

7 Simple Car Restoration Tips

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Everyone should know



Keep these seven tips in mind when tackling your next restoration project.

This task isn't for the faint of heart

Restoring a classic car is a challenging task not to be undertaken by the faint of heart.

Successfully completing such a project requires a significant commitment and demands a lot of time and money. However, many enthusiasts find great pride and satisfaction in completing their own restoration from start to finish. If you're one of the brave souls considering starting your own project, or if you've got one well underway, here are seven key tips to consider during the restoration of your classic car.

Keep your project on track with these simple tips

#1 Is the car worth restoring?

Many car lovers revel in the thought of saving a classic beauty from the clutches of the scrap yard, while others are eager to save a few bucks when purchasing their project car. However, in most cases, a car that's considered a total basket case should only be restored if it has sentimental value and money is no object. For the rest of us, these undertakings just aren't practical.

Although more expensive initially, starting with a solid car – one with a good frame, body, and driveline - can pay dividends in the long run. While wearable components such as ball joints, tires, and brakes can be easily replaced, major frame corrosion or collision damage can require very costly and time consuming repairs.

Do your research and understand the common 'problem areas' for the particular make and model of car you're interested in. To avoid overlooking

anything try finding a classic car buyers checklist specific to the make and model of car you're looking for to reference while reviewing potential purchases.

And remember: try not to be 'blinded' by the excitement of buying a project car. Chances are the first one you look at isn't the perfect car – be prepared to look as long as it takes to find the right one.

#2 Is numbers matching worth the price?

Ok, so you're in the market to buy a classic car for your restoration project. The question is, what type of restoration will you be doing? Is a full frame-off project with heavy modification in your future? If so, paying for a low-mileage all original numbers-matching car probably isn't right for you. On the other hand, if your goal is to bring your ride back to its original glory, these factors, and the price premium they command, become a much bigger consideration. Whatever you do, don't underestimate the cost of buying all-original (non-repro) parts!

Will you remember how those thousands of pieces go together?

#3 Put your camera to work!

Photos, photos, and more photos! The importance of taking plenty of quality pictures simply can't be overstated. They'll serve as a critical reference and resource during the reassembly process. If you use a digital camera try to save all of your project-related photos in a dedicated folder on your computer so none get lost or misplaced. And remember - take photos from multiple angles and be sure to use plenty of light!

Digital photo tips for your restoration project:

- Use good lighting.
- Use a camera capable of capturing small details.
- Take photos from several angles and distances.
- Keep a log including the photo number and a brief description.
- Save all photos in a common location.



#4 Plan and Budget your project.

Your restoration should proceed following a series of steps sequenced in a way that allows the project to be completed in a logical order. Each project should begin with the development of a restoration 'road map' – what needs to be done and when will it be completed?

Although every detail doesn't need to be recorded, try to map out the significant tasks. Give your car a good once over

and make notes as to the major repairs and other restoration processes that need to be completed.

With your list of repairs in hand it's time to develop a budget. How much are you willing to spend, and how can that money best be allocated to provide the fit

How much are you willing to spend, and how can that money be most effectively allocated?

and finish you desire? What trade-offs are you willing to make? Should engine modifications be made in lieu of a show-quality paint job? Are suspension upgrades more important than having an immaculate interior? Only you can answer these questions. Whatever you decide, developing and sticking

to a budget will ensure you have plenty of funds to finish your project on a reasonable schedule and that you won't end up regretting a host of poorly planned purchases.

And lastly, remember that a full restoration is truly a major undertaking. Many enthusiasts will spend well over 1,000 hours on their restoration. If your project will be completed in the family garage this means

What first-time Restorer's really need to know.

Many who have undertaken a restoration say their first project turned out to be a lot more work than they first anticipated.

most or all of this space – and much of your free time – is going to be taken up with your project for several years. Before you make the final leap ask yourself whether this is a reasonable commitment. If it's not consider reducing the scope of your project or delaying starting work until making such a commitment is more reasonable.

#5 The right tool for the job

Before jumping into the disassembly of your car you need the proper equipment and environment for the project – and that includes more than just a set of wrenches, a floor jack, and a canvas garage. Your work area should be clean, dry, and well lit. Keep in mind that a complete body-off restoration can easily take up an entire two car garage so having an adequate amount of workspace is



Patience and Perseverance lead to success

important as well.

At a minimum you'll need to have a good selection of basic mechanic tools such as wrenches, screwdrivers, sockets and pliers. A good compressor with a selection of pneumatic tools including an impact wrench, air ratchet and die grinder can be enormous time savers. You'll likely have a need for an engine hoist and stand, floor jack, jack stands, electric drill and angle grinder.

Additionally, as you progress with the restoration of your classic car you'll likely need to purchase a number of specialty tools. This should be expected. However, it's important to realize that some specialty tools and equipment – such as welding equipment and sandblasters – are needed only once or twice during a project and can often be rented for a fraction of the purchase price.

#6 Get the right safety equipment

Let's face it, resorting a car can be a hazardous undertaking. Using the correct personal protective equipment (i.e. ear plugs, safety glasses, leather gloves, respirator, etc.) will help protect your health and safety. If you're unsure of the equipment that should be used always consult the manufacturer's literature that came with the tools and materials you'll be using.

A KEY TO SUCCESS:

#7 Get Organized

The number of parts used to assemble a car is impressive to say the least. As a result, restoring a car can easily result in heaps of parts and pieces tucked away in every nook and cranny of your garage. In the end, the ability to easily find any given part will be key to staying productive and maintaining your sanity. Purchasing a few shelving units and arranging your parts will help keep your project organized.

In addition, consider photographing each part as it's removed from the car. Where a part goes may seem obvious now, but even the sharpest memory will fade after a few months or years. To ensure you don't forget how your parts go together, write a brief description on an index card, fold the card in half (to protect the writing from smudging), punch a hole in the corner and zip tie it to the part being removed. If your memory is really fuzzy, use a digital camera to photograph the part prior to disassembly, add the photo number to the card, and then save your photos for safe keeping.

About the Author and *The Corvette Restoration Page*:

Tim Cote is an engineer, performance vehicle enthusiast, and developer of The Corvette Restoration Page. In September 2005 Tim purchased a 1971 Corvette Stingray as a project car and decided to chronicle his progress with a website so that friends, family and strangers alike could learn from his successes, trials and tribulations.



With the project well underway the website has grown considerably since its inception to now include over sixty comprehensive progress updates, numerous technical and how-to articles, a restoration forum as well as a variety of restoration resources. To visit Tim's site simply navigate your internet browser to the following web address: www.corvette-restoration.com