

Scrapping to clapping

A sad but very satisfactory end to a love/hate relationship I had with a 1965 Mercedes 230SL occurred last week.

The extraordinary change in the car was wrought by the body shop of Industry Autos, formerly Andrew Flower Associates.

I bought the car in 2006 after viewing a few with Andrew Flower himself who told me what to look out for. So it was with some (over) confidence that I made the deal to purchase the car which had been the star car in the BBC series “55 degrees North”.

However when I took it to Andrew Flowers for a service I was in for a shock as the car looked immaculate, but after a magnet was used to check the underlying metal it became clear that the bulk of the car was in fact, filler.

Closer inspection followed and the decision of whether to scrap the car, repair it, or sell it on knowing it to be a death trap had to be made. We made the decision to press on with a repair that turned out to be a total remanufacture and rebuild of the car. Ron and Wayne at the body shop then began a careful dissection of the car, keeping a photographic record as they went. In the end over 1000 photos were needed to cover the extraordinary work it took to rebuild the car over a 3 year period.

The patience, perseverance, persistence and precision they used to identify the areas of multiple prior attempts to cover up rust with filler and worse, from plastic tape to silver paper, were fantastic.

The car was literally held together with dodgy repairs, and the detailed filler recreation of weld lines and such details were done by apprentices learning how to use filler, whilst the car had been in the hands of a classic car restorer for some 15 years off the road.

Some parts were easy to find as Mercedes do have many parts for their classic SLs, but not all. It was fortunate but expensive to replace the bonnet, after we found that the previous one had been ground down to fit the previous aperture. The fact that the previous aperture was smaller than the bonnet was due to the inner and outer front wings being held together with filler, meaning that the opening for the bonnet was incorrectly set up. With the front end having been replaced in its entirety the old bonnet fell through with a 1 cm gap all round.

The bits we could not find had to be made by hand and faithfully photographed for the record. The sills were held on by a couple of screws with no welding and had to be stripped back to allow for replacement as per factory specification.

I could go on and list all the areas that Ron and Wayne had to rebuild, but eventually the car was ready for me to use. And use it I did. But due to increasing problems I have with my left leg following previous unsuccessful spinal surgery, and the fact that the car was a manual, the time came when I was no longer able to drive it for long distances.

The car was accepted by a prestigious auction house specialising in classic cars, and placed for auction with an estimate of from £45,000 to £50,000. The interest in the car when we attended the auction was high. The lots prior to FNN 607C were either failing to sell or only making low to mid range of their estimated value. When our car was under the hammer however there were 3 telephone bidders who took it to £62,500 or 25% above the top estimate. The true sold price with the buyer's premium added is £70,813 only £700 short of the record price for the Pagoda SL.

That's when we heard the room burst into applause. All entirely down to the careful and correct rebuild done by Ron and Wayne, part of a remarkable team that is now Industry Autos.