

Tech Article: March 2016;

Customers are having a problem again with the definition of a few words in our language; restoration, refurbishment and repair. Let me quickly give you my definition. A restoration is a complete and total rebuild of a car including every single component being removed, cleaned, repaired and made as good as new or replaced with new as long as it appears as original; even if the part is working at the time of disassembly. From the body and frame to the smallest “P” clip and every thing in between, nothing is left untouched.

A refurbishment is a lot less. All the mechanicals necessary for a car to be driven safely are rebuilt. Originality is not as critical as in a restoration. The body and interior are made to look as good as possible without a complete redo. There can be some areas left untouched. The front suspension can be left alone if the bushings have little play or wear. As long as it is safe and in no danger of failing, a system does not need replacing.

Repairing is making a bad item good. I can build a front suspension without completely stripping the parts and painting them as original. Each item is made to work as it should and only the bad areas are addressed. Your brakes can be repaired without touching your suspension but not if doing a restoration.

Financially, there are massive differences in cost. A repair is the least costly as we are only fixing the one or two items not working. The costs associated with these are easy enough to quote within a few dollars as we know what we will need. A refurbishment is a lot more expensive. It is a lot harder to quote as you have to go thru the entire car and determine what all needs repairing. One can then go thru a parts book and price out almost all the parts cost associated with the needed repairs. Labor is then figured in and a total is given to the customer. Now, a restoration is a whole nother ball game.

On almost any car out there that you are contemplating having restored, you can expect the cost to be at least twice a refurbishment. I know of no restoration that can be done for less than \$25,000. Wow, why so much? A car that has been sitting for a few years can be refurbished and made into a safe running car between \$2,500 up to \$12,000 depending on the amount of work needed. If the engine is bad and needs rebuilding you are looking at the higher side. If the engine can be made to run but the carbs need rebuilding, it will be considerably less.

But when you are talking about completely stripping a car to the bare bones and doing a full rebuild, the time it takes grows exponentially. So, think very seriously about what you really want done before talking to a shop. We may be using a different definition of these words than you.

I have refurbished cars that have sat for 30 years or more. I have done complete restorations and kept the cost around the \$25,000 range in the past. But today, having a complete restoration done on most old British cars is a waste of money. You can always buy one someone else has done for a lot less than doing your car. If you have great sentimental attachment to yours, swap ID #s and bank the savings. Most shops do not like doing full restorations because of the time and space they take. One car can easily take the space of three when being restored. Another reason is the time/cost problem.

If I or any shop quotes you 4 hours to do something on the car, from a flat rate book or program, and it takes three, you still get charged the 4 hours. The shop beat the flat rate book. If it takes 5 hours and the shop is honest, you get charged the quoted 4 hours. The shop loses 1 hour of pay. When restoring a car, it is very difficult to quote how long it will take to restore each and every item. How long does it take to sand blast a suspension piece, prime and paint it with good paint and not rattle can stuff? How many parts will need that treatment?

It adds up quickly. Make sure you understand these differences when you drag your old car out of storage and to a shop. I write written quotes for any big refurbishment or restoration, some run 30 pages or more. Just buy a Miata.

I have one more thing to say. I saw an article about Nissan having a fully autonomous Leaf in a few years. I have heard police and insurance companies say our cars are the least likely to be stolen because they are stick shifts and the new generation of thieves cannot drive them. This indicates to me we need to get young people into our cars. The request for driving permits for young kids is decreasing as more and more lose interest in driving. When they do get a license, they will be the purchasers of cars like the new Leaf. And who will be able to repair these cars in the future?

Where, in the automotive schools and classes is valve adjusting being taught. If your car doesn't have a computer in it, how can they plug into it to diagnose the problems? Who will know how to rebuild the engines or transmissions? So, if you are lucky enough to find a buyer or you leave it to a heir, who will they get to maintain and repair the old British cars? I ain't going to do this forever.

Driving our cars is fun and we need to show this to the younger generation. I tried to talk two customers out of a full restoration on a MGTD and a MGB. I explained to both that the cost would be almost double the cost of buying one already done. And when they get tired of the car, or die, there will be no one to take it over and care for it properly. Car shows and mountain drives are fun for some of us, but not the younger generation.

What suggestions do you have to involve young people in our hobby? How can we guarantee there will be people wanting our old British cars when we can no longer fit into them?

Don't forget about our tech session scheduled for March 19th. It is free but you MUST RSVP before March 15th, we need to make plans. If you are qualified and would like to help teach, let me know as soon as you can. See y'all on the road somewhere soon. The tech session would be a great place.

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