller toolsets on worktops, losing what little space they had to work.

Today, every single person within the production facility has the same space and the same storage. This uniform approach does more than just level the playing field, it has transformed the outlook and the output of the entire workforce.

“Transitioning to this facility has changed the state of mind. You want to build a better product because you are in a better facility” said Conor Jux-Chandler, Production Team Leader. He added; “The build bay is my favourite part of the building. It's where the magic happens, it where you create something that is going to be someone's dream. And because this area is yours, you take more pride in your space and your work.”

Everything the team needs is now within reach, from integrated services to workbenches, tools to consumables, all kept organised and securely stored. The mobility of the toolboxes and trolleys enable greater flexibility within the space, and greater collaboration between the teams.

Above all else, the workshop has provided Caterham with a solid foundation for years to come, preserving it's legacy and unique production methods, whilst creating one of the most advanced manufacturing facilities in the UK.

**It's not just fit for purpose, it's purpose-built to perform at every level.**



Integrated Nose Cone and Document Holders keep surfaces clear.



FROM DESIGN  
TO INSTALL,  
DURA PROVIDED  
CATERHAM WITH  
A TURN-KEY  
SOLUTION.



#### Design

Expertise of designing and delivering thousands of workshops globally.



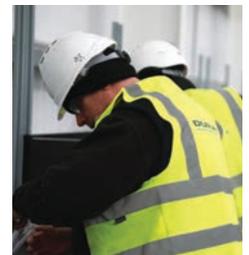
#### Custom

Bespoke pieces designed for Caterham with tailored finish.



#### Factory

Made-to-order at our specialist UK manufacturing facility.



#### Install

Perfect fit and finish from our in-house installation team.

# DURA®

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