

Shabby Chic, GT500 Style

There are plenty of insignificant donor cars sitting around ripe for harvesting

Dear SCM: Last month I purchased a 1968 Shelby GT500 convertible. This is a rust-free Arizona car still sporting the original top, interior, and paint. Yes, it is 38 years old with 82,000 miles and does show its age. But it has been garaged and kept moisture-free since new. It has never been damaged and the panel fit is excellent. The paint is what you would expect, with plenty of stone chips and fading, but the sides are straight as an arrow and reflect like a mirror.

I want to do the right thing for this little baby. New tires are on the way, and all of the normal maintenance needs are being tended to.

However, what about the top? It looks fine from 15 feet and it keeps the water out (should it ever rain again here in Arizona). But, on close inspection, it is getting a bit tatty. The carpets are in excellent condition but have pulled away around the edges. The upholstery is also in fine shape with no signs of seam separation or discoloration.

Overall, I am curious as to how far I can go with repairs and refurbishments and still be able to claim my car to be an unmolested original.—*John Zilisch, Payson, AZ*

SHABBY CHIC AN ACQUIRED TASTE

John, my preference is to always preserve an original car rather than restore. You can always find restoration candidates, but you can't always find an original car. Shabby chic is not for everybody—it is an acquired taste. But with any collectible, an original example is far more valuable than one that has had restoration.

Now for the tough choices: Do you want a 100% correct car, with all correct, original parts, or just a nice driver? Is your preference shiny paint and eye candy, or historical preservation? Remember, there are no wrong answers—it's your car. You are the boss. All I can ask is that if you want to go the new-paint route, start with a previously painted car. Such a small percentage of cars have survived intact and original that it is really a crime to slap a new coat of paint on them if you can make them presentable without resorting to that.

The goal is to make the car as nice as you can, while keeping it as original as possible. I have rejuvenated a lot of unrestored cars in my day, and find it akin to automotive archaeology.

SIMPLE START WITH SIMPLE GREEN

The first step is to scrub everything clean top to bottom, being careful to preserve original markings and details. Photograph and document your progress. A weekend spent in a pool of water and grease will give you a new perspective on life. Give it a try. Simple Green, an assortment of brushes, hot water, and a power washer will work won-



Restore it or just clean it?

There are plenty of insignificant donor cars sitting around ripe for harvesting. Everything from dash pads to carpet and seat belts is available, and they are way better than new reproduction parts. Even small items such as original hose clamps, nuts, and bolts are the key to making a correct and stunning original car. The goal is continuity and a nice, even patina of preservation. Think Susan Sarandon, not Tammy Faye Bakker.

DRIVER OR UNRESTORED ORIGINAL

On the mechanical side, decide whether you want a daily driver or if you really want to push the envelope and make a true, 100% era-correct car. A driver would use correct reproduction parts for any wear or service items replaced over the years. This maintains the look and integrity, while not absolute originality. Correct reproduction tires, belts, hoses, and consumables are readily available, inexpensive, and look right.

However, if the car is really complete and has all the important bits and pieces, consider going to the next level and making a car worthy of a SAAC Division III Unrestored Chairman's or MCA Unrestored award. Both awards stress authenticity and preservation over absolute perfection, and allow for normal wear and deterioration. In both cases, judges will look for original equipment manufactured (OEM) parts only, no reproduction or aftermarket parts allowed.

Source new old stock (NOS) or serviceable original parts to replace any original parts that are missing or inoperable. Some examples are smog, ignition, exhaust, cooling, and fuel system parts. Be aware—NOS and original parts are getting extremely hard to find and are hugely expensive when you do.

ORIGINAL TIRES \$10,000 A SET

For example, an original set of NOS tires may be in excess of \$10,000. This explains why the number of true factory correct and original Shelys is so low, and also explains their tremendous value when they come to market. One of the best sources of original NOS parts and a true expert on Ford originality is MCA National Head Judge Bob Perkins of Perkins Restorations in Juneau, Wisconsin. Bob has been collecting NOS parts for over two decades and is the accepted authority.

Making an original car truly correct and authentic is a large commitment in both time and money. However, once the job is completed, you are a member of an elite group who pride themselves on preserving true glimpses into automotive history and a visual guide for restorations to come. That's the path I recommend you follow.♦

COLIN COMER is founder and president of Colin's Classic Automobiles, as well as an avid collector and enthusiast.