

TWO GUYS FROM TEXAS / PART 5
By Bruce Fullerton (#1712) and Robert Mace (#1713)



Robert's rust shrine getting its bottom flamed while Bruce's car awaits it's trip back into Austin after getting' a little lemon yellow squirted on it. The Kubota watches the action.

Hard to believe another year has already gone by! The good news is that both cars show a year's worth of improvement ... no resemblance to the rolling heaps they used to be.

With the purchase process, teardown of everything, complete restoration of the frame, running gear, brakes, engines and transmissions behind us, it was time to find a body shop that could and WOULD do the work.

It probably comes as no surprise to any of you that most body shops are in the "sure-fire-cash" insurance claim business. Most of the shops here in the Austin area fit this description. A few used to take in hot rod, race car, and restoration projects but most have bailed on custom work.

We got even pickier in that we didn't want to have to drive half way across Texas to watch the progress on our cars. One well-funded local rodder nonchalantly advised "Just send it to California and be done with it".

If you talk this up with enough people and check the Yellow Pages under "Automotive, Restoration", the few remaining artists out there will surface. We found six shops who were willing to talk to us and quote dollars and hours (make that months) although one was 250 miles north of Austin, one was notorious for ridiculous turn-around time (the facility also looked like a front for Friday night cock fights and who knows what else) and another we ruled out due to lack of true enthusiasm.

Plan on getting (or renting) a truck or trailer out and taking your body, or complete car, by the shop. There is no way anyone can quote the work without seeing it

One really nice fellow had come highly recommended who was just north of Austin, knew what an Isetta was and invited us to come by. The quality of his work was outstanding! In addition to rods and restos, he also took in a small amount of "cash flow" insurance work. When his quote came back, along with minimum six months per car (i.e. second car in comes back in a

year), we were fearful that reality had finally set in. Soup to nuts, we were each looking at \$8K +. Not!

Classic Auto Works in Travis Peak came in with a reasonable estimate and was looking at half the time. Owner and long time body man and street rodder Mike Shambarger had even done some research on the Isetta, which he was already familiar with, and was ready to talk when we trailered 'em in to his place. He had an impressive portfolio of cars he had done and had received many awards for his work. Being about 45 minutes west of Austin in the Hill Country, this looked like the ticket. He runs an immaculate operation and only uses the best materials.

Robert had his car media blasted by Commercial Services in Austin (who also powder coated both of our frames and peripheral parts) while Bruce had his car's paint, Bondo and that lovely tarred acoustic padding neutered at Metal Rehab Technologies in Fort Worth. They used an environmentally friendly dipping technique and, man, did they do a nice job.

Bruce made a big mistake here though. The price for dipping came in way over what they had estimated at a parts swap meet where their acquaintance was made and the dollars weren't there to prime it. There were many additional parts taken in for dipping so that drove the price up alone. No fault of Rehab's.

Bruce admits that he should have used much better judgment and brought the car back to Austin and concentrated on the running gear and gotten the dipping and priming done just prior to delivery to the body shop. Bad project management on his part!

The good news is that Metal Rehab used an extremely effective rust protective product on the car and it held up very well, particularly since it was garaged. The 100 degree Texas summers helped out too. Also, the body shop had 100% control over the paint part of the project since it was bare metal ... very important from the epoxy sealer on up.



You'd think getting' your bottom flamed would be enough! Robert's car meets Mr. Grinder while the new outer wheel well panel gets fined tuned. It's getting' there!

Robert and Bruce ordered several new body replacement panels. Robert also got a new floorboard with battery box since his car was Swiss-cheese-like in the front fenders, lower side panels and floorboard.

Bruce had to order a new battery box and right and left rear quarter panel. The price of the new panels were less than the cost of sheer labor to fix the old ones. The outcome confirmed it.

As you can see in the following pictures, these panels aren't all perfect fits. The right rear panel had to be cut, repositioned on the body and re-welded. Not a show stopper but it added labor to the job. These panels are NOT stamped from original or retro dies and aren't perfect. That right passenger side panel, if you need one, is the one to watch out for as you'll see.

Plan on taking your frame with you. A real tricky part of the job (should your car have the same problem Bruce's did) is that slim piece behind the engine cover that forms the front of the rear passenger side wheel well. There is also a tab that comes off of it at the bottom that bolts to the rear of the back motor mount. That tab has to line up right and having the body on the frame is the only way to do it. (Make note that if you order a repro right quarter panel, it DOES NOT include that tab!) Another scenario is if you have a new floorboard installed, like Robert's car. That frame will be a must!

Now we don't want to leave you with the impression that the two of us are bodywork gurus but we've asked a lot of questions to the folks that are and here are a few tips they've passed along in reference to doing the job right.



Old quarter panel has been surgically removed.

