

Bodywork on classic/retro car

Below is what I'm hoping is a guide to the vehicle owner on how to achieve what they're after for their budget. They are my opinions as a business owner, someone who's been in this trade 20yrs and seen all manner of things bodywork related. It doesn't make what I've written as gospel, they're just opinions of someone with experience.

Feel free to take this as good advice, share, laugh at it, ridicule, whatever. As long as you take something from it it may help make a positive difference.

What is written in bold is questions you may ask yourselves and then are my opinions on this.

Remember these are my opinions based on enquiries I get and posts I see on social media, it's not aimed at everybody.

What am I wanting?

So firstly I'd be asking what am I looking for and what are my intentions with car short and long term. If you see yourself wanting to take your car to shows, keep it for many many years then you need to spend the money on a restoration. Yes it's a big outlay now but done right you'll only be spending that money once and in many years time you have an asset where the money you've spent won't be thought about. Having your classic 're sprayed' isn't going to magically cure what will be issues of corrosion hidden beneath years of product and eventually coming out. You will find yourself in the position of needing a resto but having already spent a few thousand on a repaint.

Have to remember your car is 25 plus years old. Unless it's been stored away for most of its life it will have undergone numerous repairs, paintwork, rust repairs, potential corrosion issues in the original metal. Just because you can't see it doesn't mean it's not there.

Where do I find the right shop?

Firstly the likely hood is you'll want to look on social media or Google. Google is quite straight forward, you just read through a companies website and decide if you want to contact them. Social media....this is where it gets messy. So more than likely you're on various groups, especially those with similar cars to yourself. The first thing people tend to do is ask the others in that group the question

'I'm looking to get my car repainted, where do people recommend?'

This has now opened the gates to an influx of confusing answers because firstly you've not asked the right question, your car may need a lot more work than a repaint, that's down to an honest shop to tell you what's needed. Anyway, aside from that you now have a load of people you don't know firing out names of shops...then the inevitable

'So and so did mine, I only paid £XXXX'

There is nothing wrong with someone writing that, that's up to them. The issue is they have not described what work has been done for that price but already there is a seed planted of what it will potentially cost you. You check out some of the other recommendations social media pages, see some of their work and think that looks lovely (still while having that random figure in the back of your head). The initial enquiries with those shops will lead to an assortment of answers, unlikely leading to a bit of confusion which then takes you back to your group to ask

'How much should I be looking to pay for x?'

As a business owner this baffles me. If I wanted an extension built I'd enquire with various building firms and get quotes, if I want legal advice I'll ring solicitors. How is it in the car trade people ask electricians, shop workers, software engineers expected prices to work on a car? It's an infuriating thing as a business owner and somewhere I feel the customer is going wrong and their part of the issue.

If you want to know costs, ask the experts and them alone.

The way to find the right shop is detailed communication. If you email someone saying 'hi how much to paint my M3?' and send a picture of your car in the multi-storey likely you'll be seen as a time waster and ignored. If you really want work doing you email the companies you like the look of on social media/Google with a big description about the car, what you're looking for and ask how can you go about getting some costings? The more effort you put in the mores seriously you'll be taken and a good shop who wants to work with you WILL get back to you.

That initial agreement

This is simple and not for debate, get everything in writing. Once you've chosen your shop, get an email with all work to be carried out, the process, the potential costs (note if its estimate or quote) and read through thoroughly. Ask questions in writing, get answers in writing.

What product am I getting?

What could potential costs be?

How do I pay?

Can I visit regular to check the work?

Will you document the build with pictures?

What materials are you using?

What guarantees come with it?

Biggest mistake I see, especially when the owner is disgruntled, we agreed everything verbally over the phone in person. Well you it's your word against theirs then and you're not going to get anywhere. Don't do anything verbally, don't pay cash without an invoice, do everything properly and professionally and both parties are covered.

How do I know I'm going to get what I've paid for?

Now this is more down to the shop owners to be upfront and honest and manage your expectations. If you've been told you're getting a restoration for under £10k, guess what, you're not. You might get a decent repaint with a bit of welding, but you're not getting a restoration.

Restoration, bare metal repaint, repaint, blow over, these are all completely different jobs.

A restoration is you restore the car back to its original state or better. You can't restore it by going over 3 previous repaints, decades of previous repairs and only welding the rot you can see. That's a repaint.

You will not know at the start what you are going to get, it's all about trust and transparency but there are tell tale signs.

Firstly if in your initial questions the answers are pretty vague, that's not a good start.

