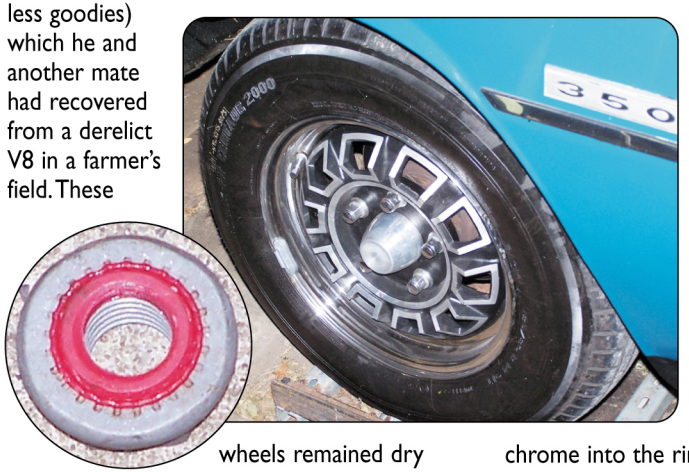
Those Dunlop Wheels

P6 ROVER OWNERS CLUB

For those who know nothing of these wheels, they were available in the 70's and were hideously expensive. They were standard or optional fitment on some Reliant Scimitars and standard on MGB V8 models. They were available for many cars of the period but remained quite rare presumably because of the cost. Construction is quite unusual in having an aluminium centre which is rivetted to a chrome plated steel rim, top marks to the engineer or accountant at Dunlop who thought this was a good idea!

I'm lucky to have a circle of mates who attend the local P6 meet and also some who used to be regular attendees. One was a nice chap called Paul Gretton who for a while was Editor of the Club magazine. Paul's interest in the P6 came to an abrupt end some years ago when family life suddenly changed (for the better) for him.

After Paul's P6 was sold he gave me a set of Dunlop composite alloys (amongst other priceless goodies) which he and another mate had recovered from a derelict V8 in a farmer's field. These



wheels remained dry stored under a lathering of old sump oil in my shed for years.

A couple of years ago I decided the time was right to waste some money to see how they could be restored. A quick surf of the net revealed a couple of companies who could do the work for a little over 400 notes per wheel. OUCH! Due respect to these folks, after going it alone with my wheels this figure seems to be reasonable for the work involved, long may your companies last.

I decided to go it alone and the first job was to split the aluminium centre from the chrome rim. I achieved this with an angle grinder to remove the hefty rivets and a rubber mallet to bash the centre from the chrome rim. First mistake was made here. The centres and rims are not interchangeable, i.e. make sure you mark the rim and centre to identify them later.

I took the centres to a local alloy refurbishing place. He was happy to dip and bead blast them for me but wanted nothing to do with the painting of them! I managed to source some black aluminium primer and black top coat courtesy of the net and did them myself. The paint was rubbed off with wet and dry emery paper to reveal the highlights where necessary and the results speak for themselves.

Next the rims were taken to the platers. Well to several platers in fact. The consensus was that they needed a special anode to get the chrome into the rim and that they couldn't do it. OUCH AGAIN!

A chance call to a platers in Nottingham and a chat with their car expert resulted in them being taken there to be fitted in when time allowed, with the understanding that the chrome might be a bit thin in awkward places. A couple of months later I was collecting them and was well impressed with the result. The bits you can see were absolutely spot on, the bits at the back were well rust scarred; to smooth the pits out completely would have seriously weakened the rim. Not to worry, I was over the moon with the price, finish and service. Chrome plating and metal polishing is not cheap.

The next thing was finding out that the centres were individually matched to the rims. OUCH AGAIN!

Now imagine 4 tight fitting centres and 4 freshly plated rims. That's a combination of 16 possibilities. A week of spare time later, I had the centres matched to the rims and the rivet holes lined up. Next thing was the rivets. This again is a specialist operation which would have cost a significant amount of cash. After confirming the rivets were just plain mild steel (thanks Tony Ryalls from the advice team), I opted for high tensile stainless steel nuts bolts and washers to replace them.

Now comes the real pain in the backside, how to seal these against air leaks. I tried using some steam pipe sealer (thanks to the fitters from work). This is a putty like substance which I gleefully smeared around the nuts and washers and any other items in the vicinity. Put the tyres on, pumped them up and 3 days later took the tyres off because they had gone flat. OUCH AGAIN! Once again the internet turned up the perfect solution in the form of a self sealing nut. These are what look like a standard nut but they have a groove machined on the mating face filled with a flexible tough sealant. They were designed for a specific US military application and were only available in the States. A rare bit of good luck revealed a UK supplier who sold them in the quantities I required. These, together with the steam pipe sealant has resulted in air tight usable wheels which are probably stronger than when they were made.

Earlier I made reference to tyre removal and replacement. Now this takes a tyre fitter literally minutes with the correct equipment, they'll charge you for this service obviously if you're not buying new tyres. Idiot boy here decided to do the job with a new set of tyre levers and a bit of determination. I swear it took nearly all day to learn how to do it and change 4 tyres. I reckon every troublesome criminal should be forced to do this whilst in prison – IT IS HARD WORK! I opted to do this myself, not for the money saving aspect but just for the satisfaction of saying that I had done it – not recommended. Wheel balancing was left to the professionals and was about 6 pounds a wheel, to buy a manual balancer would have cost about 40 notes and I wouldn't have used it again. I did try a couple of Heath Robinson ideas but none were successful.

Anyway what you all want to know is HOW MUCH! Well here's a rough breakdown, bear in mind some jobs were done through back door so I can't name names:

Wheel Centre dip and bead blast – £ 50
Wheel centre paint – £ 50
Wheel rims polish and rechrome – £ 650
Stainless bolts and washers – £ 20
Specialist bonded nuts – £ 30
Replacement Chrome wheel nuts – £ 30
New centre caps not original – £ 30
Set of 4 185 14 tyres new old stock (gumtree) – £ 80
Wheel balancing – £ 24
Satisfaction of doing it myself – Priceless!

Total – Less than a grand.

Now you know why you don't see many of these wheels about.

Steve Wyles