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Restoration and Fabrication Costs

Knowledge to Guide Project Selection

Purpose: **Present an overview of relative costs in a ground-up restoration project.**

Assumption: **Project car is almost complete, no major component is missing or unusable, and almost all trim items are available.**

Typically the **greatest cost** in a complete nut and bolt level restoration project is in project facilities, research, project management, disassembly and reassembly. These costs can be greatly reduced by the owner. Investment of his/her time, space, knowledge, skills and effort will greatly reduce this highest costs element of a restoration project.

The **second greatest cost** is body repair and painting, unless major mechanical assemblies need to be machined, new castings need to be made, or curved glass needs to be re-created. The initial estimated cost of this element is also the most likely to be low. It is not uncommon to see these costs escalate by a factor of two or more during the course of the restoration.

The **third greatest cost** is usually chrome plating and other electro-plating and trim repair or replacement. Sometimes this can be more expensive than body repair and painting, for example if the project is a 1950s era Cadillac with a sound body but poor condition trim. Particularly costly is chrome plating of castings, the repair and plating of very long and delicate moldings, and restoration of bright plastic trim. Many times, if a reasonably good reproduction is available, it will be less expensive than repairing and re-plating the original item.

The cost of new upholstery and a convertible top and/or headliner will also be a major expense in a restoration. The size of the interior and top, complexity of construction and detail, quality of materials, and the existence of partially pre-fabricated kit components have a major impact.

If a project is missing major items or many small components and is relatively rare, the owner would be well advised to consider the acquisition of a suitable parts car, which might even be a cheaper and more plentiful model as long as the desired parts are present. The cost of a parts car is usually an order of magnitude or more cheaper than the total value of the parts that can be harvested from it. Note that this in itself presents business opportunities, particularly for eBay users. This includes sheet metal sections which are not necessarily known by part numbers. An additional benefit of a parts car is the opportunity to learn and practice disassembly, or component repair, without running the risk of destroying your only example.

And finally there are tires and curved glass. These are produced in special factories and almost always in large quantities. When production stops, the supply dries up and prices sky rocket. The cost for starting production up again is enormous. They can not be repaired or built on a small scale. Old glass cannot be repaired or restored, it must be re-manufactured and the cost for the first copy is on the order of a hundred times or more expensive than the curved windscreen or rear glass when it was still in production. In some rare cases something as seemingly simple as new tires can present a major sourcing problem and expense. Sometimes the same size bias ply tire requires a different size rim today, which in turn requires new wheels to be reproduced.