

SUNBURNT SUNBEAM



If you imagine that Australian cars do not rust, then read Bob Stewart's story of one that did!

It was not until Bob started to dismantle the car that he realised the full extent of the work required.

Australia has an abundance of restorable older cars in a wide variety, most likely due to the drier conditions in many areas plus the fact that we have plenty of room down here.

Owing to my admiration of the stream-styled Sunbeam-Talbots introduced in 1948, naturally I chose to restore one of the 1948 MkI models, which was how Ted White and the Raymond Lowey organisation (then working for the Rootes Bros.) wanted them to look. The changes in 1950 for the MkII to suit the American regulations slightly reduced the styling appeal for me.

The car I found in a country town 150 miles north of Melbourne is a 1948 80 saloon. Four cars were advertised together, a MkI 80 complete and a MkII dismantled at one location, and a MkII and MkI 90, all saloons, at another town. The latter two were ignored as they were too far gone to warrant encumbering a suburban backyard. So a deal was made on the 80 and the basket-case 90 with no body. My Holden station wagon (bought new in 1966) was put to work covering 900 miles (three trips), the last two with a tandem trailer to recover the spoils. Although the 80 was complete the cylinder head had been removed a long time ago, so little was known about the condition of the mechanicals but, while the roof had little paint left on it, the car seemed fairly straight in general and had 78,000 miles on the clock.

When dismantling began the full extent of the rot was discovered and it was then realised that taking the body off the chassis was the only way. The bare bones of the chassis frame were repaired, then sandblasted along with the petrol tank and differential. The contractor who was doing the job told me to throw the parts back if they were not right. They went back so many times that eventually he turned the gear over to me and told me to do it myself! This suited me as I could then do it to my satisfaction. Finally the frame was chromated and black-enamelled as original.

The engine bores were not worn very badly and, because the pistons were found to have fatigue cracks in the ring grooves, it was decided to hone the cylinders round and parallel and have new pistons made 0.003in oversize to suit. New bearings, valves and timing chain were fitted, and the oil pump reconditioned together with ancillary components - water pump, starter motor, generator, distributor and carburettor. A new clutch disc and a rebuilt pressure plate completed the engine work.

The gearbox required some replacement gears, synchro rings and bearings etc. due to a stone falling into the box, no doubt when the dip stick was removed at some stage. The result was that the stone jammed and broke a synchro ring which, in turn, found its way between second gear and broke half a tooth off each of the mating gears. By contrast the differential required only new wheel bearings and seals.

The springs were reset and new bushes fitted and the Luvax Girling shock absorbers were reconditioned - eight units being used to get enough serviceable parts to get four good ones!

New king pins and bushes, tie rod ends etc. were fitted and, as I was unable to

acquire a new steering box nut, I was pushed into looking at making one. As an ex-tool-maker, managing a small engineering factory producing pneumatic fittings, it didn't seem an insurmountable task but the prospect of screw-cutting an internal five-start Acme thread of about 1/2in pitch pulled me back into line very smartly. The solution! A Standard 10 nut available happened to have the same internal dimensions but the outside diameter was smaller, so the original nut was bored out with a stepped hole and the Standard nut was turned down with a matching step. Then the two were pressed together and sweated with a high tin content solder, finally cross-pinning tangentially to make certain.

The brake drums were re-machined and the master cylinder and wheel cylinders were re-sleeved in stainless steel. As I expected to display the chassis at the Melbourne British Motoring Show and then have it stand around for quite a long time before finishing the project, it was decided to use silicone brake fluid because it did not absorb moisture; it was a very sound product. A new hand brake cable completed the anchors.

The displayed chassis gained a lot of interest. Obviously being able to see all the mechanical bits without the incumbrance of a body appealed to the public. Incidentally I completed all the mechanical work myself bar the machining of the pistons.

For a couple of years during the project I had a molasses and water bath in operation, a wonderfully cheap do-it-yourself rust remover - I suppose most DIYers would know this system. Mix one part molasses to five parts water then submerge rusty steel parts on retrieval wires and cover for about a week. When you retrieve them and hose them down you are rewarded with bare metal. I would not recommend putting castings in it and it won't remove paint. As it is a fermentation process it is a bit smelly and I wonder if it would work OK in your cooler climate (*Ed.'s note: we have tried this but totally without success - but will re-try using higher temperatures*).

