

# *18 Months Hard Labour*

I suppose it's fair to say, the things that we aspire to during our short time on this planet are achieved by dogged determination, a belief in yourself & what you are undertaking, and sometimes just a little bit of luck. Of course it helps no end should you receive help and encouragement along the way. Good fortune smiled upon me by having most importantly, my wife and my family who believed in what I was about to undertake; "The Total Restoration" of my, or should I say our Austin A40 Sports.

I set myself a Goal, which was, to attend the Austins over Australia (A.O.A.) Rally, to be held in Toowoomba - April, 1997. Although after taking a detailed look at what lay before me, I couldn't help but think that I was being a bit over ambitious. We had purchased the Sports in September 1995 from Graham Cole - who was disenchanted with Austins - we also inherited a Utility full of A40 spares. From October to November I sifted through what I had dragged home from Victoria, a lot of it went to Sims Metal.

By the end of November I had stored and tagged most of the parts, knew I was short of -one hell of a lot, and in some cases didn't even know what went where or even why! In this regard I was fortunate, being able to obtain information and in some cases patterns for floor panels from Don Ashcroft who had also purchased a Sports about the same time. If someone had told me we would have had 2 A40 Sports in the Club last year, I would have suggested a visit to the local funny farm was in order.

What compounded my rebuild was the fact that it was Left-hand Drive, having been imported from the U.S.A. The car had been owned by a Lady in Maryland. It is true the Sports is based on the A40 Devon and the A40 Somerset, But the chassis is totally different as is the floor pan, clutch and brake pedals and the body.

The clutch and brake pedals and the body were of major concern to me, I had none! I managed to modify Devon pedals to suit and using some sections of Devon floor and a lot of ingenuity, managed after a hole lot of head scratching to construct what was required. To this end "The Legend" my dear old departed Mate, Bob Simpson was a source of inspiration and knowledge. Bob must have spent at least two months of the last year of his life doing what he loved most - restoring old cars and solving what sometimes seemed impossible - believe me when I say there is a lot of Simmo in that car.

I decided like most restorers to rebuild sections at a time. The Aluminium body panels are mostly bolt on and were in a deplorable condition due to corrosion and the

steel sections which riveted onto the panels would have to be replaced. The panel work was removed and put aside, so I could concentrate on the body shell, which required new door sills, chassis rails and a complete floor pan. All this took from December '95 to April '96

To this end I fell into many traps awaiting the inexperienced. As an example, on the off side or drivers side, after 3 weeks of nights and weekends replacing sill rails, floor pan etc. I found that I could not fit the door, it overlapped some 25<sup>mm</sup>. My Son Michael's solution was to grab the 9" angle grinder, cut my 3 weeks work in half and with the use of a Porta-power spread the body to fit the door. "Now Dad, brace the door opening and weld in a new section!"

I have to admit Col O'Sullivan warned me this could happen and advised me to brace the shell before I started. I surmised that I would not be in this predicament if the big mongrel had not talked me into an A40 Sports in the first place. There were I might add many occasions I called him far worse than mongrel, But Col was a constant source of encouragement and when ever I needed a hand he was always available. As you know Col is always good for a laugh, which sort of eased the frustrations. A great deal of the aluminium body panels were repaired by him including the rear beaver panel, after all, he got me into this mess didn't he?

Working on the "Fong Scale" of assessment I would rate myself a meagre 3.5 out of 10 when it comes to MIG welding. But, working on the theory of ; if you put enough on, some of it has a chance of sticking, fusing, penetrating or whatever "Fong Folk" or welding speak call it! Besides no matter how much bird dung you produce it can always be made to look half reasonable if you have an angle grinder.

Speaking of angle grinders, why do they almost always spray the operator with hot sparks and another thing I've noted is what ever you grind has a sexual attraction for window glass. I know this for a fact, because the glass area in my Sports was totally stuffed by the time I had finished all the body shell repairs - which took me incidentally till late June '96 to complete.

