

Restoration of a ROVER ESTATE



From 1965, when I was only two years old, there has always been a P6 in the Myers family. The first being a 2000SC in City Grey followed by a succession of 2 litre cars right up to a Monza Red 3500S which was purchased in 1986.

Occasionally when riding shotgun in my parents P6 I was fortunate enough to have a rare sighting of a P6 Estate. I never thought that I would actually get to own one but in 1988 I had my chance.

I purchased my Rover Estate, registration number SYF 432N in January 1988. It was Lunar Grey in colour with an Ebony Box Pleat Leather interior. The car belonged to a friend of mine in Exmouth, Charlie Simpson.

I went to Devon with my Dad and a friend to buy a 3500S for restoration. We drove down to Exmouth in my 3500S with a four-wheel car transporter trailer. On the trailer was a VW Beetle which we collected from North London for Charlie. Whilst there Charlie told me that he had been trying to sell his Rover Estate but had had no luck. he asked if I would take the car back to Kent to sell it for him. I jumped at the chance.

We returned to Kent in convey with me taking up the lead pulling the trailer loaded with a 3500S and my Dad following in the Estate. By the time we had got to Stonehenge, on the return journey, I had caught so many glimpses of the Estate in the mirror that I had talked myself into buying the car myself. No fool that Charlie Simpson! He saw me coming a mile off!



I spent the Spring of 1988 tidying the car for the coming show season. I took the car to a number of far-flung rallies that year including the Dutch rally in Valkenswaard and also Littlecote in Berkshire.

The car came off the road at the end of September 1988 for what was to be a more thorough restoration of the base and body, which I estimated, would take about a year. I

decided not to restore any of the running gear and mechanics on the basis that, "if they ain't broke, don't fix it".

I systematically stripped the car right down to a rolling base unit with all of the parts being removed, labelled and boxed. The only parts to remain on the car were those needed to keep it driveable to assist with the restoration.

The base unit was initially taken to Spanners of Strood for welding. However, I was so dissatisfied with progress that I took the car away. They also managed to damage the bonnet and landing panel by accidentally driving it into a wall.

The welding was finally completed by Graham Miles of C.W. Crash Repairs. He did a fantastic job, all the more remarkable as he is paralysed from the waist down.

Had the car have been a saloon I would have not hesitated in scrapping it. The base unit was in extremely poor condition, mainly in the rear wheel arches.

Whilst the car was away I set about purchasing all of the parts required to complete the restoration. I was very fortunate to track down a complete set of genuine Rover wings and sills at, of all places, a main Porsche dealer.

The rear wings had to be altered to allow them to fit properly. The nearside rear wing also had to have the petrol filler surround welded in to place.

With all of the welding completed the car was taken to Chestnut Street Coachworks of Sittingbourne for painting.

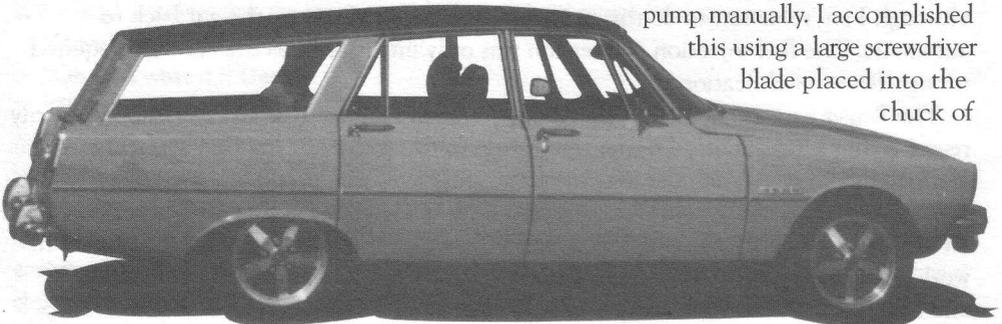
The task of preparing the car was easy due to the fact that I had, in addition to the wings, sourced a brand new bonnet and four "as new" doors. In fact the only original panels refitted to the car were the front valence together with the front decker panel and tailgate.

