

If this story has a beginning I suppose its inspiration came one morning back in 1974 when the August edition of Classic Cars arrived. The cover carried a picture of one of the most beautiful cars my 18 year old eyes had ever seen.



As I turned the pages the Tulip Wood Hispano only increased in beauty. I was captivated, smitten and a long simmering love affair began.

At 18 I possessed neither the skills or the finance to do anything other than admire the pictures, which i did over and over again. Back in 1974 there was no turning to the internet for further reading or pictures, my local library carried little or nothing and the magazine refused to enter into any dialogue about the car. So it seemed as if this love affair would be fleeting like ships that pass in the night.

On the cusp of adult life there were more important “fish to fry” a career, a wife , kids and a mortgage all would follow, but buried somewhere ,was that most beautiful of visions. Out of sight maybe, but out of mind – I think not.

Fast forward to 2007, my son has just got married and the reception held in our barn now has to be cleared and the garden put back to “normal”. Furthermore – my “free” time is returned to me.

In 1998 at the tender age of 43, my wife and I decide on a complete life change and opt for early – very early retirement. Stepping down from a very stressful job – as a financial analyst - I find I have a lot of time to devote to “little projects” and after my son’s wedding the time was ripe for just one such project.

I have always been resourceful and hated waste of any kind. This has lead me to hoarding objects with a view to “that will come in handy one day”. One such object now needed clearing from the garden but try as I might I could not face scrapping it. In 1987 I had bought a 1981 4.5 ton Mercedes 508d LWB mini bus and converted it to a motor home. “Lisa” (LSA number plate) as the kids had named her, served us well travelling around Europe, Scotland and acting as a great viewing platform at local airshows.



However even Mercedes’ rust and Lisa was no exception but with only 65k kilometres on the clock I couldn’t bring myself to commit her to the crusher. They say that life has many defining moments and from where this one came from I know not.... but I woke up one morning with the Hispano on my mind. What

followed was a quick trip in my recently highly organised loft and hey presto “Classic Cars 1974” appeared from years of hibernation. Nearly 33 years after I had first seen her she was staring back at me. I have to say she didn’t look a day older than the last time I saw her.... but me... well I’m afraid the same couldn’t be said. In fact I looked older than my Dad had looked when I was 18.

Have you ever bumped into an old girlfriend in later life? Its difficult to describe the feeling but you seem to go a little light headed, a little tongue tied and a little silly all at the same time..... As I turned the pages this was one such moment. The next step was put a plan together.

As the seeds were sown the excitement began to build and with tape measure in hand, I cut away the nettles, brambles and cleared an area around “Lisa”. Unbelievably, the track was only millimetres different (the length I could do something about). The height was a problem – but not insurmountable.

With the real love of my life – Julie doing the steering - I hooked up the tractor and dragged Lisa up to the house for a better look. Time had not been kind as she had stood out in the elements for around 10 years – whilst we built up our business of converted railway wagons as holiday homes. However the more I looked underneath the more I was impressed with the Mercedes solidity – a testament to German engineering.

Over the next week I unbolted the body mountings and carefully disconnected all the wires, feeds, steering, handbrake etc that attached the body and chassis together. At this stage nothing was thrown away or discarded and later this was to prove invaluable, as were the copious photographs I took.

Then when I thought all was cleared I confirmed this by carefully jacking the body up. Plan A was to raise the body sufficiently high enough to draw out the chassis but when the 3 inch steel tube began to buckle under the immense weight I decided plan B was a better option. Call the scrap man and “Hiab” it off.



He duly turned up within 4 hours and was ambivalent to the difficulty facing him. Problem one.... can you remember June 2007, in particular the weather? Well this was that Monday and we were located mid way between the two heaviest rainfall areas in the country.... Scrap men are hardy, non pc and non health and safety types and on this particular day they confirmed all 3 qualities.

After 3 hours of pulling riving pushing, lifting oh and much questioning “Lisa’s” parentage, we were free. I must confess to being a little sad at seeing her body disappear into the gloomy and wet afternoon.

What was left only the brave, committed, and insanely stupid would even have considered. As I have all three of the above qualities all I could see was a 1924 Tulip bodied Hispano Suiza racing car. However I must confess to



having to blink a few times in order to bring this vision of loveliness into sharp focus.....

Task one – I haven't a clue – Task two – I don't know I haven't got that far yet, Task three well that depends on what task two is.....



It's no good getting older if you don't get wiser so I walked away for the day and had a think and a drink. This worked so well that I would use this method many times over the coming months.

I came back the following day with a simple plan. My Father taught us that everything happens for a reason – even if you can't see it at the time. So quite simply, the first thing to do

was to get the engine to coax into life. After ten long years of slumber and several, severe Northern winters. The reasoning was simple, If I could get the engine to run then not only would that be a job less but in my mind it would be sign. A sign that says this inanimate object is telling you "*im worth saving.. lets go*"

If you ever embark on any major project having a clear focus and objective gives you quite a lift. It was in this frame of mind that I prepared the engine for life when all of a sudden my hopes were dashed. Although I had made it clear to the scrap men to be careful – in return they would have a "free" body – I had forgotten that a HIAB doesn't lift straight up, more like an arc. The net effect of this was that as the body was lifted it caught – of all things the expensive lift pump. Worse, upon inspection the 3 bolt mounting flange had been broken along 2 of the 3 mountings rendering its function almost useless.

Despair again descended and after ringing around (Mercedes dealers who were absolutely useless - which came as a big surprise) the local Bosch dealer was more helpful and identified the pump and a new unit. They say projects such as this are tempered with highs and lows of equal intensity and frequency. Now was another high, only to be dispelled by an equal and opposite low when he told me the price....



I retired to the house, filthy, fed up and facing failure..... Tea & time are great healers and so they again proved. Upon inspection the breaks were not only clean but complete. I checked the pump itself and found it to be undamaged and performing as well as the day it was made. The damage was totally confined to the broken mounting bracket, which was impossible to weld. However, I'd heard of a glue called "liquid metal" that many raved of.....

J B WELD was inexpensive and did just what it said on the tube. I reworked an old jubilee clip as a clamp and 24 hours later it seemed the repair was very strong, so it looked like we were back in business. The instructions said you could grind it, drill it, tap it in

fact treat it just like metal, except you couldn't weld it. To date it has neither failed nor required me to purchase a replacement.

With the fuel pump re-installed, new filters a make shift fuel tank and fresh fuel added we only needed power to the starter motor and we would know whether we had the nucleus of a project or not. Now the 508d is a 24 volt start so 2 socking great 100 amp hours wired in series would be needed. These were temporarily robbed from my wife's generator.

