

Project Management

No Car Is Restored Without A Lot Of It!



No automobile restoration project or hot rod build can succeed without considerable effort, knowledge, and experience invested in tasks that can only be described as “project management.” These are tasks that do not immediately change the status of your parts or project car, but they determine the speed and success of most efforts. No significant project is completed without an orchestrated collaboration of many types of expertise and facilities. Experience in automotive service and collision repair is helpful but those alone do not prepare you for the vastly greater range of tasks, contact, and knowledge required to build a complete car.

Three Basic Approaches

There are three basic approaches to a restoration or hot rod build:

1. **Hire a specialist with a shop and experts on staff.**
2. **Do it mostly yourself and learn as you go.**
3. **Adopt the role of a general contractor, part-time skilled tradesman, and mostly general laborer.**

Facts

The best shops have the longest waiting list and are the most expensive, but their results are the most spectacular. Most unfinished projects and used parts are produced by the learn-as-you-go enthusiast. The role of a general contractor or project manager, and business overhead expenses ranging from facilities and equipment to employee benefits, are invisible factors but they do add up to a very significant fraction of a project’s cost. Novices and enthusiast customers do not recognize that this highly specialized type of project management can either be learned or it must be paid for.

These methods and facts suggest numerous employment and business opportunities in a large and rapidly growing niche of the automotive industry and effect the structure of this program. Although its is impossible to learn and experience all that is required to restore and build all types of cars, it is possible to learn the important and vital fundamentals, acquire an ability to recognize what or who you need to make good decisions, and learn about your preferences, affinities and motivations to become an expert in some aspects of the many and varied tasks required to build a car.

The bottom line relative to making good decisions is where cost, time and quality meet. And the bottom line of a good restoration or build is either its market value or what one particular person is willing to pay. This means that some knowledge about history, market values, economics, and considerable model expertise are necessary.

For many enthusiasts the lack of specific tools, experience, knowledge, skills, time or garage space present insurmountable challenges. With confidence in a referral, and the inclination and financial means to commit to a “check-book” restoration or build, one might typically hire a specialized company and entrust the project automobile to the “soup-to-nuts” experts. But finding one with the talents, experience, reliability, and ability to provide you with a reasonably accurate estimate of cost and time is difficult and requires a certain amount of luck or fame.

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A firm estimate of cost and time is not credible until at least the body has been stripped to bare metal, at which point your project is worth a fraction of what it did before this point. If this is your situation and a check-book restoration or build is your intent, this introduction course will make you a better customer. A “clueless” customer gets the highest estimates and longest wait.

If your inclination and intent is to be the general contractor, general laborer, and occasional skilled laborer of your restoration or build project, this program will provide much of the know-how, confidence, a network of resources, and research and learning skills. Three project cars are assigned to teams of advanced restoration and fabrication students. They are requested to identify tasks by mid semester suitable for first semester students, and first semester students are invited to visit advanced classes from time to time.

Summary

In summary, successful management of an automobile restoration or build project requires you to be armed with a vast variety of specific knowledge, a special kind of common sense, and the ability to organize and clearly define which tasks you either are or might be capable of performing with some educational preparation. You can acquire many of the skills required to perform a total ground-up restoration or build on many pre-war and most post-WWII automobiles. Chrome-plating, reupholstery from scratch, and wood-framed body reconstruction are the exceptions. All of these skills, except wood-frame body reconstruction, are also typically sub-contracted to experts with specialized facilities — even by professional restorers and builders.

