BLASTING YOUR BODY

After straightening the rear of the Light 15 body (see FD 10 (5) Jan/Feb 1987), Ron and I decided that sand-blasting was in order to remove the accumulated multiple coats of old paint and gunge, prior to more detailed tidying up of the body and painting it.

Firstly, we stripped off all the tar inside and out, and after a month of getting high on petrol fumes, and nearly blowing ourselves up with gas burners, we were ready to blast. The weekend chosen was also auspicious and appropriate in that Mum had gone away for those days!

Our first attempt was with a unit hired from Alltools (tools being the operative word), which their staff said would do the job easily. The sandblast set-up consisted of a 10 cubic foot per minute (10 cfm) compressor and a spray gun with an outlet of about 5 mm diameter. Of course this proved about as successful as leaving the shell down on the beach on a windy day!

The second attempt was with a 60 cfm unit from Lilydale Hire. This had a suction-feed gun which took the sand straight from a bucket. The bigger unit made more noise but was still too slow with too narrow a spread of sand.

The third attempt was with a 75 cfm compressor and feed hopper. This set-up made a hell of a lot of noise and went through about 3/4 tonne of sand but at least it was successful.

The medium-grade sand was found to be the best compromise between speed of removal versus excessive pitting and risk of deforming panels. Perhaps on the underside where heavy underseal was being removed and appearance is less critical, the coarse grade would be better overall. On the other hand, there is quite an amount of lead filling in the Traction body where panels join up etc, and the lead pits and exposes air pockets fairly readily. Perhaps the fine sand might be better in these areas, though care and a bit of later filling should overcome any problems caused by the medium sand.

We managed to blast the boot lid, guards and bonnet back to bare metal without damage, but we took the doors back only as far as the primer which we hand-sanded off later. Alternatively, the doors can be chemically stripped (for about $20-30 per panel for commercial rates or you can do it yourself with proprietary strippers) to avoid the risk of buckling.

We found the stripped Traction shell to be remarkably light, even with the rear suspension still on, and with three people (two at the back, one at the front), it was easy to pick the shell up and gently lay it on its side on some old foam padding to make it easier to blast the roof and floor panels. Attempting to blast the floor "right way up" simply caused the used sand to build up and obscure the work area. When on its side, it was also easier (by far!) to blast the underside and also up under the dash area and the upper areas in the boot, inner roof etc. Without the rear suspension on, two people could tip the shell. [The photo shows how light the shell is. But have our heroes developed an "un cheval" as a down-market competitor for the 2CV?].

We laid plastic sheeting all about to catch the spent sand for reuse. The collected sand was sieved to remove paint flakes and foreign debris [piece of fly-wire screening?] and while this achieved some savings, it was found that after the second use, the sand had lost much of its abrasive character.

One problem we found was that the sand was sensitive to moisture in the way it flowed. If it picked up moisture, it wouldn't flow properly or carry in the air stream. The moisture trap on the compressor wasn't completely effective and to keep the sand going, it was necessary to keep banging the feed pipe carrying the air/sand so that it didn't foul up.

The sand cost us $60 (about 12 x 40 kg bags). The 75 cfm sand blaster and hopper and an 8 cfm spray gun (to apply the primer) cost $218 for the day. Do it yourself places charge $30 per 1/4 hour.

Note: During the blasting, it is essential that proper eye and lung protection be used.

We feel it most important to completely remove the old "tar" completely, since we found situations where the tar had shrunk, cracked, and let rust develop under it. To remove the last traces of tar and oil etc before priming, the body was thoroughly swabbed down with Prepsol [My understanding is that Prepsol is actually no more exotic than common alcohol or methylated spirits. This may prove cheaper than the proprietary product - Ed.].

We etch-primed the clean metal the same day to avoid development of rust again, using zinc chromate from Wattyl. It was a lot of trouble for the saving of money. If we have to do anything similar again, we'll have to find another spot because Mum won't let us turn the place into a "beach" again!

Hayden Chapman
Ron Lawrence.