Also if the shop has a staff of 1 or 2 guys and full of in and out cars with small damage on you need to understand that's their bread and butter. Are they going to have a few hundred spare man hours to complete your car to a standard you want while keeping their in out customers happy or is your car going into the corner to be worked on when they have time? Your car is staying in that corner because they don't have the man power to do it, and you're going to pressure them and they're going to rush it to get it gone and you off their backs.

A good shop will make you feel like the car means something to them, they have pride in what they do, they enjoy that type of work and will be keeping you updated. Shop owners are people, it's not too difficult to gauge the type of people they are, we are able to do it in other areas of life so what's the change. If you have made the decision financially over gut instinct then potentially you've made a bit of an error.

But again ask questions if unsure.

What do I do if I'm not happy with the work that's been carried out?

First and only question a shop owner needs to know is why?

Now from a shop owner point of view and if you've been down multiple times to check various stages and been happy with the progress and everything that was written at the start has been adhered to at point where you not happy and why have you not said anything? Because if you haven't and the reasons you're not happy is some bits you were hoping might get done but were never agreed at the start, that's really just tough. Or if it's the paint finish and you're going round with a magnifying glass from an inch away for the slightest blemish because you've gone well over your budget and fancy trying to get some money back, again I'd say realistic tolerances and expectations for the money spent. Nothing is perfect and again if the shop owner feels they have delivered at minimum the product matching your budget that's on you. Im not getting a Gucci suit for Topman money.

Flip side though if you have genuine reason to be upset then the best thing to do is keep it professional and open dialogue with the shop, via email is best. The more you document the better. If you're civil you'll usually get further than puffing your chest out because one reaction causes another and once bridges start getting burnt it becomes difficult.

The one absolute do not do which I see on multiple pages is the name and shame. Those people wanting you to do that haven't got your best interests at heart, they are nosey. They want to watch the drama unfold and have a laugh. Also, UK law, what constitutes as libel. This is written defamation about an individual or business that turns out to be false but is harmful to their reputation.

In other words in your pissed off state if you write on social about a company ruining your car because others have urged you to name and shame and your words can be proven to be false, you've opened yourself up to be sued and those who wanted you to name and shame are not funding it if you lose. This is of course an extreme...but it's a possibility.

There is no need for it.

Deal with the company directly, if you don't get anywhere seek legal advice but it should never come to that.

In summary

First and foremost, this is a paid profession, it's our job, our source of income to pay our bills, feed our families. In no profession do we work for free (not willingly). If you are contracted to work at a desk for 40hrs a week filling in spreadsheets and your boss comes and goes can you do the 5 hours this afternoon for free, you'll likely say no, why would you?

That is the same in this profession, we are not going to do 5 hours of prep for free.

If you have taken your car somewhere and got a fixed quoted price they're only going to do a specific amount of hours on it, that's basic economics otherwise they're working for free and losing money. If they come across an issue the likelihood is they'll either ignore it to fit within your budget or notify you at which point you can say here's the extra money to address it or if you say 'nope, you told me it would only be X amount' then guess what, they're ignoring that issue.

You really do in this trade get what you pay for. Yes some places charge a very high Labour rate because they need to cover large overheads making the cost a lot more more than a small place who can charge less because their overheads are less, that doesn't mean that fancy shops work will be better. What I mean is the more time and care you put into it the better the job.

If I did the same job twice, once putting 100 hours into it and the next time 200 hours, the second job is highly likely to be better.

Also materials. You can buy cheap materials and you buy expensive materials. Value beans don't taste like Heinz beans. Cheap clear coat doesn't have the shine and longevity as a premium clear coat. Also paint and materials isn't literally the paint. You have all the consumables, tape, paper, sanding discs, filler, gas, electric, so much. They're products for your car, the shop isn't buying them for you and like everything materials have gone up. On average we spend around £1500-2000 plus vat on materials to do the mk1 Golf restos we do.

The majority of shops, and definitely ones with good reputations are not here to rip you off. They're here to do the best job because they know reputation is everything and if you're happy you'll spread the word. Good work takes time, time costs money, good materials cost money. It all adds up.

There is plenty of information out there for you to do your own research and find the right shop if you but you have to put in the ground work. If you want the easy quick option of lazily asking Mike, the plumber from Rochdale where in Somerset should you take your E30 to be painted you're already up against it.

Remember people working on your car are human, we make mistakes, things can take longer than expected, we have moments where we may need to address painful things in our personal lives but the majority of us are decent, respectful people who will show the same courtesy and respect we are shown.

Let's all work together and get some more transparency back into this trade so we can avoid the negativity and enjoy the cars 👍

