

Restoring a small piece of history such as a TVR prototype is neither something to be rushed at, nor treated as a task.

It should be looked upon as a glorious honour conferred upon the few, a once in a lifetime opportunity to be relished and savoured and a fantastic opportunity to involve your closest friends in something unique.

The White Elephant

Starting the strip

(or Baring the Elephants Bottom...)



I decided to put together a reasonably relaxed schedule for the White Elephant's restoration. This should allow all involved enough time to enjoy this rescue of Peter Wheeler's old car, and to appreciate the journey as much as the end itself.

Bearing in mind that a good number of original Holden and Bosch parts will have to be sourced and shipped from Australia, and that in a 1980's hand built development car we are not exactly sure what we are going to find, the end of 2005 seemed like a sensible point in time to aim at.

So having trailed the White Elephant to the West Lancs TVR Car Club meeting in August, followed by Cardiff's Power & Passion in September, the strip-down proper was to begin in earnest the first week of October. The plan being to have the bulk of the car dismantled, catalogued and labelled by Christmas, so we can start the reconstructive work in January. A comprehensive set of photographs also have to accompany every item removed. There is no manual for this one.

Having failed to have the car running for more than a few seconds at a time, due to a highly corroded Bosch Australia 92060240 Ignition Module, and smelling the increasing levels of Optimax vapour rising from the large and leaky custom rear fuel tank, I eventually took the difficult decision to not run the beast until after the rebuild – a difficult call to say the least. Over £18k spent to date and not so much as a burble...

Removing the manifolds will have to be left for a later date, as it is physically impossible to get at them with the engine in the car. A minor point really, as you can't get at plugs 1, 5 or 6 either due to the proximity of the chassis rails.

Our first job in October was to trace the electrics. The 1988 Holden engine loom had been grafted into what appeared to be a modified Tasmin loom, which in turn was driving the 'home made' front and rear spurs. Apparently several alternative wiring combinations had been tried during the 10 years of the car's active life, as we found almost as many dead leads as live ones. All were duly traced, disconnected and painstakingly labelled.

Of particular note is the rear number plate lighting. John Ravenscroft told me that when building the Elephant, his type approval manual dictated that he had to illuminate the rear number plate with a minimum of two bulbs, each of which must be stamped with a specific rating, mounted a certain distance from the number plate, and be switched with the side lamp circuits. One point he did notice however was that the manual did not specify whether or not the lights were to be mounted before or behind the plate. Deciding to have a little fun with the type approval inspector, John mounted three lamps behind the Perspex F120SCK plate - and they illuminated it perfectly. As it did not state to the contrary within the type approval restrictions, much to the frustration of the inspector, the rear mounted lamps were allowed to stay. John Ravenscroft, Neill Anderson and Peter Wheeler heartily approved of their new idea and the system was duly adopted for the Griffith prototype the following year. Well that's what prototypes are for, isn't it?

At the end of October we turned our attention to the Elephant's damp and mouldy interior. Dave Cumming had kindly removed the three foot tall tree, along with some of the agricultural carpet, before we collected the car from the factory. So jacking the Elephant onto its new axle stands, John Kenyon along with a big tin of Plus-Gas started to remove the seats and belts, while we carefully removed the dash, console and clocks.

Disconnecting the disc brakes was a simple affair, although the SEAC style handbrake did present us with quite a puzzle due to a couple of interestingly placed spot welds. Dropping the coolant was also an education, as access to the radiator, which is placed flat within the extended nose of the car, is very much at a premium. Removing the doors also became rather more time consuming than first budgeted for. On stripping the door panels we revealed a series of spot welds holding many of the bolts in place. This prototype was definitely not designed to be stripped down again. So the doors eventually had to come off complete with the incredibly difficult to get at hinge assemblies. Further to this, Neill Anderson has reliably informed me that the modified window winder mechanisms may still hold one or two surprises for us. Thanks Neill! Sometimes having a tray of beer sat next to your tool rack is a real sanity saver.