Preliminary checks confirmed the engine was not seized, had plenty of oil (no water or radiator needed as my intention was not to run for long). Last but by no means least I looked for the biggest screwdriver to short across the starter and we would be ready. Final checks and a quick "jump" across the starter to make sure all the theory works.....sparks fly and the engine "rocks" as the starter turns the flywheel.

....now for the big start. Contact! And before the motor has turned a complete revolution, voila, it burst into life and settled into the most even of tickovers. It was as if Lisa had been in slumber overnight – and not the actual 10 years she had lain dormant. I revved it – like all frustrated F1 drivers do, imagining it was a McLaren Mercedes leaving the Spa pit lane - and let it stop. Eureka, we were truly in business and if my Father is to be believed this is surely a sign....

The following morning one of the worst incidents of the whole project occurred. Which in hindsight, turned out to be the inspiration upon which I would call, on more than one occasion.

My newly married son and his wife had returned from honeymoon. He had left all smiles, with his lovely bride and returned to find his father stricken with a rapidly deteriorating case of senile dementure.

"Clucking bell what on earth are you doing" – I think that's what he said. I offered him the 1974 classic car magazine and pointed to the pictures as a feeble answer but he was unimpressed. I must confess that when he summarised what I was proposing even I thought I was bonkers. "Your going to take a 1981 4.5 ton diesel mini bus and make it into a 1924 wooden bodied racing car?" Put it that way and even now it sounds more than a little daft. But on more than one occasion I would let those words act as inspiration and encouragement to further the project. I dare not, cannot & will not let this project fail. This however was not the first time even I thought I'd lost my marbles.

Over the next few days I beavered away and began to realise that I could not make an exact replica of such a beautiful beast and that compromises would have to be made. My finances and lack of engineering skills & facilities plus certain hurdles that would be impossible to surmount had to be recognised. Although I was realistic, none the less I was still enthusiastic and full of energy to complete a vehicle that would be worthwhile. In addition one of my goals was not only to construct a car that looked like the Hispano but more importantly re-created what it was like to drive one of these monsters.

Magazines today are full of "kit cars" based on some modern euro box which when completed drives like a modern euro box with a fibreglass outer skin. Now this is fine provided that's what you want. However what I wanted was a car that drove, sounded and behaved like a 1920's racing car. The engine was big powerful and lazy, with oodles of torque – and yes it was diesel but so what? Audi and Peugeot are blazing a trail at Le Mans and look set to continue to do so. Ettore Bugatti once

called the 1920's Bentley's the "Fastest Lorries" in the world and to all intents I was starting with a lorry.... The gear change would be heavy - positive, but heavy. The brakes would be powerful and again would need considerable pressure as they lacked a servo but this pedal pressure was what they endured in the 20's. In fact Rolls Royce was so impressed by the original Hispano's four wheel brakes that he copied them. It had leaf springs, a drop front axle and a quality of engineering not found these days. Furthermore I had saved it from being discarded because it was old, because it had a rusty body and because it was a diesel. This and my pile of old Mahogany would lead me to the biggest recycling project in, in, well in the history of my back garden.....



Within a fortnight all the ancillary gubbins had been removed and stored. The engine gearbox and steering had been removed and everything was stripped, cleaned and sprayed. As I mentioned earlier the track was pretty much perfect but the wheelbase was woefully too long, as Lisa was a lwb I would need to remove 37 inches. Never having done a "cut & shut" before it was a case of the blind leading the stupid. I



bought the most expensive hacksaw ever and a packet of equally high quality blades.

There's a saying measure twice cut once and this was no time to be argue with those sentiments. In fact I think I measured about 10 times. The beauty of working with such a quality piece of engineering is that you know it was made by machines in a jig so it is manufactured to the millimetre. Scribing 2 datum points I marked the proposed cut lines carefully, re-measured and re-measured again. I clamped 2 very substantial angle brackets to each chassis leg to act a supports whilst the cutting was in progress. These would also allow me to "slide" the shortened chassis back together again prior to welding.



Even though I was apprehensive of this process it all went really well and here I learnt another lesson. Take your time, don't rush and proceed at a pace your comfortable with when all the theory usually works. It was a piece of advice I would call upon several times.

The chassis was butted back together and clamped firmly once the measurements were again all checked. Roll out the stick

welder and crank up the amperage. I tacked everything, checked straightness and again measured the diagonals. A couple of hours later both joints were seamed, plated and just in case – bolted with stainless steel bolts as well.



Now anyone who has ever made anything knows that as you complete a certain stage you just cannot help yourself but pretend what it's going to look like when it's finished. The other thing that always happens is that you somehow manage to convince yourself that after this marathon stage has been completed there's really not much left to do.... Those of you who have never made anything ignore the previous paragraph.....

The rolling chassis – I say rolling but with the brakes seized on rolling is perhaps a little exaggeration - was still sitting too high. Now was the time to remove many individual spring leaves and see what we can be done. It's worth remembering that this is no Airfix kit, there are no instructions, no real plans, just photographs and furthermore there are precious few engineers I know who were even remotely prepared to assist. So removing leaves and correcting ride height was purely a matter of mix and match, trial and error.

Although only a rolling chassis, I can assure you there is an awful lot of metal in a Mercedes rolling chassis. So removing leaves is both slow and laborious. Several hours later and it was beginning to look something like I wanted.



The engine and gearbox is one hell of a lump, both in size but more importantly weight. Originally both were mounted right at the front of the chassis which is totally wrong for this project and would need to be moved further back. The beauty of working with such a quality chassis is the way in which the designer and the builder had really thought about its construction – if only the British motor industry had shown such dedication and foresight, we might still have one.



The engine mounts are really a work of art both in design and construction. The net result was that re-siting the engine and box was one of the easier tasks. Once in place the rolling chassis looked almost ready for Brooklands – well perhaps that's a little bold – but

considering my starting point it looked fantastic.

Where next? The body which I was looking forward too could now be started in earnest. The original was reputedly made from Tulip wood – or was it? During the weeks of cleaning welding, cutting and re-siting, I had spent a lot of time researching the racers history. Ebay - not for the first time – was a useful source of information spares and articles on the Hispano. It turns out that although the original owner Andre Dubonnet commissioned it in Tulip wood this may have been a little white lie. Mahogany looks to have been the wood used but tulip wood being a better “brand”. A bit like owning a Seiko watch and telling everyone it’s an Omega..... Personally I could care less but with a garden full of Mahogany, this decision was akin to the choice of Hobson....



I had scanned in the photographs and taken measurements. Everything was reproduced in photoshop and after hours of toil I had a set of body plans that would be as good as I was likely to get. Plywood was chosen for its strength, availability and ease of use for the floor and formers.