Of the problems associated with restoring a Convertible or Tourer, probably the one that gave me most headaches was the flexibility encountered once the body shell was removed from the chassis. Even allowing for the perimeter frame that I had fitted so that the doors could again be removed, a certain amount of longitudinal & latitudinal movement still takes place. So it was with a great deal of trepidation I lifted the body shell from the chassis. I achieved this by using and adjusting 4 chains of unequal length until I found a central balance point. This manoeuvre was completed as carefully and as quickly as I could, not wanting to put any more strain than necessary on the body shell.

Once on the ground I was surprised to find that I could lift the shell onto its side quite readily. Although the final rotation to upside down position was achieved with

the assistance of Peter Bates. With the body shell in this position it only took me another week to finish off some of the welds which previously required contortional skill way beyond my capabilities. This saw the shell now prepared for the next stage of the refurbishment - painting.

I imagine a great many people associated with the Vintage Movement would know the name Kevin Crocker, the head Guru at Kenny's Paints. I have attended a number of swapmeets with Kevin and respect his vast knowledge when it comes to paints and the techno's associated in this area. I am firm in the belief that, before you apply new paint you must firstly remove what has already been applied - after all you have no idea what has been slapped on over the years. So I decided everything on the Sports had to be stripped back to bare metal - or in the case of the body panels, bare aluminium. The body shell was no exception. This stage was completed and set aside by the end of July '96.

The shell was stripped to bare metal, Galmet Ironize applied, followed by Galmet Cold Gal, as a protection against further rust. This was followed by 3 coats of Two-Pack 2K Enamel. Once this was completed I constructed a mobile trolley which allowed me to very easily move the body shell for storage out of the weather under the carport. Now we were ready for our next section - the rolling chassis.

There were three reasons why I decided to take the rolling chassis to Stripco. Firstly it's mid August & time is running out, Secondly it saves me a lot of cold nights in the garage and Thirdly I've managed a couple of good financial returns from swapmeet sales. This aspect of the Vintage movement was introduced to me by Col & Ron. I have picked up quite a bit of bargaining prowess from Ned Kelly and his Brother.

So with the Sports on the back of Simmo's trailer once more, we were off to the strippers at Revesby, Stripco is only two Streets from where I work. I delivered the rolling chassis at lunch time Wednesday and after parting with the cash picked it up on Friday lunch time. Chassis, suspension, etc. sandblasted and finished in Polyurethane grey undercoat. I surmise the above would have taken me at least a month to complete. Back home in my workshop I worked well into the night and had everything ready for painting the next morning.

Judy leaves for work Saturday mornings at 5.30am, and after seeing her off (someone has to finance the rebuild) headed straight for the workshop. By 12.30pm I had the Chassis, all component parts painted and hanging to dry, suspended from the rafters. What I couldn't fit in the garage was in the carport, I can't imagine what the neighbours must be thinking. I do receive some strange looks sometimes! Allowing the various parts two days to dry before I started serious assembly was much to Judy's annoyance - It was quite interesting having the washing along side shock absorbers, springs etc. all side by side on the clothes line.

It took a further two weeks to fully assemble the rolling chassis. We had to make all new brake lines, mount the master cylinder from left to right, run new fuel lines through etc. On a Devon chassis this is not a problem, but on a Sports chassis, **forget it!**

Ok, so we have a body shell ready, a rolling chassis completed, it is mid way through September and my March deadline is not looking good. A.O.A.? I don't know.

October saw the gearbox rebuilt, tailshaft balanced and diff re-raced, this was all straight forward. Once again I put the rolling chassis aside to concentrate on the power plant. Over the last two months I have adopted this ritual on my way home from work - call in to Simmo's, fill up with Olwen's coffee and secure what parts I am short of, from Bob's seemingly endless supply. I am embarrassed by Bob refusing to accept anything as payment. Bob wants me to leave the motor and fit the body shell to the chassis - which I did the following weekend - so he can fit the electrical harness that he has made for me. We sat the dash gauges etc. in place and did a continuity test which proved to be spot on. Once again Bob's genius has proven to be invaluable. I numbered each wire before I removed it from the body, ready for a woven cover, in the original colours. I was quoted around \$450 for a new harness - this one cost me \$50.

