



De Tomaso Pantera

Name Al McNaughton Gisby
Age 39
Occupation Classic car project consultant
From Italy
First classic Mazda MX-5
Dream classic It was this one!
Daily driver Volkswagen 'Hecho en México' Beetle
Best drive 12,563km in 47 days across Canada and Alaska

PANTHER CAUGHT ON EAST COAST

It only goes to show that, with a bit of dog-eared determination and perseverance, you can one day own your dream car. I thought that I had my 'realistic and attainable' V8 in the form of an MGB GT (*Your classics*, August 2010). But an itch was surfacing at an alarming rate and the only hope of scratching it was to morph into a cyber-troll for a few months to find an Italian panther.

Only weeks after a mini restoration had been completed on my MG, to take me way beyond my menopause – bang! – a one-owner '71 De Tomaso Pantera appeared in the USA. It was in the right colour with the right patina and, as I was to find out, monumentally filthy.

I haven't given myself an easy path to the motoring nirvana of driving my exotic up the Stelvio. The car had sat awaiting resurrection for the past 20 years and to quote the inspection report: 'Under ordinary circumstances, I would have itemised all of the defects on a panel by panel and component by component basis. However, this is a "project" car and this simply can't be done because there are too many individual faults to list, and the vehicle does not run so it is impossible to determine the condition of mechanical parts. Overall, it needs a comprehensive mechanical and cosmetic restoration. Everything will need to be refinished, rebuilt and/or replaced as appropriate.'

During 2013, there had been sleepless nights, nails chewed to the quick and my wife questioning my sanity while the car was subjected to the art of the *carrozziere*. A couple of days before Christmas, a thing of beauty was revealed and was transported home to be reassembled.



Fly yellow, one-owner '71 Pantera arrived from Florida – with a few insect friends – in a grubby state after 20 years off the road



Every part is being replaced or overhauled

Little chance that it would fit under the tree, but at least I could make Brum Brum noises in the sanctity of my garage. I shouldn't wonder that my parents still have the suction-cap steering wheel from my childhood that I could use to keep me amused in the interim.

Dismantling the car had revealed some interesting clues about how it was built in the first year of Pantera production. The chassis number was stamped or scribbled on many panels and parts, consistent with low-volume production and each car being ever so slightly different.

Numerous documents of ownership have been found behind bits of trim, along with the first – and nibbled – roadworthiness inspection slip that was dragged down into the transmission tunnel by a nesting mouse. A living US-import bug managed to escape when I lifted a carpet, but I haven't heard about any local harvest failures yet.

Every screw, bolt, pipe, wire and component is being subjected to



McNaughton Gisby gets bad news: the bill!



Immaculate respray; alloys refinished, too

evaluation, and being replaced as necessary. As the job progresses, I'm relying on my mechanical and electrical engineering background and appreciating the relative simplicity of a Ford Cleveland 351 V8. The Pantera has always been criticised because of its lack of a real Italian heart, but surely it is the only way to bring home some '70s Italian wedge on a manageable budget?

Last autumn, I visited the original owner in Florida and enjoyed a few hours with him and his mates over a barbecue in a local workshop, while he spun some yarns about his 42 years with the car. I saw the farm



Reassembled rear suspension back on car

'The container ships passed in the night on the high seas, with the De Tomaso going one way, the MG the other'

building where it lived, and stitched together its history. Rummaging around, we also turned up the space-saver spare and the tyre inflator can. Fingers crossed that the original jack materialises soon.

What has become of my MG? It sadly had to be sold to fund this project, so the container ships passed in the night somewhere on the high seas, with the De Tomaso going one way, the MG the other to its new owner in California.

And when will the Pantera be finished? I don't see any reason to rush, but the model's half-century in 2021 is as good a time as any to see the project through. Wish me luck!

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