

WOODWORK RESTORATION

The following notes apply to Slough built post war Big 6s but presumably could be applied to other Slough built cars.

Our decision to renovate the woodwork was not taken lightly. I was tempted to try and patch up the bare spots on the door cappings (at the opening edge where the weather strip has long since given up) and cracks in the finish on the dashboard, OH! that dashboard!! carrying on it the original and intact transfer of the dealer Commonwealth Motors which I was so loath to remove.

So I approached this job with great apprehension, and, could I match the original finish??.

Fortunately we have woodwork from other cars to experiment with, so I stripped several door cappings and a dashboard with its capping piece, using paint stripper. What a shock!! each piece of bare timber was revealed as a different colour but showing a beautiful grain that had been hidden under the finish.

After showing these pieces to several building tradesman who could not identify them, and finally seeking advice from an old established furniture maker and restorer it was decided, after taking into consideration the year and country of manufacture that the dashboard and its capping is an imported mahogany, and that the door cappings are of cedar. Further, on inspecting some original finish pieces he proclaimed that they were done in what the trade called 50/50, a common practice in woodwork to disguise various types of timbers used in one article as it gives a full even colour. It's made from a mixture of shellac and varnish with a body colour included.

To add insult to injury, on my enquiry regarding French polish, I was told that motor vehicles have not had this type of finish on interior woodwork since the early 1920s, as genuine French Polish will not stand the rigors of heat and damp.

So, what a dilemma! Should we go back to the 50/50 finish or work on the beautiful natural colours and grain?.

Armed with the best advice and tips from the old masters, we began experimenting with various preparations and finishes and decided after much soul seaching to work on the natural beauty of the timber so, lets go step by step.

1. Remove door cappings and dashboard capping all secured with self tappers.

2. Dashboard removal should be done very carefully to ensure no damage is done. The instrument panel is attached with two chrome headed bolts, which unless you are going to rewire as well, is advisable to separate from the board as you ease the panel back towards the steering wheel after first removing the self tappers.

The ancillary controls e.g. choke, starter button, speedo cable, dash light switch, trafficator control, advance and retard, should be detached at this stage allowing the board itself to be lifted free. I found opening the windscreen made it easier to juggle the board out and off the gearshift lever.

3. Brush on and remove stripper as per the instructions. Allow plenty of time for the timber to dry completely after completing the varnish removal.

4. Repair any cracks or splits with Liquid Nails or similar glue (after glueing clamp parts together for 24 hours). Use Woodstop to putty up any bruises or chips - this is available in a range of colours so take care matching. I found walnut was the most versatile.

The putty used originally is very light in colour; if you find any of this in your woodwork it should be dug out and done again in a better matching colour or use "Colourwood" stains (again Walnut Brown was pretty close to the door cappings). As far as colour matching is concerned, it can be built up to the required strength gradually after STEP 5.

5. Rub down with glasspaper (not wet and dry) starting with F2 and progressive grades down to 00, then finish sanding with steel wool. At this stage do not handle the surface, keep it clean and dust free.

6. Treat all pieces with Wood-grain Filler, again choose your colour carefully.

7. Final finishing is easy, using Instant Estapol Spray Gloss. This will protect and seal your work, a light rub over when completely dry with steel wool and another coat and you have finished.

This method takes a lot more time and effort than the original 50/50 finish but the rewards are certainly worth while.

Mel Carey.
(Readers may like to refer back to volume 5, No. 3, page 6 (September/October, 1981) for comparison with Gerald Propsting's experience and advice on dashboard restoration - Ed.)

Mel Carey