

# 1924 DORT SPORTS TOURER

“Hey Ralph I know where there is a car just for you, ready to be done up.”

These words were spoken to me after the July Historic Car Club meeting in Naracoorte 2003. For someone who vowed never to tackle the restoration of a car I was soon to commence the massive task of restoring a 1924 Dort, back to the beautiful car she was.

Just to enlighten you a little about my Dort, and the history of Dort, this car was made in Flint, Michigan, USA by the DORT MOTOR CAR COMPANY. The car I have is amongst some of the last made. Joshua Dallas Dort closed the doors of his motor company in 1924.

This Dort is a Model 79 and is Chassis Number of 105676 with the Engine number of DT9623.

The motor fitted is a six cylinder Falls OHV motor with variable pumped oil pressure.

It was shipped to Adelaide where Murray Augner of Franklin Street constructed the coach work of the 5 seater Sports tourer body, this much is known as there are engraved nickel plated brass plates in the door wells depicting this.



On evidence supplied from the Australian National Motor Museum in Birdwood I have been informed that this car was first registered to a Mr H.D. Ralph, Cheltenham Street, Malvern, Adelaide in March 1925.

Early this year I was fortunate that my eldest son while on the web one night happened across a man by the name of Stan Uher in Blenheim, Ontario, Canada with a site about Dort / Gray-Dort's.

According to the Gray Dort Enthusiasts Club member Stan; my car chassis number is the highest known in the world at this time.

Robert Gray manufactured cars using Dort componentry in Canada up to the time Dort closed his doors of the Factory in late 1924 and so the same Dort Chassis was used on both make of cars.

What impressed me about the Dort was it was all there except one door handle. Though having said that, quite a few bits and pieces were worse for wear, what with rust, and general deterioration over those years.

With no knowledge of this style of vehicle and no shed I started to tidy her up a bit, however as most who have had



anything to do with cars have found there really is no easy quick fix and so gradually the whole car was slowly being dismantled. Bit by Bit, nut and bolt, panel by panel.

I was determined to do as much myself as I possibly could to be able to claim I restored it. This has been achieved fairly well so far, some technical things I had to get more experienced people to assist me with. In 2005 due to work commitments I had to shift and so all the house hold goods and the entire car, “bits and all” had to be relocated from Naracoorte to Mt Barker. I was very careful to log and bag every piece that was removed and photographed every thing - yes photographs absolutely by the hundreds. (Which has proven to be the best move I have made yet?)

Once I was in Mt Barker (by the way our new house had; yes you guessed it- no shed) I stripped the rest of the body off the chassis and started an electrolysis bath to remove all rust from many of the pieces and this worked a treat. I cleaned the chassis with an angle grinder wire brush and it came up very well- it was then I discovered it was not quite straight, Oh no. With the help of my mate Graeme Smith from Penola and some borrowed heavy chains 3 Ton Rota-lifts and Graeme's Port Pac were able to get the chassis back into less than 1/16" to square over the entire chassis. I then gave it a coat of POR sw2 sealer and two coats of POR chassis black. While I was doing this I had the motor, gearbox and differential completely over hauled by friend at Para Hills who is an excellent motor mechanic on older engines.

I had the front springs reset and while this was being done I had been cleaning up all the “other bits” and getting them nicely painted.

I started to put the springs and running gear back in place and by now I had a rolling chassis.



# 1924 DORT SPORTS TOURER

I was able to refit the engine, gearbox, diff and tail shaft, with all of them cleaned, painted, new bolts and fittings where required. I had turned new pins for all the brake linkages and had new brake linings fitted. In-between all this happening I had been sending bits and pieces to the Nickel platers to get those parts ready for the fit up. Some of the timber work required a tidy up and I was very fortunate in having some well seasoned oak donated to me by Ray Mossip from the Adelaide Hills Motor Restorers Club.

I used this to replace the timber work at the back of the tub, replace the two front door pillars that are in the engine cowl and make new base timbers for the engine cowl, plus remake the fillers in the door wells. Some parts of the body had sections of rust and I was able to use the services of my cousin Rod Drabsch who Owns "Rods and Relics Hot Rod Builder and Vintage Car Restorer" at Keith (in the SE of South Australia). He came up with his car trailer and we loaded the Dort and took it to Keith and I spent two weeks staying with him and his wife Karen. In his work shop Rod and I replaced the damaged parts.

I learnt so much from Rod in those two weeks, he had me shaping and bending metal and cleaning parts down. I must admit he did the welding and boy what a great job he does of that. (Oxy acetylene) He uses a special shaped torch and he welded from one side of the rear tub to the other non stop, using no filler rod except where a small rust hole blew out requiring the slightest touch of filler rod at that spot. One had to be there to witness the skill of this man. Rod is a keen metal worker, and has designed and patented tools specifically for the metal trade including a shrinking disk made of stainless steel. The technique is to heat the metal with the disc, and then cool it quickly with compressed air. To see that metal shrink before your eyes is truly something amazing to witness. It was then home to Mt Barker (200km north) with the car and the start of preparation for the painting.