These would be covered with Mahogany – suitably glued and screwed all topped off with an exterior varnish.

Sounds easy sitting here writing this article, but I can assure you there was an awful lot of preparation and not infrequent swearing. When I said I had a garden full of Mahogany, what I meant to say was the previous March we had had the Mahogany framed double glazing in our house, replaced with UPVC double glazing. Therefore 16 window frames had to be dismantled and turned into one eighth inch strips of around 8 to 10 foot lengths.

Weatherproof white pva glue was selected after careful trials proved this to be the most durable and flexible of the options. A very useful little addition – not available in Dubbonnets time – was my air powered nail gun. This is a most useful tool, which allowed the positioning of wood accurately, instantly and single-handedly. A boon when your are known locally as “Billy no mates the eccentric”...

Over the following weeks I absolutely enjoyed myself, bending cutting, planning and fitting hundreds of strips of wood. It wasn't so much a task more therapy, radio 2 kept me company during the day and I would gauge the time by finishing with radio 4's story around 8pm. Where upon Lisa would be sheeted down and left outside for the night as the brakes were binding so much, moving proved impossible without a tractor.

After my sons comments I vowed that he would not see its progression until the project reached a stage where its own momentum would ensure completion. During the late summer / early autumn 2007 he visited many times but the location of our house dictated I could see him coming and “Lisa” was sheeted down to restrict his prying eyes and acerbic comments. Whenever he arrived I



pretended I was in the middle of something else. Never the less, he would always steer the conversation to “hows Chitty Chitty Bang Bang?” A phrase that I can reveal annoyed me intently. He also called me Dick Van Dyke aka Caracticus Potts, but I would smile bite my lip and remember that old phrase “he who laughs last laughs longest” . Although I said little and took a huge amount of stick, I garnered strength from each

derisory comment with the mental reply ... just you wait.

By October the chassis was completed and the body from the firewall rearwards was structurally sound and roughly shaped. The weather broke and the time was nigh for Lisa to be wheeled into the garage and sheeted down permanently for the winter.

Fast forward to January 2008 and our daughter announces an October 2008 wedding in our barn. After the celebrations of the announcement she asks if the 5 year project wooden car (which only my wife had seen up until then) would be ready to take the bride to church?

My initial reaction of “fff,fer,fer,fer - no chance” began to soften and the more I



thought about it why not? It's here that phase 2 of the plan begins to be hatched. The church in question is no more than 3 miles away along very rural quiet back lanes. The date is October when historically the weather is generally fine and dry. I slept on the request and about a week later told her and her fiancé that this was the plan – done deal. All I had to do now was complete it.....



There are times when you get a bee in your bonnet and the problem grows and grows until it stops you totally. Well the seized brakes were just such a time. The drums are monstrous and with them seized on appeared impossible to remove. An engineer - who was stopping in our converted railway wagon homes – yes another project that I may tell you about one day. He said that he thought a slide hammer would do the job. I don't have a slide hammer or know anyone who has, but it did prompt me with an idea. My engineer grandfather who had died some 35 years before , left me many of his tools in his will. Convinced I would become an engineer and these would be useful. As it happened, I became an Accountant and many of these tools had lain undisturbed for the duration.

One such piece of equipment was a hub puller, not a Halfords type, a socking great hub puller that removed flywheels from gas engines with ease.... I retrieved it and lo if I left the wheels on the legs would engage perfectly with the slots in the wheels. Not as designed I know but it worked. Within the hour the drums had been removed from the axles and cleaned. Again these are small points to the reader but to me this was Christmas and 2 birthdays combined. I kicked myself for not having started sooner. In fact again all through my life whenever there has been a problem I have found that to confront it head on is always the best solution for it rarely turns out as bad as you imagined.

My celebrations were short lived however when I stripped the brakes down to find all four slave cylinders in a poor state. After numerous telephone calls a mist of despondency descended yet again. Mercedes EVEN WITH THE CHASSIS PLATE AND LOG BOOK IN FRONT OF ME THEY COULD NOT IDENTIFY THE VEHICLE, until they did, I had no chance of sourcing the replacements. Several very helpful motor factors later and I was told that the only solution was a company in the Black Country who could import them from Switzerland, at £58 each and £75 carriage, plus VAT – and by the way it would take 6 weeks.....

One of the principles I had set myself in this build was that as I was “time Rich” I would not just throw money at this scheme, however hair-brained, but make and recycle as much as possible. Brakes though are a different matter and the thought of brake failure whilst driving my precious cargo to the church and ploughing through the collected throng, briefly entered and then left my mind....

Still when all else fails its best to resort to tried and tested methods, so walk away and have a cup of tea. In a previous life my expertise in the financial world and on the computer brought me wealth and an early retirement, time to see if those skills could be refocused. EBAY is the simplest and most useful website known to man. Well certainly to “Hispano man” as my wife had christened me. There seems to be a trait in my life that I always find the item that I was looking for yesterday, never the

one I'm currently looking for. And so it was, I typed in Brake Hose Mercedes (of which I needed 4) and there in the listing were " Wheel Cylinders Mercedes 508, 608 Drum, 1974 -1985". I had to blink twice, upon entering the site it transpired that the seller had..... 75 to get rid of and there was a discount for more than one& by the way he also had the brake hoses.

Its at times like these you do believe there is another force which gently pushes you along. As my granddad used to say "God helps them who helps themselves"..... but he always tempered this with "but god help them who's caught helping themselves". This was not the first my granddad appeared in my thoughts, he was an engineer, a boat builder and if I didn't know any better I could be forgiven in thinking he was in some way watching over and guiding me along.



Fixing the brakes was a simple matter, in fact by the end of the week you could say that I was an expert on Mercedes 508 brakes. In view of the ethereal presence of granddad, "Lisa" had been re christened Henry (In his honour) and now with Henry movable he saw daylight again as I wheeled him out into the sunshine. I know I've mentioned this before but the engineering on this vehicle I appreciated more and more. It had stood all winter in freezing conditions in my barn on a carpet and in that time not one drop of oil diesel or fluid had marked the carpet.

The bearings, brakes and in particular steering, were a work of art in engineering terms. I was more than impressed and convinced that this was a chassis worth saving. Along with the spiritual help I felt I was receiving I truly felt that "Henry" actually wanted to be

saved and was helping wherever possible. I know this might sound a little daft but those readers who have an empathy with mechanical bits and bots grow to actually love them. They talk to them, name them, eat breath and sleep with them so it's not surprising that you grow to love them. Those of you reading this who merely pay for everything to be done and send it away to a garage never experience anything like the bond of those who don't and consequently think "us" quite mad.

