

Hi-tech yet so simple

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Green gurus ingeniously combine recycling and engineering

Formula One and stockbroking are not traditionally thought of as breeding grounds for green gurus.

But those are the backgrounds of two Exmoor men who have invented an ingenious composting contraption.

Their gadget known as the "Ridan" is the brainchild of stockbroker-turned-hill farmer Richard Gedge.

The Ridan is already helping businesses, schools and even a prison turn waste food into compost. This cuts their carbon emissions and saves hundreds of pounds in waste bills over a year.

The first design Richard cooked up at his Brayford farm was little more than a closed cylinder with a hatch, a stand and a giant metal screw running through the middle.

The idea was to simply place waste food and a bit of sawdust down the hatch, turn the handle on the screw to churn a bit of air into the contents and let nature take its course.

The right mix of organic matter, oxygen and the warmth of the container made compost in a fraction of the time a waste heap in the corner of a garden would take.

But there was just one problem: "It was bloody hard work to turn the handle!"

Enter Dan Welburn, former race engineer for championship winning Grand Prix teams Benetton and Lotus. Like his future business partner, Dan had moved to Exmoor to change down a gear after a highly pressurised career.

He had - quite literally - been living life in the fast lane



Green energy: Richard Gedge, left, and Dan Welburn pooled their knowledge to perfect the Ridan composting machine, which works much faster than other methods

setting up engines for the fastest cars on the planet.

The pair met by chance at a party, and it was not long before they got their heads together to turn Richard's rough prototype into the finished article.

Dan has put his engineering expertise to good use, creating a simple gearbox that made the unwieldy screw easier to rotate. Now even a small child can make the compost turn, an essential part of the process.

Because the Ridan has a healthy appetite - it gobbles up about five tonnes a year - it is aimed at organisations that

generate a lot of food waste and have flower or vegetable patches to benefit from the compost.

Among the dozens who have bought the composters since it was perfected about a year ago are South Devon organic food retailer Riverfood Farm and a host of schools around the country. Leyhill, the South Gloucestershire prison famous for its award-winning gardens, is another satisfied customer.

Why is the Ridan proving such a hit?

The main appeal lies in its green credentials - composting is an

environmentally friendly way of getting rid of waste.

When rubbish buried in landfill decomposes it creates methane, one of the most planet-warming of greenhouse gases. Composting food waste produces much less in the way of harmful emissions.

Schools and eco-minded organisations such as Riverford also use the Ridan for educational purposes.

"Many of our customers put up interpretation boards to illustrate the "closed cycle" of composting," said Dan, referring to the fact that nothing grown in a veg garden ever needs to go to waste - it

should either be eaten or turned into compost to help the next crop.

It is fitting that Richard's invention is being used to inspire schoolchildren, because he himself became interested in green technology at an early age by seeing it in action.

He grew up in the Midlands, and on many a rainy holiday was hauled off to mid-Wales by his parents to traipse around the Centre for Alternative Technology - a kind of Aladdin's Cave of green gadgets such as solar panels, wind and water turbines, ranging from 1960s models to

the latest hi-tech versions. It made a lasting impression, and with a wind turbine, wood chip boiler and sheep's wool insulation in the walls, Richard's farm high in the Exmoor hills is a paragon of low-carbon living.

As well its eco-qualities, the price of the Ridan appeals to many customers. At £2,000, it's a fraction of the cost of other composters.

It is simple, it is cheap and it works. And with customers stretching from Devon to Scotland, this West Country innovation is rapidly helping make the rest of the UK greener.

Fish restaurant is first in West to sign up to sustainability scheme

A Bristol restaurant has become the first in the West to join a scheme designed to give customers an environmentally-sound dining experience.

The Rockfish Grill, owned by celebrity chef and fish expert Mitch Tonks, is one of the first restaurants in the country to be given the thumbs up by the Sustainable Restaurant Association (SRA).

The SRA is a new organ-

isation that rates restaurants on how sustainable they are.

Growing your own veg, choosing sustainably-caught fish, and buying organic meat has become second nature to an ever-increasing number of eco-conscious food lovers.

But just how easily "eco-diners" can enjoy a meal away from their own kitchens is a different matter.

Luckily for consumers, the

SRA has been set up to rate restaurants on a selection of criteria, such as where they source their food, how they use their energy and how they dispose of waste.

The association hopes that a high SRA score could one day turn out to be sustainably synonymous with an AA rosette or Michelin star.

The Bristol-based Rockfish Grill and Seafood Market, for

example, has long been a leader in sourcing sustainable fish, thanks to restaurateur Mitch Tonks who previously set up the Fish Works chain.

But they could use tips on dealing with food waste, packaging and energy, Tonks admits.

"Sustainable seafood is our expertise - we have very strict principles in the way we source it and hope to share

this with our fellow members," he said.

"But we also look forward to working with those members to ensure that these principles can be applied to everything we do. And, of course, we hope that one day all restaurants will follow."

■ To find a restaurant near you that's part of the Sustainable Restaurant Association, visit www.thesra.org.



Tips: Bristol chef Mitch Tonks