

1924 DORT SPORTS TOURER

STAGE TWO

It was now time for the body to be prepared for painting and over the next five weeks I spent many days sanding back coats of primer on various panels and parts. As fast as Jason the painter and I were sanding back the panels he was putting yet another coat on them. The whole car body was not in the paint shop at once so transporting bits to and fro was made easy by a couple of frames on wheels. These made it very simple to run the larger parts on and off my trailer. By doing it this way the panels had a longer curing time and made the finish much nicer. The larger tub section was actually on an old hospital bed which proved an excellent tool as it could be wheeled in and out of the booth as well as on and off the trailer with no lifting required, another advantage was it could be raised or lowered to whatever height was comfortable to work at.

When we got to the final prime coat Jason would let me rub back everything except the outer surfaces of the guards, bonnet and body as he needed to know the feel of the finished surface.

The top coat was applied and I was extremely pleased with the way it was coming up, the prior work was now delivering its reward. We carefully transported everything back home and began the work of putting it all together. Placing it on the chassis and lining up was not without some minor hassles. And even though extra care was taken when fitting all the bits back onto the car a couple of minor marks and chips occurred but Rob said Jason would be able to fix them no problem.



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The making of the running boards was commenced with a couple of slabs of English oak, from an old oak tree that was removed from a block in Hahndorf about ten years ago and had been naturally drying in a shed at Birdwood for all those years. I engaged the help of a cabinet maker, Dominic Prince to assist with the machining of them. When they were machined to the correct thickness and width, I trimmed them to size and fitted the aluminium tread rail around them (after applying the four coats of two pack estapol to give the required finish). All four of the front floor boards were in a very poor condition so I elected

to make new ones using the existing ones as patterns, these also required aluminium edging to replicate the original and once these were fitted in place it was beginning to resemble a car once more.

At this stage I still did not have any wheel nuts and Stan had contacted me saying he also required a set of nuts for his 1923 Gray Dort and as he intended getting some cast in Detroit offered the opportunity for me to also order a set, this I did. He said he hoped they would be ready by mid February and I was hoping this would be the case. The Dort had to be checked at Regency Park, the State Government Licensing and Roadworthy Authority before March 8th in order to retain the original black and white registration plates for the car.

With the Dort now assembled and the wheels held on by only the few wheel nuts that I possessed it was time to arrange transport to Clare for Clare Upholstery and Restoration to commence the interior restoration. My older brother had offered his services and 4WD for this task and along with the generous offer of a car trailer from a club member I was able to load and transport the car to Clare. The trip went well and on arrival she was unloaded and pushed into the work bay. Nick Tilbrook allowed four weeks for the upholstery job and actually took four and a half. I elected not to have the hood done while the Dort was there as time was closing in on March 8th. So my brother's services were again called upon to go and pick the car up. Back home I worked on some of the final touches to the electrical system and fitted the vacuum windscreen wiper and a few other things that needed to be completed before the Regency Park Identification.

It was during this period that Stan was still working frantically on getting the cast nuts from Detroit and then having them machined in Canada before being air freighted to me. Time was running out. The rest of the car was pretty well ready to go and on the 2nd March the wheel nuts arrived. I quickly fitted a couple before I emailed a big thank you to Stan. On fitting I found the left hand nuts very tight and not threaded deep enough to secure the wheels. "Oh no what do I do about this!" so I frantically started asking if any engineering shop has a left hand 9/16 UNF plug tap. No one could help me so I contacted Graeme Smith who was coming up to Power Of the Past and I asked him if he would check if David Munn of Munn's Engineering in Naracoorte had one, and again a blank was drawn. It was then I took the plan B option and borrowed some large washers from work and packed out the wheels until the nuts secured the wheels firmly in place. So after much anxiety, on the 6th March we were finally off to Regency Park. I was a little concerned about the identification inspection as I had heard of many people who had had problems with this department and was not sure what to expect. We unloaded the car from the trailer and waited our turn. During the unloading process one of the inspectors had come out into the yard to have a cigarette and while doing so came over and showed a genuine interest in the Dort and I took the opportunity to tell him a bit about the history of the car from the USA to Aunger Motor Company 63 Franklin Street Adelaide. He returned inside and about ten minutes later he called me in. He checked it over and gave it a clean bill of health so it was off to the registration section to get her registered. This done it was lunch time and I gladly shouted lunch to my brother Chris Uppill and Graeme Smith. I thought it was fitting that Graeme was with me the day I pick the Dort up from Kingston SE and there the day she was registered. Graeme has enjoyed being a part of the long nine year journey this has taken.

Back home in Mt Barker it was time to prepare for the next big event being the unveiling I had planned for March 10th.

I had sent out invitations to about ninety people, some of whom had worked on or helped in various capacities so that I could complete the restoration. Around seventy people were able to make it on the day; some of these travelled quite a distance and I'm pleased to say, were glad they made the journey. Two in particular I wish to thank for making the effort were Kathleen White the wife of the owner from whom I purchased the car. When invited she informed me she had not been to Adelaide in ten years and felt it too far to come (it's a journey of around 280 miles) I said that I understood and felt I just wanted to invite her anyway. On the Thursday prior to the unveiling I received a phone call from her asking if it was still ok if she came as her son Clayton had offered to bring her for the day, I was delighted. The other person whom I was very pleased to have here on the day was Ray Gillies of Naracoorte. It was he who made the statement at the beginning of this article and so I felt privileged that he even though not in the best of health made the journey with the help of John and Ronda Paech to be there on the day.

I mentioned in my pre unveiling my appreciation to those who assisted in this project but the biggest acknowledgement must go to my wife Diane who has been there through this whole journey, and witnessed the high's and low's of the restoration. And I would like to paste an email response to one of my invitations which I feel fits in well with all this.

Hi Ralph. It figures; Mark and Kathy are coming over for dinner that day. Can you move your date??? Seriously, Ralph, congratulations! I wish we could come. Nice-looking invitation. Can you send me the "before" photo, of the car in blue, that is on the invitation? We just painted the 1923 Gray-Dort project body in its original "Lake Louise Blue"

colour...I had to invent the colour. Lake Louise is a famous tourist destination in western Canada...the lake is rich blue with a slight greenish hue to it. Anyway, it looks great. We will be toasting you and Di on the 10th. Cheers! Stan.



Don't you just love the humour of the man; he has been so helpful over the latter stages of this project and pleasing to know that there are people out there who are willing to assist others achieve their dreams.

I pray I too can be in a position some day to help others achieve their dreams.

Restoration of anything is always challenging and rewarding, the achievement of the project brings great satisfaction.

Live your dream

Ralph