I believe in life that the big man who sits above us all sends us just enough in the way of problems that we can just about cope with. The next 2 hurdles certainly felt like I was being pushed to the limit of my resourcefulness and ingenuity. Because of the major repositioning and modification of Henry it would be impossible to utilise the pedals. Despite numerous cups of tea, try as I might, I could not re-use the pedals.

EBAY here we come. Several were available – all expensive – and all meant for racing cars. I filtered my choice down to a site selling WILWOOD, primarily because WILWOODS technical site is excellent. It gives dimensions, solutions, spares numbers and dealers, in fact it's what many English sites should take notice of. Now this purchase was considered for a long time as it was going to be the single largest purchase of the build to date. The great thing about EBAY is its instantaneous, you buy it now, the money electronically changes hands and you just wait for the postman. That's the theory.

When I bought these pedals the guy selling them had no bad feedback and appeared genuine. 2 weeks later and many un-acknowledged emails later – nothing. He might be on holiday, he might be busy I thought, but both these excuses were dashed when an email arrived from EBAY. It stated

quite clearly this seller had been struck off and that I was invited to start procedures to reclaim my money. "Please note that you are not necessarily guaranteed a refund and the process can take up to 6 weeks".

In desperation I looked at his site again and noted that even that very morning a buyer had left negative feedback stating "HES A CROOK AND NEEDS SHOOTING – DONT DEAL WITH". His purchase was a set of pedals the same as mine. The phrase BUGGER, BUGGER, BUGGER doesn't come close.

It's not a nice feeling to be duped and I was feeling a little low as I walked from the computer room to Henry. Not only had I lost some serious cash but I had spent 2 weeks waiting for non-existent goods to arrive.

Our postman Mark, has been one of the main supporters of the project. He's watched the progress over the last year and has been both helpful and enthusiastic in his comments. We chat daily and he was aware of my anxiety on the pedals. Just at that moment his van pulls up the drive. "Why the longface Steve?" he asks. I tell him my plight and that I am a mug. Go and have a look in the Renault he says, there on the front seat is a package, inside were the pedals I had been waiting for. Mark and I have an agreement that when I'm not in he leaves any mail in the Espace and yesterday I was away.

Despondency turned to relief, upon further enquiry It transpired that my pedals were the last to leave the stricken factory – divine intervention yet again? who knows.

With the pedals fitted and new copper brake tubing all round – ditto for the clutch mechanism – i'm just about ready to try the pedals. All seems well but I'll not know properly until the engine is running and the car is moving. Henry is pushed to a gentle slope and allowed to roll, everything works as it should. When you achieve a milestone in anything, it's like getting a second wind in a marathon and this was certainly my second wind.



I now had a rolling chassis that stopped – it didn't go just yet – but when it did it I had the confidence it would stop. Next the throttle linkage, unfortunately because of the engine re-site the throttle mechanism worked back to front and would therefore need a little thought. This coupled with the fact that my pedals were "racing" pedals, their movement was designed to be minimum, so I needed something that would augment this movement. My inspiration came when browsing a hardware merchant, something I did quite frequently when I had a problem such as this. Something caught my eye and set my mind in motion. Eureka! – a bath plug, the type that stops the water from draining the bath. The modern ones have a rubber seal set in a groove around the perimeter. If I

mounted the plug on its side and attach it to the throttle spindle, it would be a simple job to run the throttle cable around the "plug". Not only would it give me linear travel but I could work it clockwise or anti clockwise, in other words kill 2 birds with one plug – if you get my drift.

Back home I offered the solution to Henry but it became clear the diameter was insufficient. Ie when you press the throttle pedal to the floor, you would only get half that movement at the engine. Time for tea I think.

I have learnt never to throw anything away. Even the most damaged, rusted, broken item may yield a pattern a thought or a solution and yet again this proved to be the correct process. Tucked away on the back of one of the shelves in my garage, was an old piston from a JAP engine I rebuilt years ago. Around the piston were 3 piston rings sitting in 3 grooves..... One hacksaw cut later and it resembled my earlier inspiration – a bath plug! 2 bolts and some careful drilling and my Jap piston was ready to be tested as a custom throttle slide. It was smiles all round as it proved the most inspired of solutions.

The timing of this success was perfect, for a family who regularly stops in our holiday homes (www.thewagons.co.uk) and had been enthralled at the progress, were due to leave this Saturday. It's currently Friday evening, the fuel tank had been sited and piped up, fresh diesel was poured in and the moment of truth was nearly upon us. I checked and re checked fluid levels and confirmed the clutch operation. Everything was correct, the batteries were connected and I wired up the separate starter button so I could make the whole a single handed operation from the cockpit. I pressed the button and apart from sparks and a burning smell nothing. Not even the starter whizzing round, not indeed the solenoid engagement. I jumped out and reverted back to first principles. It quickly became apparent that for some strange reason the engine had seized.

Even to this day I cannot fathom why, it had stood out in the cold for 10 years and never seized. I get it running in July and then put away in a warm garage, sheeted down for the winter and it seizes. Quite bizarre! Still the fix is easy, one big spanner on the pulley nut, and bingo. I climb back in the cockpit and press the starter very carefully. The big 3.9 litre engine turns over and bursts into life, just as it left the factory more than 27 years ago. It settles into a thumping – and very loud – rhythm as at this point only the manifold is connected – no silencer! Tentatively I depress the clutch, engage gear and slowly release the pedal. Voila! Henry moves. He entered the garage Lisa, has had a successful sex change and exits as macho Henry under his own steam.



The smile on my face was matched in the morning when I showed our guests the same 20 foot, roll out and reverse back in the garage, movement. Remember I still have to address the steering! They were as thrilled as I was but now the pressure was on as its only 10 weeks to the wedding and we are still in our base wooden coat and only complete up to the firewall.

Despite the lack of time I never once felt under pressure believing that so long as I put the hours in the job would be completed. I constructed the engine cowl and bonnet and Henry now began to take shape. The radiator, or more to the point, the dummy radiator ie the bit that's seen from the outside of the car is the next major construction. Because its only cosmetic (the real Mercedes radiator which cools the engine is sited under the bonnet. Anyway because it does not need to hold water I decided to have this built by a professional locally and took the "buck" I had constructed to get a quote.

This was yet another defining moment as my idea of cost was not matched by the fabricator. "Well mate, the materials (Stainless steel) will be £350, labour, welding etc will add another £450 and the polishing will take at least 2 days which is another £350, and don't forget Gordons bits" Gordons bits? I enquired fearing it was local mafia protection money. "Yeah, Gordons bit, VAT, Gordon needs paying as well". My reply rhymed with "cough" I made my farewells and left.