Given the fact that the both bodies had been down to bare metal, next step was to use a rust inhibitor as a base. If the bare metal isn't properly prepared, you have a poor foundation for everything that will go on top of it. An epoxy sealer is laid down first and, once dried, out come the metal snips, hammers, dollies, MIG welders, etc. to remove any cancer.

It's truly amazing to watch the progress on these cars! The rough bodywork went pretty quick. That would be the panel replacements, new battery box and hole-filling. Bruce's car had 37 holes plugged up that were

there for no apparent reason. Looked like someone had gotten a new electric drill for Christmas and needed some practice or something. Ugly!



Note diagonal cut that had to be made in repro quarter panel on Bruce's car. These guys aren't stamped from original dies and, while close, this one did not fit correctly as delivered.

Phase 2 involves the application of filler and then blocking. This is the part that smoothes all of those small dents out after the hammer and dolly and welder have been done their thing. The car really starts to shape up here.

Once the car has been sanded and wiped down, it's back to the booth for a second round of epoxy sealer. The idea here is to make sure that there is no surface that can trap moisture. That epoxy will make sure of that if it's done right. Ever see a chunk of body filler that's cracked and getting ready to drop? Busted! That's the long-term product of how not to do it.

Might be a good place to mention undercoating / sound deadener. Mike is big on a 3M product by the name of Rucker Schutz. It takes a special gun to shoot it so it's not a typical do-it-yourself type product. This is the stuff that automakers coat rocker panels with prior to applying the finish coat. Reduces paint chipping.



After some expert jockeying, the body shop got Bruce's new panel dialed in. Aaron Bowen of Classic Auto Works puts the finishing touches on the rough-in.

The rear deck, firewall, both side panels and floorboard were coated as well as the entire underneath side. No more of that obnoxious tar paper monkey business! Besides, we'll bet the local environmentalist wackos (you have to live here to fully appreciate this) will eventually figure out that that tar paper stuff causes cancer in left handed, yellow fanged walking sticks, and could endanger the seventeen still in existence. Think we're makin' it up? We've got the black cap vireos here that build their nests about two feet off the ground. Wonder why they're one of Mother Nature's popular entrees? Duh!

Now that we've got that out of our systems, Rocker Schutz can then be painted over ... leaves that subtle, rough texture, greatly reducing noise and adding an extra layer of protection. Unless someone is looking up into the front wheel wells or under the car, they won't even notice it. And if they do, so what? Gives your car a nice, professional touch and tons more protection than BMW had available in 1957. It also helps mask any welds that have been ground down on your floor pan, firewall or rear deck. Oh, and be sure and have them shoot your rear mud guards while they're at it. That goofy rubberized stuff you get at the auto parts store, *Dupli-Color in particular*, is a big-time loser!

As previously mentioned, Mike Shambarger would only shoot Glasurit (BASF) products. Mike unconditionally stands behind his work and no corners are cut when it comes to paint. It's not the cheapest but who would want cheap in a frame off resto anyway? Besides, if you price out any decent automotive paint, \$5.00 a gallon gas starts looking good. If you're curious, a quart of Glasurit 55 base coat/clear coat paint is around \$90.00. When it's mixed down with reducer, it will yield about 1.5 to 1.75 quarts of paint, enough to shoot an Isetta, depending on the color, whether the engine compartment / underside of the car is painted, etc. Bruce went with a "sunglasses-at-night" lemon yellow, just a tad lighter than 2000 Beetle yellow. Robert went with 2001 Beetle Cyber Green.

If you're going to pick a paint color from samples, TAKE IT OUTSIDE AND LOOK AT IT IN NATURAL LIGHT! There were about 250 shades of yellow Bruce had shoved in front of him. Under fluorescent light, they looked one way, outside ... whoa! Whole new ball game. All of a sudden, greens emerged from some shades, pale yellows got even more pale and so forth. Light does funny things to colors. It's a real eye opener!

The base coat / dry coat process involves shooting the car with 2-3 back-to-back coats of the base coat (the final color of the car), letting dry (notice we didn't say "bake"). The clear coat is applied next and allowed to dry. Wet sanding is then done with extremely fine grit paper starting with 1000 grit, then 1500 and finally 2000. The icing on the cake is two to three different buff jobs with the appropriate compounds.

Note that we have grossly over-simplified the detail that goes into a show-quality job but you get the picture. Your body man can walk you through the whole process if you just ask. It's a laborious task to punch out truly eye-popping work.

Time's up! Next issue we'll move along to the interior and discuss upholstery, trim detail, chrome, the Isetta Belchfire 300 heater system, and try to get the wiring harness back in with a couple of tips you may want to consider. These may actually end up being two real cars, er, Isettas again!

Here today and out the other ... BF & RM

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Bruce's car in Panzer gray regalia.



Body of Bubba's one-lung hemi parked back on chassis to check fit of new floor pan.