I hunted around and found a paint shop that would allow me to work with them so I could still have a hand in the preparation work. Adelaide Hills Panel Works, who are dedicated to restoration work, were prepared to allow me to work along side of them on the Dort. This was greatly appreciated and Rob understood my desire of being able to work on as much of my car as I possibly could. As my youngest son is a panel beater by trade the paint shop knew that I was not about to take any short cuts. I made it known if they were not happy with what I had done they were to either; get me to redo the work, or they could finish it themselves. As most of you know, what happens at this point governs the finished job. I asked them what products they wanted me to use on the preparation because some products are not compatible with others. Rob listed the preferred products and he mentioned some of them were not cheap. I understood this, and he was appreciative of my knowledge about the work involved in getting a car ready for a paint job. A coat of paint will not make a car look great, the coat of shiny paint just protects what you have done previously.

And after all this work I don't want a shabby looking car. While all this has been happening I was getting more worried about my windscreen and what I was going to do about the replacement of it, because it was rusted out completely in the bottom corners. Over the years I have been watching out for some screen material of the same profile to repair it. I had tried John Biddle at Antique Motor Spares, and some of the swap meets to no avail. Some people suggested that I use any windscreen profile but I didn't want to - there are two other Dort buckboards in the state, one at Renmark and one at Myponga. If we all happened to be at a show one day people would say "that's not a Dort windscreen." Not being able to find anything that was remotely near to the required profile, I had Callington Foundry cast three length's of aluminium bar from a wooden pattern I made.



# 1924 DORT SPORTS TOURER

The intent was to bend them to shape have them welded and nickel plated. John Wright from the Adelaide Hills Motor Restores Club kindly arranged this, and had the glass rail milled in them for me. I then tried to bend one to the curve of



the cowl, the outer corners are quite sharp and as I neared the finished profile- YEP it broke!

I called in to see Jim, the owner of Callington Foundry who was quite sure he could bend one of the other pieces for me. I waited for about six months calling in from time to time and finally was informed, sorry mine broke too. Well back to square one as

the saying goes. I was then my dear one Di calmly said at the dinner table one evening, your in touch with Stan in Canada why not ask him if he can help. I emailed Stan as soon as the dishes were done. I've been sending Stan so many emails that by this stage I had set a clock in my office to Blenheim time. Stan emailed back "can you send me a profile?" I traced around the end profile of my screen channel and scanned it emailing this straight back to him. His next email just said can you send me a pattern of your screen. I traced around what I had left of the poor old screen

and then turned it over to get a complete pattern. Being on a large piece of paper I thought it would be great to have a copy of this before I post it to Stan just in case it went astray, or there was a plane crash. I asked the design guys at work is there anyway of getting a copy of such a large drawing. They just laughed and proceeded to put it through the large plan drawing printer at work - Bingo! a copy. I posted it off and waited about a week. Stan contacted me and asked if I wanted it surface or air mail. Air mail was \$120 and I was about to ask the minister of finance, when Di came in and said "you've hunted for so long for this just get it flown out and you'll have it."

Well, I tried to pay Stan but he just said wait till you get and see if it is OK, and by the way I have taken the liberty and added a section into the bottom rail. About four days passed and I was at work when Di rang me to say "It's here! The package from Stan arrived today" she was as excited as I was. Classic Coachworks, vintage vehicle restoration and preservation of Marlborough Street North, Blenheim, Ontario, Canada; had come up with the goods.

When I opened it up there was a bottom rail with the correct profile and a length of material long enough for the sides. I had to cut and fit the screen together, purchasing a piece of 9mm plywood and cutting it to form the shape of the glass. My top rail from the original screen is in good condition so working from that I was able to do the rest, calculating and mitring the corners. Having achieved this I got AHP Works to do the corner welds. As you can see by



the photo all the little bits on the ply is all I had left after I had cut it to the required dimensions; **no room for error!** Had I made a mistake I guess it would have been back to Canada. And that's just one of the stories of problems and solutions of restoration work.

I have had to send the headlight reflectors off to be re-silvered, not cheap but I need head lights for the night drives if I'm out late and to be road worthy. The wiring loom was partly in place but as with all old wiring it was not up to the task required of it. Years ago Vinwire attended the "Swap Meet" in Naracoorte and I had taken one of his business cards knowing that at some time in the near future a wiring loom would be needed. I visited the website for Vinwire but found no listing for a Dort (by now I was getting used to this) thinking great, this could cost big dollars. On contacting them they told me with the parts I had, plus the copy



of the wiring diagram I had found on the web, they could make a loom for me at about the same cost as looms listed for 1924 Dodge or 1924 Chevrolet. I promptly sent them a plan of the chassis, showing the measurements of the rails and cross member positions to help them calculate the loom layout. Vinwire has since sent me the loom which has included in it the turning light wires for front and rear including stalk. I have not fitted the loom yet but when the body returns from the paint shop soon I will start fitting it into the body and chassis. Over the next couple of months I will be working on the Dort so soon you will receive the second part of this article about my long but enjoyable journey.

TO BE CONTINUED