Back in the garage it became clear that as the radiator had no need to function I would have to resort to plan B. The only problem was that I hadn't the faintest idea what plan B was yet. Time for tea, me thinks.

Up here in the frozen "Norf" we have a delightful locally produced programme on ITV called "The Dales Diary". The basic format is the presenter – Luke Casey – visits places, businesses, people of note in the Dales. I retire to the TV and Tea and settle down to watch the next episode, even though my mind is filled with the problem radiator. One particular business Mr Casey visits is a chap who has dropped out and is making a frugal living making garden objects, wind chimes, statues, objects of art for the garden etc. Nothing novel here you may think but the material he used was – copper – everything in copper. My ears pricked as most of the decorative bits on Henry should be in copper.

Just as he's about to divulge his secrets the bairn of ITV occurs – adverts. After the break Mr Casey asks him about the price as he points out that the price of copper has become prohibitive these days. Not if you know where to look, he replies – "where for gods sake, where?" It transpires he uses old immersion heaters, cuts the top and bottom off splits the remaining barrel and voila a sheet of copper emerges that's about 1 by 1.5 meters.



I raced off and disappeared into the loft. It was about 2 hours later that my long suffering wife Julie came into the garage to say she couldn't understand why there was no hot water any ideas? No I replied but what do you think of my new copper radiator? Only kidding! My brother is a heating engineer and has a garage full of tanks, he very kindly donated 3 and we were in business again.

On reflection most of the bulk of construction was fairly straightforward and not very expensive. I was on time, on budget and in my mind had already completed 3 laps of the Targa Florio.

However It was to prove a false dawn as it was the small items I never even considered, that were to cost the money and take time to resource. For example the radiator grill I could not find anything suitable anywhere. My local store – Barnitts – in York was not only a gold mine for sourcing parts but also ideas. It was on one such trip seeking a 5 foot piano hinge to use as the bonnet hinge, that I accidentally came across a rack of sheet metal grill inserts. They were just what I wanted and furthermore any of the designs would do. I settled on one with simple holes punched into it but at £35 a half square meter I had better be careful when cutting.

That weekend, another set of holidaymakers who wanted the guided tour, was taking interest in my plight with the cost of the grill. I explained I had bought the front grill but the side grills would need more than twice as much again was giving me a headache. The man nodded sagely, congratulated me on progress to date, then bade me farewell and set sail back from whence they came to the Isle of Sheppey.

The following week a UPS delivery van appeared in the drive and it was with a puzzled brow that I greeted the driver. Parcel for Crawford, "I am he" I replied but I was not expecting anything. The parcel, a large and heavy package, was signed for and he disappeared down the drive. Carrying the package to the garage I had not a clue what it contained, however not for the first time was I pleasantly surprised when inside I found 10 sheets of mesh grill, a book about the first flying in England (my other passion) and a letter from the chap on the Isle of Sheppey saying he'd found these and hoped they would come in useful.....



Its moments like these that restore your confidence that these small islands still contain some really nice genuine and generous people.

I now turned to the last remaining major engineering problem – the steering. Steering has a lot of black art connected to it and get it wrong and it could be goodnight midnight. There are loads of stories on the web – most written with tongue in cheek – about kit car

boys who've fitted steering boxes wrong and upon leaving the garage turning left the car went right.... Or my favourite, "I remember approaching Copse corner, smugly congratulating myself on my welding, when I heard a loud crack just before I hit the catch fencing!"

My approach all along was to maximise the engineering on this car not re-invent it. For all you techies out there the original box was mounted well forward on the side of the chassis. It is connected to the wheels via a steering arm. The simplest solution was to move the box rearwards around the arc of the steering arm. I positioned it temporarily whilst I made sure when you turned the wheel left the wheels did indeed turn in that direction. As both the theory and practise seemed to work I bolted it permanently knowing that the Ackermann linkage was maintained and I did not need to replace the steering arm.

All that was now required was to locate the steering wheel and connect it to the steering box, a 5 minute job, or so I thought. My intention was to mount the steering wheel as near the vertical as possible as per the original. However this conflicted with the 508 as originally the steering wheel was mounted flat. As Houston once famously said "we have a problem". EBAY to the rescue again and a couple of days later a 508 shaft and coupling was winging its way northwards. The connection was a simple matter and now we had steering as well.

The original Hispano once completed, was veneered and this was a job I had put off for a long time. EBAY had provided me with a supplier of mahogany veneer. Although he was a little surprised when his normal sale, around 5 metres, was usurped by this strange Northern chap who made a volume

request for..... well 180 metres! Not for the first time did my explanation for its purpose sound feeble and far fetched.

Anyway he duly obliged and furthermore supplied it in one length! During this and other bizarre projects I am amazed by the ability to get objects, items and services that you would have no chance in the local Yellow Pages.



Veneering was going to be a 2 man job, the positioning alone was impossible for just one person. So Julie was garnered in the day set aside for this mammoth task. Fortunately the big man upstairs sent us a calm dry and sunny day for this task. This allowed us to wheel Henry out into the garden allowing greater access. The glue had been carefully selected and tested, for adhesion, positioning

and durability. I had asked many professionals their opinion which had left me even more confused as each had a different answer. One chap insisted on contact adhesive, which had I selected would have been not only disastrous but prohibitively costly. I laid out everything that I thought we would need, glue, pasting table, protective gloves, clean damp cloths, scissors and plenty of sharp Stanley blades.

The sun was warming Henry, the glue and the 2 protagonists nicely and by mid morning we were ready! The first piece was glued down without drama and very quickly within 5 minutes of starting. There were no bubbles, it was accurately aligned and looked superb. Not for the first time did I stand back in admiration and mentally complete yet another lap of the Targa....

The biggest dilemma's were the measurements and the seemingly simple task of deciding do you start from the top and work down or the bottom and work up. Indeed, do you lay them in one piece from radiator to the back or treat the car as bonnet, cockpit and rear? Oh such fun. By the end of the day half the car was completed and it looked stunning. We completed the car the following day, with not a problem or a wrinkle in sight, even I was impressed. The biggest problem was removing the glue from my fingers, clothes and the pasting table.



Within 48 hours the car had been transformed, it now really looked like the original and it sank in that perhaps, just perhaps we were going to make it after all.

I let the glue dry over the weekend and then set about rubbing it down in preparation for varnishing. The big man upstairs sent us very rainy weather but recalling what Dad used to say “everything happens for a reason” this turned out to be a blessing. For varnishing, proper oil based varnishing, takes ages to dry and during that process dust is your enemy. The rain kept all the dust outside well damped down and therefore minimised damage to the drying process.