As I mentioned previously Graham Cole who started the restoration on the Sports had begun the rebuild of the motor. It had been bored to +0.40, crankshaft ground to +0.40, mains and big-ends supplied along with new pistons and rings. The block had been in storage for a couple of years, so I decided to have it chemically cleaned and the bore honed to remove any surface rust. This was done by a good friend of mine at Sydney Crankshaft Services, Wetherill Park. They also double checked the measurements for me (that I had taken) just to be certain. On its return from the engineering shop I set the block on the engine stand and started the rebuild everything went smoothly until I tried to fit the new pistons to the con rods, I found the pin size to be too big and the gudgeon height too high. They were obviously the wrong pistons (I believe them to be A55 pistons).

Managing to secure a set from P.J.Engineering in S.A. they were duly fitted the following weekend. Things were looking good until I tried to fit the camshaft, for some unknown reason the new cam bearings that had been fitted were +0.10 and the camshaft of course was standard. Another trip to the machine shop and more delays, Murphy's Law was working overtime!

Another week saw the motor fully assembled except for one minor detail, I didn't have an exhaust manifold to fit, and the design is totally different to the Devon. I had written to Rob Stuart - in the States - some months back asking him to try and find one, but unfortunately had received no reply up to now. After exhausting all avenues I could think of, Don Ashcroft offered to loan me the one of his Sports so that I could have one either cast or fabricated using it as a pattern. After some further research I

found the cost of having one cast was worth as much as the car, so the only alternative was to fabricate.

I profile cut the flanges and found a chap at Hume Exhausts who was quite happy to take on the job. So armed with a spare cylinder head, flanges bolted in place, and Don's manifold as a guide, along with body/chassis clearance measurements I had taken; I left the lot at the Exhaust shop. A couple of trial fittings and some minor modifications, saw the new manifold completed in just over a week - which wasn't bad considering all that was included. I also found after a visit to Mini Kingdom, that Mini Cooper heat shields (after a little modifying) were almost the same as the originals.

My next project was to fabricate an accelerator linkage (remember it was left hand drive). This was achieved by lengthening a Devon accelerator mechanism by some 4" where it locates across the firewall. At this point, without the motor in the chassis I had no idea just where the linkages would be to suit the Sports, twin S.U. carburettors. This and other intriguing questions would be answered once the motor was fitted - which was achieved without drama.

It was now the end of October and at last I had smoke coming out of the engine pipe! I only ran it long enough to check oil pressure and make sure the clutch & gearbox functioned - as the noise without an exhaust system was disturbing the rats, spiders and pigeons that had nested in the car over the last couple of months. The neighbours weren't too thrilled either.

By the end of November we had fabricated an exhaust system, fitted all new glass to doors & windscreen and fitted Bob's electrical harness. Everything electrical proved to be functioning well with the exception of the generator, which proved to be my own stupidity (by incorrectly marking the wires before I had it woven). I know Bob would have sorted out the problem and would have loved to have been with me to see it all functioning, but by this time he was hospitalised and not expected to see Christmas. It was a very sad time for all of us, I have so many fond memories.

Bob passed away early December '96. It was wonderful to see so many Club Members, with their Cars, attend the Funeral. Olwen has promised that she will come with us to Austins Over Australia at Toowoomba in March. This makes me more determined to finish the car and I have decided that even if it isn't fully restored it *IS* going to be there.

By the second week in January we had all the body panels bolted in place and all the lines and gaps were pretty spot on, the body at this point of time has not been repaired or prepared for painting. Once again I pick up Bob's trailer and take the Sports to Riverstone for a total re-trim at Brad's Auto Upholstery. He promised me that two weeks was all he required, and we could have it back for painting. Brad was true to his word - mind you I did have to do a bit of ranting & raving on a couple of occasions -

but he did put in a lot of hours and a full 24 hour weekend to help me meet my deadline, A.O.A. '97. Brad is a top tradesman and I would thoroughly recommend him to anyone.

