

If only life was that simple...

2005 was a busy year for the White Elephant; we removed her body, stripped her down and catalogued all her bits. We then removed the engine and worked out, through a process of elimination and with no engine numbers to go on, what the power unit's specification must be. Through the summer we spent several itchy months creating a complete set of splash moulds of the old girl's bodywork, just in case the worst was ever to happen, and at the same time we were refurbishing the chassis, to give the whole undertaking something a little more solid to sit on.



the

White Elephant

Restoration

The aim of the project was always to have the Elephant finished for summer 2006. Everything was going according to plan and our schedule appeared realistic. After all, we only had a chassis, body, engine and a few ancillaries to tinker about with now didn't we. If only life was that simple...

To begin with I did think that life was that simple. The chassis was easily sorted, as all I did was ring Richard Thorpe at RT Racing and tell him I was bringing it to him the following week. What could be simpler? Richard soon had the chassis stripped down and after sand blasting we found that just the outriggers and a couple of other ancillary pieces needed replacing; the main structure of the chassis was really quite good. So after some welding and re-tubing it was back to the sandblasters again, and then off to the powder coaters for the paint job.

The brake shoes were all looking rather tired, and without a doubt the rear set were very poorly indeed. So the fronts were refurbished at AP, whilst a new set were sought for the back. Likewise the front disks received a slight skim, whilst a new pair was ordered for the rears.

Having already had the diff' and gearbox expertly re-built by Alan Jackson, of whom I can only speak in the highest possible terms, at ATJ Transmissions in Chester, the entire rolling chassis really did look as though it was going to be plain sailing.

So the chassis pretty much looking after itself, we turned our attentions once more to the bodyshell. On closer examination, we found a good number of star-cracks and small splits, hardly surprising from a shell with a heart of modelling foam; so a good number of patched repairs would have to be carried out.

Although working hard to keep PW's old chariot as original as possible, I also decided to remove the aerial from its original mounting position on the nearside rear wing and install an internal aerial within the roof lining. This isn't an aesthetic move, but purely a common sense one. The fact is, the fibreglass is so thin along the rear quarters that if the aerial was to catch on something immovable it could be very easily ripped out, leaving us with the prospect of an awkward future repair job. So the original location hole was to be patched and filled and the rear corners strengthened. There was also an issue towards the front of the shell, where the old 420 Sports Saloon prototype nose had been bonded on. The fibreglass here was starting to come away and split quite badly, so some intensive work would be required to bring this area back up to spec'.



More worryingly, inside the tunnel where the manifolds ran close to the side of the bodywork, there were signs of heavy scorching. In certain areas the manifolds had actually been touching the front end of the tunnel, and we figured for longevity that by cutting a couple of recessed access panels in this area, we could assist the airflow around the manifolds.

At the same time this might also enable us to gain access to the two rear plugs of the Holden V8, which thus far had been impossible to get at. The carefully cut access panels gave us over ten millimetres of additional clearance and should certainly be a major improvement. We will cover the cut-outs from the inside with stainless, ceramic-coated covers which will be secured by way of captive nuts. These covers in turn will eventually be trimmed up with two pieces of Velcro-backed carpet for ease of removal.

So comfortably being the better side of both chassis and body, we once more turned our attentions to the engine. The lack of engine numbers had originally given me some sleepless nights, but after purchasing a number of V8 engine books from down under, I eventually identified the unit as a 1988 Commodore VN with the fast road LB9 conversion. This gave me the entire parts list I needed in order to re-build the motor. So chassis, body and engine all sorted, I was actually starting to feel quite confident; too confident.

A few days later I received a phone call from Richard Thorpe, who unneringly sounded just the slightest bit tense. He informed me that the experimental adjustable rear anti-roll bar had been originally manufactured to a very "interesting" specification and if we re-connected it in the usual manner, there was every possibility that it could snap under tension. The original drop links did show signs of much re-welding and fatigue, so the decision had to be made as to how we connect the rear anti-roll bar up, without creating a spring loaded steel explosion just a few inches from both the old girl's fuel tanks.