The first coat went on Monday night, by completion I had used a full gallon of genuine, old fashioned, full fat, varnish. It had been in my possession for about 20 years and this was its moment. The effect was fantastic, a deep sheen began to emerge as each coat garnered a greater lustre and hence more beauty. Between coats it was left for at least 24 hours and rubbed down both carefully and gently. Date to the Wedding – 4 weeks. Because of the time scale I had decided that the interior – for the Wedding only - was to be sacrificed. In other words it could be completed at a later date.

One of the things you learn with varnish is patience, rush it and it takes 3 times to sort out the mess. So with this in mind between coats I turned my attention to other parts of the car and there was plenty to choose from.

The lights on a 1920's are considered by many, as its “eyes” and when positioned feel the car comes alive with a proper face. I was keen to see Henry's face and had been working on the lights – on and off – for some time. Whilst at the vintage meeting at Mallory in 2007, I had scoured the autojumble stalls and noticed a pair of genuine Marchal headlamps. Although not a matched pair they were the same size and with a little “tlc” they would do nicely. I approached the seller and began a dialogue.

I recall at some stage asking the price but it all goes hazy after that. All I do remember, is being frozen to the spot upon hearing his reply. Even after years of high powered board meetings as a financial analyst where I was well trained in keeping my inner thoughts from appearing on my face, however this moment tested all those skills.

I can't tell you what he, or indeed I, said as the price bounced around my brain. In rare situations like these, I find a big smile, lots of nodding and a diplomatic exit work rather well....The nearest ambulance would have had the required oxygen to revive my flagging consciousness, although at 200 yards I felt I would surely faint long before reaching it.....

Fortunately a passing Frasier Nash complete with barking engine, rattling chain and the smell of Castrol R had the much the same effect and I quickly regained my senses.

With the real lights now totally out of the question the seed was planted that some serious ingenuity would be required. Several months later and an unscheduled visit to Matalan saw me killing time whilst awaiting the return of our every day car from service. Quite by accident – and not for the first time - I found myself in the kitchenware section where a sale was in progress. On the bargain basement section were 2 stainless steel mixing bowls 11 inches in diameter – the price – reduced to £3 each. Both were purchased , not because they would definitely make the lights but I ‘ve always found its better to have something tangible upon which to base, modify or construct your ideas around and at £6 even I recognised a bargain.

When offered up and clamped temporarily in place the Hispano, Mercedes, Special, Henry came alive. Now all I had to do was develop an idea into a tangible solution. On a serious note, you do wonder how even a reproduction set of lights can cost so much when the basic headlamp shells can only be pennies surely someone somewhere is making a killing.

Over the next few months I had concluded that a set of Landrover spot lamps mounted inside my mixing bowls would make a fair job of Henry’s “eyes” but then another twist of fate intervened.

Christmas and New Year have passed and we are at Morrisons for our weekly shop. Most husbands endure this exercise under sufferance but when I have a project such as this on the go I find any shopping can be an Alladin’s cave of ideas. This trip was to prove no exception, Mr Morrison was busy discounting anything to do with the festive season, lights, decorations, plates, kitchenware etc. Again some unseen guiding hand appeared to direct me down a particular isle. I knew the moment I saw them that here was mark II headlamps, better still there were on offer – buy one get one free - £3.99..... The great thing about Morrisons Christmas cake tins is that they come with a stainless steel lid complete with clear Perspex insert, just made for 1924 Hispano racing car copies, thank you Mr Morrison.



I had a set of “E” marked spot lamps that would fit perfectly inside, they were fully adjustable and now care of my Christmas cake tins came with covers as well. A quick trip to the local pet store saw a sheet of the finest rabbit hutch mesh cut and inserted between lid and lamps and voila! A genuine copy, well a damn good attempt anyway, of a set of Marchal headlights. A copy that was except for the price, at £3.99 to the untrained eye it would fool all but the purest.

Next I turned my attention to the mounting stays for the wings and headlights. We have another passion – even more expensive than vintage cars – race horses. These are kept next door at the farm whilst on summer grazing and are visited daily. Now farms are great places for my ingenious and Magpie like qualities. During the summer, I had noticed a “scrap” pile mounting and watched with interest as bits of discarded tractors & combines began to strewn around. One such item that had caught my eye, were huge lengths of galvanised pipes ripped from their slumber and replaced with the ubiquitous plastic. Straight as a die, in unbroken lengths, galvanised and furthermore free!

This is perhaps a good time to introduce a friend who unquestioningly helped whenever I asked. Although christened Mick, he is affectionately known by me as “Effing Mick” because of his use of that adjective beginning with the letter “F”. Mick is employed to keep the farm running smoothly. However he supplies me with so much humorous material that I have dined out on Mick’s stories for so long that many who have never met him feel they know him like a brother. I once introduced my mother to him as Mick, she replied “I’m so pleased to meet you Effing Mick my son has told me so much about you.... Now “Effing Mick” is one of life’s great all rounder’s, there is little he can’t or indeed won’t try to do. Whether its fixing tractors, welding, bending, decorating or ploughing, Mick is your man.

When I told him of this little project he said little but you could tell from his attitude he thought me as mad as a box of frogs.... Mick not only “can do” but has access to all sorts of equipment which he knows how to use. So it was to him I turned when it came to bending metal. 2 gas bottles a burning torch and 20 minutes later, all the wing and headlamp stays were perfectly bent with no creases and little to disclose they had not been professionally made.

The next task turned out to be the most physically demanding of all. In order to mount the wings straight on to the stays the tubing needed flattening, all I had was a big hammer and an anvil upon which to work. Several hours later all the stays were flattened and I had muscles like Popeye. The location, bending and size was all a bit trial and error but G Clamps are very useful pieces of kit. Once the location and size was decided all I needed to do was to weld and bolt them in place.

After painting and bolting the stays and light supports in place I attached the “Cake tins” and stood back. The overall effect was amazing Henry had eyes and looked more and more like the 1920’s racer he was supposed to be. Unfortunately the one thing I was unhappy about was the back of the “Cake Tins”, because they were flat, from the front they were just about perfect, but from the rear they looked clumsy and most definitely home made. I was less than pleased.

Sometimes it seems that you take 2 steps forward and one back – this was just one such occasion.



