

Rufus - Modifications during Strip-Down:

During my previous restorations I have followed two common but distinctly different modus operandi. The first method is to strip everything off the chassis in big lumps then restore the chassis. With the chassis on blocks I restored and fitted all the big lumps (including the body when separate from the chassis). This method was employed on both cars and motorbikes it works on the majority of standard restorations as you are basically not changing much and just repairing, fettling and restoring it to its original condition.

I built my first kit car (an RMB Gentry) in the early eighties and quickly realised that there is no such thing as a 'standard' and the second and better method was to build the car to a roadworthy condition, strip it down, then fettle and paint everything before building it back together, obviously you are building the car twice, but in my experience it works out quicker in the long run.

My previous restoration on an older kit car ('Mungo' a Lomax 224) made me rethink the way I do things. Bearing in mind that Mungo was up and running in the long and distant past; i.e. 1997, I approached his restoration using the first method, insofar as I stripped him down into big lumps, refurbished the lumps and started putting him back together. This turned out to be a big mistake as it basically meant I started to repeat (what I later considered to be) the build mistakes of the original builder. This resulted in my modifying restored parts before fitment and after modification they required restoring again.

Based on my experience restoring Mungo I decided to adopt a totally different modus operandi for 'Rufus'. Coincidentally, like Mungo, Rufus was taken off the road in 1997 and had been stored unused in the same dry garage ever since. During his captivity he became eligible for Historic Vehicle Status (Free Road Tax) and as he was converted to an NG over 30 years ago he is also eligible for MOT Free Status. I have to apply for both concessions by submitting completed paperwork (including a current MOT) at a Post Office that deals with vehicle tax.

During the 'Strip-Down' I looked at each part very carefully and anything found to be less than satisfactory was modified and trial fitted before being placed on one side for fettling/refurbishment at a later date. In my opinion it's better to be hyper-critical on an unrestored part than to modify a part that you have already restored. A final thought on fettling; 'don't just clean up a part ready for painting, improve it by rounding off any sharp corners etc.'

Over the last fifty plus years I have enjoyed restoring cars and motorbikes and building kit cars in my spare time. Rufus will be my last restoration project, and my last book, but you will have to wait another couple of years or so to purchase one. He is destined to become my everyday summer drive replacing 'Emma' the TD. The situation at the moment is that all major modifications have been carried out; all I have to do now is restore all the parts and put him back together!