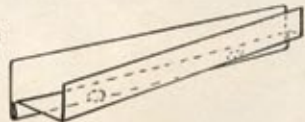
The body next. The front floor required about 40% new metal and the stiffening flutes required some simple press tools to be made as the sketches show. New sections were fitted where required in the main body, sills, rear inner wheelarches and boot floor. The rear seat mounting panel was rusted completely free from the floor and a whole new spare wheel compartment had to be fashioned. All patches were joined edge to edge - I didn't know anything about joggling at that stage. The body was sand-blasted inside and out, then the underside was painted before remounting on the chassis.

The usual bottom-of-the-doors cancer had a strong hold and required major surgery to save them. The front doors were done with a single folded piece as per the sketch and the rear doors were repaired in two parts, the passenger side skin extending half way up to accommodate crash damage. This door couldn't be opened and some earlier enthusiast(?) had used a bar or large screwdriver between the trailing edge and the body, severely denting the surrounding area. The dog-leg behind this door was pushed back about four inches and required major work.

The front mudguards had holes cut out up front for turn signal lamps which required

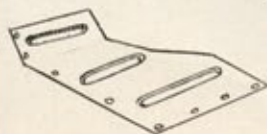


Repair panel front door. One piece fold with extra length to wrap around to reach serviceable metal.



Repair section boot floor. Probably the hand beaten stiffening flute wasn't necessary but I would know it wasn't there.

Spare wheel compartment hand formed from one piece.



A front floor repair piece used simple press forming tools to produce stiffening flutes.



Bob was careful to take all the panels back to bare metal before they were primed. All repairs were made with oxy-acetylene welding equipment.



The chassis was repaired, chromated and black-enamelled to the original specification, then fitted-up and used as a static display at the Melbourne British Motoring Show.



(Below) The complete body ready for priming.



Replacement floor and door sections and a spare wheel well were made and fitted. The whole body was sand-blasted, inside and out, and the underside painted.



Lifting the body back on to the chassis was a four-man job.

patching, plus some bush bashing damage, and the mounting brackets were severely cracked, probably due to Australia's rough roads. All of the panel repairs were effected with a conventional oxy-acetylene set, then the loose door pieces, front guards, bonnet, sunroof, boot lid and spare compartment lid were chemically stripped.

The front doors posed a special problem. Because they are fitted with built-in aluminium hinges it meant that they could not be completely immersed in the chemical for fear of losing the hinges; fortunately the obliging operator suspended the doors clear of the aluminium, then sand-blasted the uncleaned area to finish.

All of the door latches were cleaned and serviced and the quick-lift window mechanisms required new springs to re-activate them. The Bailey channels were re-felted and everything internal was painted with rust control enamel.

Then, with the body undercoated, mounted on the chassis, loaded on a tandem trailer and the station wagon loaded up with all the loose parts, it was off to a club colleague's restoration workshop for its exterior finish, using Jewelescent Gunmetal, the term used for the original finish. Actually it's a current Holden colour, but don't tell anyone!

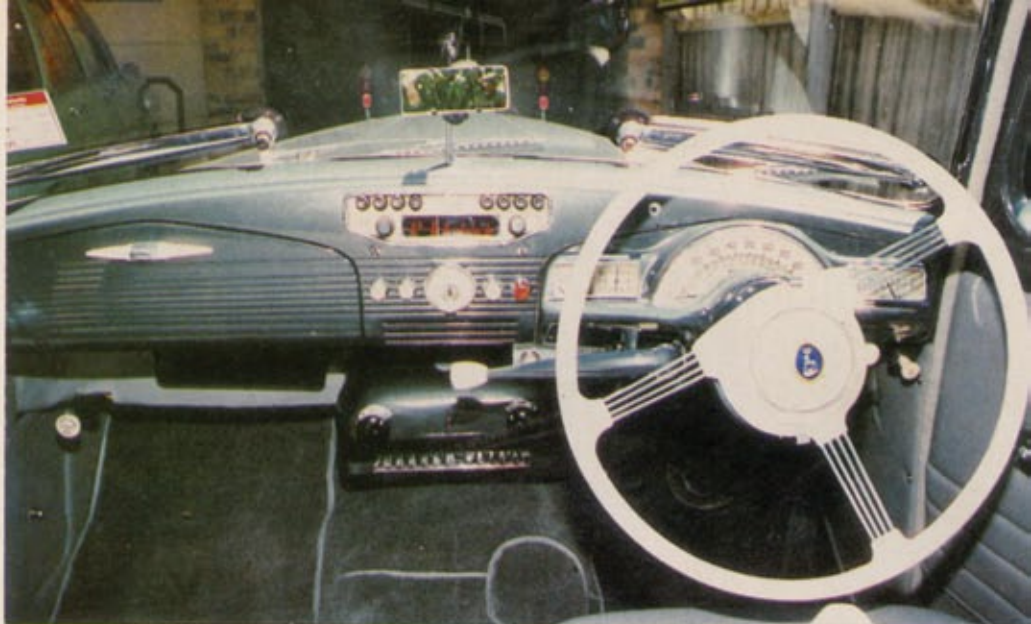
A new cotton-covered wire, cotton braid loom was made up with turn signal wire added, retaining the trafficator arms for originality. People told me "you can't do it" but the circuit couldn't be simpler - I just used two flasher pots, each one activated by the trafficator signals' wire isolating their independent flashing circuits.