There were now Six weeks to A.O.A. The first thing I did when I bought the Sports home was to remove all the trim I had just had done, bloody stupid isn't it? I then took the Sports to my son's place, where we spent the next two weeks repairing and file finishing, then undercoating the body. During this period Michael and I spent a total of 120 hours outside of our normal 5 day working week.

It is now Four weeks to A.O.A. - I am having no end of problems in securing a full brake pedal. We have manually bled, & pressure bled, but still can't quite come up with a full brake pedal. Time plus frustration finds me in peak hour 6.30am traffic, once more towing the Sports, to Burt Bros. Brakes at Fairfield. Perhaps the fact that I was very tired contributed to my damaging the front nearside guard & door, and tearing the tail light off the trailer as I unloaded the Sports in Burt Bros. workshop.

What I do know is, it's Friday and Monday we have the spray booth booked. Michael wasn't pleased when I told him I was taking the car for brake repairs, so I wasn't looking forward to telling him what his addle brained old man had just done. To Michael's credit, all he said was, which guard? The left hand side! That's good I wasn't happy with the gap between the door anyway, I'll fix it tonight. Which he duly did! and Saturday I was able to complete the repairs. Now we were looking good for the Monday respray. Michael weaved his magic on the Monday afternoon and the spray shop allowed us to leave the car in the booth overnight. Believe me after checking out the finished product sitting in the booth with the interior masked, my first impression was ; oh lord what have I done! It looked like a big bright yellow blob. I spent a restless night wondering what to do next.

With only three weeks left I now have the Sports back in my garage trying to assemble it as quickly as possible without damaging the bodywork. The more I assembled the more I liked it, and once the interior was refitted that made a world of difference. With the chrome strips, badges and lights in place it was all coming together. Col and Peter wanted to come and give me a hand - I was most grateful for their offer, but declined; as I wanted to finish it on my own.

Two weeks to A.O.A. that's fourteen days & fourteen nights. On the Sunday we took the Sports on her maiden voyage, Col came over in his Somerset Coupe to come with us, just in case we had any trouble. We both set off for Picton and I am pleased to say all went well - except for the generator discharging, also I was not real happy with the exhaust. So Monday I took the Sports to have my fabricated system reshaped at Hume Exhausts. Wednesday a wheel alignment and wheel balance at Morton & May's and Thursday had to fit a new regulator at Express Auto Electrical. I burnt the other one out when I wired it wrong.

It is eight days to A.O.A. On my way home from the Auto sparks the car came to a sudden grinding halt. - fuel blockage! I managed to get home ever so slowly and once back in my workshop found the entire fuel system to be contaminated. So it's clean the fuel line, fuel pump, carburetors, remove the tank then go over to Col's place to use his Gurney Spray. The amount of rust particles to come out of the tank was unbelievable. I had had the tank steam cleaned and fitted a new fuel line when I first assembled the car, just so that this problem would not happen. We fitted the tank once again, but things still weren't perfect, so I fitted an in-line filter half way along the chassis - one with a removeable filter cartridge. I surmised this would protect the pump and carby's and also allow me to clean or replace the filter if I had a problem ( which we did in Toowoomba).

Countdown stands at five days, I road test the car, fuel System seems OK, but now would you believe the ignition switch is shorting out. Off with the dash nobs, remove the panel and fit a secondhand switch that came out of Ern Quinton's '49 Devon. Now we have only Four days before our departure - Monday night I service Judy's Falcon, our tow car. Tuesday night I fit new wheel bearings and repair the lights on Bob's trailer. Wednesday night check on Sports and load up for a 6am departure. On Thursday we pick up Olwen and were off to A.O.A.

Judy and I have the next three weeks off to recuperate and recharge our batteries. You just couldn't imagine how much support Judy has given me over the last 6 months, thanks love. So too I would like to acknowledge the following people who's help and assistance was greatly appreciated, Col O'Sullivan, Peter Bates, Don Ashcroft, Rob Stuart, my three children Michael, Geoff & Rebecca. Most of all Bob & Olwen Simpson to whom I am deeply indebted and eternally gratefull, I can not thank them enough. May you ever Rest in Peace Bobby.

Tony Andrews.

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