The re-spray took a couple of years to complete as it was undertaken during slack periods, the result, however was excellent. Unfortunately it wasn't without incident. While I was working on the electric fuel pump in the rear of the car, a stray spark ignited fuel vapour which had built up due to a leaking fuel tank. The resultant fireball landed me in hospital with burns to my face and hands. I was unable to smell the petrol as it had been masked by the smell of paint! I replaced the original tank with a one off aluminium tank made by a local racing firm.

Following the re-spray the car was returned to me in or about 1993. It was still in base unit form with the exception that the rear wings had been fitted.

I lost interest in the car for some time due to the death of my Mother and Father. It wasn't until early 1996 that my enthusiasm returned. By chance I was given a set of 15" Jensen Interceptor alloy wheels. They bolted straight on and made even the bare base unit look very special!

It was at this point I noticed the engine had lost all signs of any oil pressure. Before stripping the engine down I decided to remove the distributor in order to operate the oil pump manually. I accomplished this using a large screwdriver blade placed into the chuck of



an electric drill. With the ignition on, pressure was soon registering on the gauge. Since then oil pressure has been outstanding, never dropping below 30 even when hot at idle.

With my enthusiasm re-kindled by the wheels I launched head long into finishing the car. Within a matter of 3 or 4 weeks the car was complete except for the fact that I had to return the car to the spray shop for it's final buff up. On getting the car out of the garage I caught the nearside rear door and wing on a wall. Chestnut Street Coachworks repaired the damage free of charge.

The Estate was now ready for it's M.O.T. which after a gap of almost 8 years, it passed first time. I had a feeling it would pass. The examiner was in a very good mood. He had just fulfilled a life times ambition to fail a car on every item on the M.O.T. checklist. The car in question was a large Volvo Estate. What a heap.

The rebuild was hampered by the fact that the parts had been off the car so long that the labels I had written had faded.

I experience only one minor problem after returning the car to the road. The Borg-Warner type 35 gearbox developed an oil leak. I soon traced it to what I thought was the sump gasket. I replaced the gasket to no avail. The gearbox continued to leak, but curiously, only when the car was left to stand. A major investigation followed with the gearbox being removed from the car. It was then that I discovered that the kickdown cable had worked slightly loose. The job could have been tackled from the engine bay. If I had interrupted the signs correctly I would have saved myself the task of removing the gearbox.

1996 saw the car travelling to a number of local Rover and non-Rover rallies within the area. I also used it for work on the odd occasion during the summer.

The birth of my Daughter, Molly, in 1997, restricted the car's use in that year to just 200 miles. This included collecting her from hospital and going to church for her christening. I have just recently tried to teach Molly to say "Rover". She manages "Doggie" when she sees a picture of a Rover, which I guess, is quite close!

I am pleased to say that the Estate saw a great deal more use in 1998. In fact so much so that I almost used up all of my 3000 mile allowance bringing the total mileage to 84,000 since new. Also within the same year I fitted fuel injection to the car and then two weeks later took it to Jersey for our family holiday. In many ways the injection has improved upon what was already a very good car.

Jobs for the future include replacing the carpets, restoring the leather seats and the vinyl roof covering. I have also contemplated converting the car to a manual gearbox, although I am reluctant to do this as it would be hard to convert the car back to automatic. The fuel injection conversion was only undertaken as the car itself required no significant modification.

The Rover Estate may not be everybody's "cup of tea" but it's certainly mine. My only regret is that I didn't complete the restoration of the car whilst my Dad was still alive. He loved the car. I would like to think he would have been proud of my efforts.

I would like to finally add that Graham Miles of C.W. Crash Repairs has undertaken an extensive amount of base unit restoration work on P6's. As far as I am concerned his work is beyond reproach. He has undertaken work on Paul Smiths Pre-Production P6 and also the TCZ amongst many others. Grahams telephone number is 01795 422663.

