

Ask Ronny

by Ronny Shaver @ Ronny's Garage

Answering Your Questions About Classic Car Care Service And Restoration

Published April 16, 2013

Should I Have My Car Painted and How Much Will It Cost?

by Ronny Shaver

One of the questions my customers ask most often is "how much would it cost to have my car painted?" The answer can be somewhat complicated and is not usually what they want to hear. A "paint job" can be the most expensive restoration step, when done properly, for many reasons. I will address a few in this article.

A Rolls-Royce or Bentley automobile is an expensive luxury item and should be treated as such. When built, they are assembled and finished with the finest products available and the end result is self-evident. So when having a PMC re-painted only the highest quality paints and primers should be used. These products are expensive, I am currently having one of my cars painted and the top quality clear-coat costs \$500 per gallon! That is only one of the steps involved but the final paint coat is the one that has to endure the elements and the most obvious. Think of it as the difference between looking through old mottled and bubbly bottle glass and high quality optical glass, the final views will be drastically different!

Another crucial element for a quality paint job is proper surface preparation. Imagine installing marble flooring on your lawn. Marble can have a brilliant shine like glass and if it is installed on a lumpy un-even base it will look like one of those carnival mirrors that distort images. This same distortion principle applies to an automobile's paint finish. The metal underneath needs to have a smooth and undistorted shape, if not then the shiny final paint finish will magnify every fault and imperfection. The best way to prepare a car for paint is to remove all the old paint and correct all the underlying flaws before applying the primer, then priming, sanding and priming in multiple steps until a perfectly smooth and un-distorted surface is achieved.

One costly step that is also essential is removal and refitting of all trim pieces and glass if needed. To invest a substantial amount of money in high-quality paint and extensive labor and materials for proper surface preparation without removing all trim pieces and rubber seals adjacent to painted areas is like throwing money out the window. I'll give another example, think of installing beautiful new baseboards and crown-molding in your home without caulking the edges before painting. Sure, the end result will look much better than before, but the human-eye (at least mine!) will automatically focus on every flaw and gap between moldings and walls. So then the perception of the quality of finish will be significantly reduced. This same concept will apply to an automobile paint job. Any slightly imperfect taping of trim edges prior to painting will "jump-out" like a sore thumb. Another dis-advantage to leaving trim pieces installed is that the paint edges will eventually peel and lift because it is impossible to clean and prepare the trim edges completely.

One last thought, in my experience, when a car is dis-assembled in preparation for a high-quality paint job many new discoveries will alter the initial scope of the project. I call it a "slippery slope" because once you start sliding down it is hard to get traction to stop! The story usually goes like this: now that the chrome is off I can see so many flaws in it and can't possibly install it on a "beautiful paint job" looking like this, might as well have it refinished. Oh and the interior is pretty ratty looking and will detract from the "new paint job" might as well do that. Oh and look at the wood trim, it is so tired I might as well have that done too. Oh no, when the hood is open it looks really tired and when I look under the car it looks a hundred years old. Help!! Well, enough of my story.

If you are thinking of having your car painted, be prepared. I recommend you look your car over carefully and set limits to the project and try to stick to them. When budgeting, determine what is comfortable for you then add at least 25 to 50 percent. Be prepared for unexpected surprises and deal with them accordingly but don't forget the "limits" you set and don't slide down the "slippery slope" of restoration!

Thank you for the questions and keep them coming. Please send your questions to Ronny at ronnyshaver@ronnysgarage.com.

Happy Motoring!
Ronny