The instruments were selected from a couple of sets and checked over while the steering wheel was refurbished to the best of my ability. Towards the end of the project, while at a swap meet (autojumble), I reluctantly walked past a new old stock period radio aerial, never thinking that I would find an H.M.V. Radiomobile. Lo and behold, a week later one turned up in the classified section of one of our newspapers; it was within a few miles of home so of course I nearly fell over myself getting there. Then a phone call to the promotor of the swap meet gave me the link to the stall holder with the aerials - fortunately he had some left. The radio required \$100 spending on it to get it going but it was worth it, complementing the instrument panel beautifully.

Faced with the fact that we, too, have cold weather, sometimes as low as freezing for short periods here in Melbourne and, not being able to locate a MkI genuine heater, I made my own out of bits and pieces but that's another story. My wife appreciates the warmth provided as the 80 is generally a much cooler car than my 2A, not having the sealing strips on the rear quarter lights as original.

A new pair of correct pattern headlights and all the brightwork rechromed completed the exterior.

The interior trimming was a shared project. I did the boot, footwell panels and the firewall. The seats and door trim panels were done by a professional using light grey 'leather' - vinyl. If I can't tell the difference, I don't see how anyone else could! The carpet, headlining and windlacing were all done in matching grey. I had quite a tussle with the



Bob refurbished the steering wheel himself and was delighted to find an H.M.V. Radiomobile among the classifieds in a local paper.



The interior was completely re-trimmed. The seats are finished in grey leather-look vinyl. Bob with the finished car in 1987.



trimmer as he kept on wanting to make it better but not to the original pattern; in the end it turned out a top-class job.

The front small tool kit, a foam rubber container behind a neat little door in the passenger footwell panel, was empty so, from the handbook illustration, the search for these items proceeded through the restoration period. The same went for the large tool kit in the boot lid because it was short of the oil gun and the hand pump. Things turn up in the most unlikely places, don't they? While looking for something else in my mother-in-law's beautiful roll-top desk, an exact pattern oil gun appeared, brand new, never had oil in it. Furthermore, her laundry cupboard produced the exact design pliers, still with protective lacquer on them (remnants of an Austin A40 I think). Thanks mum! Over the years I have also acquired, to complement the authenticity, a dealer's workshop manual, a factory parts book, a mint condition handbook, a salesman's guide plus some very exotic advertising brochures. Rootes covered this area very well.

The vehicle's first outing was a 1,200 miles round trip to Bathurst, N.S.W. to participate in our 1987 National Rally. The results of the concours judging were very satisfying, bringing me first in class and top overall points scored against Rapiers, Series Alpines, Tigers, and fastback Rapiers etc. Being basically its maiden run, it wasn't completely without problems (typical of a 'new' car). Earlier in the story I mentioned the fact that silicone brake fluid was used in the system.



The result was that the master cylinder cup washer had swollen, extending down the cylinder and closing off the return orifice causing the brakes to drag, something you don't need when you only have 47bhp burdened by more than 22cwt of motor car. A complete change of rubbers and fluid remedied the problem.

After using the car all year for club outings etc., at the 1988 National Rally at Shepperton, Victoria (only a 300 mile trip this time), the judging produced the same results as the previous year.

The 80 has also had two 'bit parts' in a couple of TV movies, "The Four Minute

Mile" and "The Darlings of the Gods", both to be shown in the UK.

At the time of writing, one of my sons has just begun the restoration of a 1964 Series 4 Alpine GT and my youngest daughter owns a 1967 Hillman Imp GT. My wife drives a 1964 24/80 Wolseley MkII which has been in our family since new and is an immaculate original vehicle. Apart from my Holden station wagon, mentioned earlier, I have a 1952 Sunbeam Talbot 2A which is an original car that I use for weekend running about and autokhana events at which it is quite successful. All of these vehicles gain a lot of attention due to their age and condition.

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