During the week my daughter had rung to say the wedding dress was ready for the final fitting in York and could she meet us there on Tuesday. Well I’m not much use with wedding dresses – other than paying for them – so I took this visit to York to wander into my favourite hardware store – Barnitts. The “flat” back of the lights was on my mind as I drifted around the store. By chance I found myself in the cookware section. The sales staff raised a few eyebrows as this chap kept picking up mixing bowls measuring them and returning them to the shelf. At the back there was one suitable bowl but upon enquiry all the stock they had was on display and as there was only the one, I left disappointed. As I walked along one of the prettier streets in York I was aware of a row of pots glinting in the sunshine from a shop window in front of me. I followed the reflections and found myself in what as you would call “The pound shop”.

There before my eyes were stacks of bowls in Stainless Steel, perfect in size and more importantly all £1 each. I refrained from asking the price in my excited state and purchased 3 – just to be on the safe side. Later that day I was amazed at how easy to fit and elegant the resultant modified light back looked. I stood back and smiled, the whole exercise had cost - £6.99 (Cake tins £3.99 + 3 bowls at £1 each) and I had a spare mixing bowl left over! The internals – Landrover spot lights - had been an unused present when I was going through my “Landy” stage so had in effect cost nothing.



The last major construction was a set of mudguards and now these would have to be addressed. Metal was out of the question due to time and cost. Fiberglass - not my favourite medium – was also ruled out, which frankly left little in the way of choice. My Dad has always said “stick to what you know, play to your strengths”. And so it was, that having spent many years designing and bulding my

things from wood that I turned to my “strength” – timber. Wood has some great properties and some weaknesses the trick is to maximise your strengths whilst minimising your weaknesses.

Plywood had enormous strength, is cheap, plentiful and can be cut easily. However it can only be bent in one direction at a time ie compound curves are out. With a little thought I built a test jig out of 2 identical pieces of plywood bent to shape then glued to the jig and screwed down for good measure.

Many problems occur because of impatience, so I left the “wing” to dry out for about a week. I then cut around 20 pieces of 1 inch thick pine and carefully glued them to the surface of the “sandwich” of ply. This gave me a wing around 2 feet long, 7 inches wide and about an inch and a half thick. With a jig saw the profile was easily cut to shape and with a belt sander I shaped the wing which started to look like a wing remarkably quickly. In all I had spent about an hour the shaping and the whole exercise looked extremely acceptable. It looked good, was relatively quick and easy to make, which left only one question to answer, would it be strong enough.

I began with the bend test, which it passed. So then “drop” test followed next which it also passed. How about that most technical of all tests “the wack it good and proper test?” Gingerly I began with a tap and built up to quite wack, certainly in everyday use it was very sturdy. In fact the tests I put it to would be rather more than I dare on my everyday car. Satisfied that this method of construction was suitable I proceeded with both front and rear wing jigs.

In fact just how strong the wing proved to be came one day when I was backing “Henry” out on to the drive. Unable to see clearly I noticed all too late that I had run over something, which turned out to be the test wing. Even after this rough treatment it still refused to break crack or twist. Try that with your aluminium or steel cycle wing and have a look at it afterwards.....

Originally I just varnished the wing (departing from the original) but something wasn't right and I ultimately changed this to a dark brown paint finish as per the original. With the wings lights and veneer in place I now had what I thought was a beautiful car and although not the original, to me Henry looked ready to tackle the Targa Floria, just like its inspiration had in 1924.



As I mentioned earlier the finishing touches not only make the car but also cost the most and so it proved. The windscreen had been decided upon months ago but as yet I hadn't found a suitable one on the web. Ebay came to the rescue with a Brooklands screen - all be it in red - of all colours. Perhaps because of the red colour, I managed to acquire it brand new for £36. Whilst there I found a

great period brass horn complete with intact and un-perished bulb. When I enquired if it worked okay, the vendor blew it down the phone – it worked alright and would be perfect.

Perhaps the find of the build was saved until last. One Saturday morning there appeared a mascot – reputedly from a pre war Hispano – it was on a buy it now and had been listed for just 2 hours. Although it would add the finishing touch, it was expensive. Secondly the chap who had advertised it had spelt Suiza “Sweeza” which meant anyone searching using the phrase “Hispano Suiza” would fail to find it. This allowed me a little longer to think about it but not long...

Mark, the postman, arrived and I relayed the story and my dilemma. “Get it bought” was his only answer, “you’ve come all this way and although expensive, this is the icing on the cake. You’ll will never get another chance”. I returned to the computer with the simple vow that if it was still



available I would buy it. One week later Mark returned waving a special box that needed signing for. It was a Saturday and our next guests were admiring progress before leaving. Excitedly, it was unwrapped, admired. We then had, what can only be described as the closest thing to a topping off ceremony by placing the “Flying Stork” atop the radiator filler. It looked fantastic and endowed Henry – if he needed any – with his final piece of credibility.

Henry's first task and inspiration, was Laura's wedding. As such we tried to build him in a way that meant something to all those involved. All too frequently you meet people who know the cost of everything and the value of nothing. We had tried to build something and instil into our children that being unique, original and surrounding yourselves with possessions that not only function but have meaning is every bit as

important as just their intrinsic value. It was this ethos that had saved "Lisa" from the crusher, a camper in which we had travelled on many great family holidays, had never let us down and carried wonderful memories. We had used wood from our windows, copper from my brothers house and latterly a beam of wood that had come from Laura and her fiancés 200 year old cottage after it's rebuild. Even the mascot was reputedly from a pre war Hispano but there was one last touch that we had to put in place.

Since an early age my daughter had not only fallen in love with horse but had grown up following her dream of riding them in races professionally. Now with that successful part of her life behind her she had continued working for a top trainer as a manager in one of his yards. 2008 was not only her big year but it was to be a big year for one of her charges, a racehorse called Madam Trop Vite (Madam very quick in French). Madam Trop Vite had rapidly progressed through the racing ranks and was entered in a "Listed" (high grade) race a Newbury. Although the "rag" (least backed or fancied) of the field, she duly obliged and at 20-1 her winnings paid for Laura's wedding shoes. It was with great excitement that we watched live on TV her next performance at Doncaster in September, where she made her next appearance. This time in a group 2 (even better grade) called the Flying Childers, she was a little more fancied – but not much – as the "southerners" had descended upon the Yorkshire track with their "big guns". Horses don't know what their odds are and consequently when Madam Trop Vite muscled her way not only to the front but stuck her head out on the line, it mattered not, she had obliged yet again.

Now you may be wondering why that little story has crept into an article on a Hispano replica? Well simple really, we phone Kevin (the trainer) and his lovely wife Jill and requested the front shoes when she was re-shod. These would make, when polished up and mounted, the perfect steps. We



received the shoes the blacksmith made the support step and it now stands in perpetuity, a perfect end to a nice little story.

