

Eco hero The blacksmith and inventor

email ecohero@telegraph.co.uk

The 'artist blacksmith' and inventor Dan Harding, 35, is the designer of the Hotpod (hotpod.co.uk), a hand-built and energy-efficient multi-fuel stove made from recycled gas bottles and Volkswagen engine parts. He lives in St Ives Bay in Cornwall with his wife, Lucy, and their two children. **Interview by Angela Wintle**

Iron is in my blood. My father was a blacksmith and farrier and he taught me how to weld. I've always loved salvaging metal and finding new uses for old objects. I'll never forget stripping down my first VW engine, pulling out the camshaft and thinking it would make a great candlestick (I now sell them on my website).

I'm always experimenting. I've made brushes and fire tongs from old VW shock absorbers, a coal scuttle from a recycled fire extinguisher, and lamps, planters and vases from mechanical and industrial parts.

I came up with the idea for the Hotpod when I was living in an old VW transporter along the Land's End peninsula. When Lucy, my future wife, moved in and we had our first child, we needed to upgrade our heating. I took my inspiration from our friends in the travelling community, many of whom had adapted empty gas bottles to heat their vans. But it was another five years before I made a full-blown Hotpod.

The Hotpod often raises a smile.

Some people think it looks like a Wallace and Gromit invention. The stove resembles an old diving bell and the flue is partly constructed from a Volkswagen air-cooled engine cylinder. The stove door was originally an old Pyrex saucepan lid, but I had to abandon that because there was a danger it might crack at high temperatures.

My invention may look quirky, but it can warm a small house. The heat is controlled by two stainless-steel handwheels, which vary the amount of oxygen entering the stove. You can boil a kettle on the hotplate or warm porridge on a cold winter's morning.

I owe my business success to the BBC. We applied to a TV programme aimed at helping households turn around their economic fortunes. When the presenter saw the Hotpod, his business

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plan was simple – 'Make 100 of those and you'll pay off your mortgage'. He was right.

I make two types of Hotpod. There's a limited-edition model, constructed by hand from recycled materials here at my forge, which costs about £3,000. I've sold 150 of those. I also make a version for about £2,000, which is cast from reclaimed iron at a foundry in the West Midlands and later hand-assembled. I'm setting up a network of stove showrooms across the country, so I'm confident sales will rise this autumn.

Photograph by Michelle Sank

Next week: the climate change protester



If you have a wood-burning stove, try **kiln-dried hardwood** sourced from sustainable British woodland (certainlywood.co.uk). It has less moisture than softwood and is far more fuel efficient. **Go foraging.** I encourage anyone to give nettles a try. They taste a bit like spinach and are great in soups. **Transform old tins, jars and plastic bottles into planters.** Make drainage holes in the bottom and plant with tomatoes or chillies. Charge your mobile phone or laptop and burn calories at the same time. The multifunctional **Powerplus Gazelle** generates electricity when you cycle on it, enabling you to have power wherever you go (naturalcollection.com).