2 weeks before the wedding, i'm on time, on budget and even thinking about making the last piece in the puzzle – a wooden steering wheel. They say that pride comes before a fall and on reflection that Monday 12 days before the wedding will be dubbed black Monday. I had just installed the Mercedes original radiator all painted and smart looking. The body was shining through 6 coats of clear varnish, the wings and lights looked resplendent and Henry was ready for her final

fluids in preparation for a full test drive. I thought something was not quite right when after a couple of gallons of water in the radiator I could not see the levels coming up. I looked a little closer and noticed that the radiator had more holes than radiator. My first thought was this had been caused by frost damage and if the radiator had frozen what had it done to the engine?

After removing the radiator and examining it I deduced that as all the holes were around the base that the holes were a result of corrosion not frost. It was still with trepidation that I took the radiator into the repairers although I needn't have worried as within 24 hours the radiator was done and ready for collection. Next door to Kingston Radiators is a sheet metal fabricators, worth a call in I

thought with the steering wheel in mind. The chap called Tony was helpful, saw no problems and reckoned he could do it in 2 days. Fantastic, I returned home and quickly drafted the requirements along with a full scale plan. Within a week, the steering wheel blank was also ready for collection beautifully cut from quarter inch aluminium, where there other company, a laser specialist had had its employees fighting for the job as a respite against sheets of boring repetitive industrial bread and butter.

All along I had felt that my hand was being guided and provided I put the effort in, I was rewarded with acceptable results. For example, where do you think you could get not 1 but 2 sheets of real mahogany 16 inches square? No I didn't either. As the garage was looking like a disorganised tip the time had come for a tidy up. About 9 pm I decided to appropriate some of the off cuts of wood to the log burner pile. As I cleared away months of accumulated detritus, there in the corner was one of the required pieces. I recognised it straight away as a piece left to me by my grandfather. It had followed me for more than 30 years and this was its moment. I carefully cut out the wheel and glued it to the steering wheel frame. Unbelievably the following day another piece turned up for underneath a cupboard which had not been visited for years. This was more than just fortunate it was bordering on a miracle. I quickly epoxy the wheel together and looked forward to tomorrow when I could set about shaping it.



Remember earlier when I said there were times when you take 2 steps forward and then one back? Well Saturday brought a reverse step. One tube of glue I had used proved faulty and whilst I was watching Lewis Hamilton trying to take pole position the glue gave up its "stick". Before my eyes one side of the carefully glued steering wheel just peeled away. Calmly I re-located to the garage and as it was such a beautiful day, moved my bench to outside. I carefully cleaned and reapplied a new tube of "Rapid Epoxy". Working without panic and slowly I carefully positioned the wood and began to clamp it down. As I applied pressure to the numerous G-Clamps I noticed a problem, the pressure had caused the wood to

slip – only slightly – but enough for me to notice. Worse, the "Rapid" in rapid, meant just that – in fact perhaps "Effing Rapid" would have been more accurate. It was solid, immovable, fixed forever and worse it was in the wrong place.

To say I lost it would perhaps be totally accurate. G-Clamps went horizontally in all directions, the air was blue – no make that purple. I was experiencing what the stock market has recently called meltdown. It wasn't pretty and it wasn't clever. Just at that moment – and out of my line of sight – our customers for their holiday turned up. Although I don't remember exactly what I was saying I can confirm there were a lot of phrases that rhymed with "clucking bell" & "right bar steward". Are you having some difficulties? came the softly spoken question. After profuse apologies and lots of bowing and scraping, I explained the problem and was relieved that they saw the funny side.

With the new radiator installed it was with some trepidation I started the engine. 10 minutes later and all fears were dispelled, thoroughly warmed up the thermostat opened for the first time in 10 years. It was ticking over like a sewing machine – not for the first time did I secretly admire Teutonic engineering. Overjoyed and unable to curb my excitement I checked everything and climbed aboard for a tentative test run. Unbelievably not one thing needed adjustment the temperature never moved; there wasn't a squeak, a rattle or a thump. What's more, because it had been considerably lightened, its acceleration was "brisk" and with such torque I only needed 3rd 4th and top. In fact on the hill outside our house, it's the only vehicle we have ever driven that will not only pull in top but seriously accelerate up the hill.

The day before the wedding just happened to be my birthday which was understandably overwhelmed by this more important occasion. However that night my son, daughter in law and new granddaughter arrived to see me. In a small box presented by my son was a metal badge carved



in my initials SJC. It was to be the "builders" badge and adorn the radiator. Gold plated and carefully crafted we attached it to the radiator grill and it looked perfect. We now had a car that everyone had contributed to and was ready to perform its most important task to date.

At moments like these the Oxford English dictionary seems quite inadequate to describe my pride and excitement at having created such a beast. I accept the purest may sneer at its underpinnings, scoff at its embellishments but I care not one jot. It's mine, I've saved it, rebuilt it and I'm proud of it and furthermore I think Andre Dubbonnet may just be looking down



and nodding in approval. And the wedding? Well 30 minutes before we were to leave Henry disgraced himself – would he start – would he buggery. Perhaps this was my final test, calmly I checked, bled and tightened the fuel system and hey presto we were in business. I can't say I was confident so I left it running until Laura climbed aboard on her most important journey.

As a final touch, Laura had bought me a leather flying helmet – just to add to the authenticity I'll wager – and it captured the period perfectly. But perhaps the crowning moment came during the day when my son was overheard telling all those prepared to listen – “have you seen Dad's car, it's awesome” Could this be the ultimate accolade?



The future? Well I have learned enough to know that making long term plans is not always a good idea..... however my short term objective is Cadwell 2009 and then to drive to either Le Mans or Spa in 2010. But my secret desire is to turn up at my local Morrisons for our weekly shop and just watch the faces of those in the car park as we load a weeks shopping in the rear seat.

Stop press..... we made Cadwell! Despite the weather and the VSCC bringing forward the day to a Saturday in June during British GP weekend???? However we had to trailer “Henry” behind the trusty Quattro. The reception was great, from marshalls, the public and fans however there's always one. He happened to be the first on the scene and told me that “he knew what it was supposed to be and that it looked like it..... from a distance”. What a nice chap I thought as he proceeded to tell me that there was only one etc etc etc. I let him finish and then proceeded to correct him that in fact there are 2, another was built in the eighties. I smiled as I turned my back on him imagining that he's probably a purist who owns a 1930's MG with a completely new body, replaced engine, retrimmed interior. Along with its new tyres, oils, modern brake linings and re-engineered diff and tells his friends that it a genuine vehicle. Genuine that is, like my Great granddads axe, which has had 3 new heads and 5 shafts, but it gives him pleasure – just like Henry gives me. sjcrowford@btinternet.com