

# PROGRESS LETTER FROM DAVID CHAUNDY ABOUT THE RESTORATION OF HIS AUSTIN 12/4 AUNTY BETTY

November 2009



Bill admiring the results of so much of his labour before the blue paint was applied

The Chassis has received 10 coats of black surface followed by a thorough flat down, it's such an awkward shape to flat down, and the job took me a week to do! I think the job actually took around 20 hours which would equate to 2 days work for an unhindered chap. I am much hindered so I can only do a few hours here and there, hence it taking a week. With the chassis beautifully flat and smooth I applied 2 coats of high gloss black 2K paint which looked pretty good but wasn't perfect due to the odd run. It is virtually impossible to paint the chassis without runs due to all the angles one has to paint without getting too much paint on any one section. Everyone said I had gone insane when I said I wasn't happy with the job which did look pretty good. It is important to me that everything on Aunty Betty is finished to the best of my ability so I rubbed the whole lot down again removing all the runs and marks with 800 grade wet or dry. This has produced a beautifully flat surface on which I hope to apply a high gloss run free finishing coat. I'm now in the process of masking the chassis up so I may paint it section by section to avoid the dreaded runs. Each section will be painted with most of its surface area horizontal minimizing the risk of runs.



The body has received a vast amount of my time of late. It is now resplendent in its first 2 coats of Cobalt blue cellulose paint which I must say looks lovely. I applied 22 coats of primers and surfacers to the magnificently repaired body, on the whole these were built up in batches of 5 coats applied in one day. I then allowed at least 2 weeks hardening time before applying a guide coat and rubbing it off with 600 grade wet or dry. It took me 12 hours solid work to rub off each of the 4 guide coats applied to the main body tub and a further 5 hours to final finish the surfacer with 1000 wet or dry. The gloss blue went on beautifully and looks excellent, of course there are many more coats to go and many more hours of seemingly endless flattening, but it's a milestone. It has taken 3 years almost to the day to get the body ready for the colour coats. I would never have dreamed it would have taken so much time and effort. My hour tally currently stands at 6230 hours put into the project, insane.... thing on it they may be right! Well the body panels look wonderful, ripple free smooth and just as I'd hoped they would look. I can't wait to see the back of the paintwork, to see the body assembled and waxed will be a very happy day.



I have spent most of my time this week flattening down the Sankey artillery wheels having had them blast cleaned and powder coated. The powder coaters do lots of work for the vintage car fraternity and always seem to have some similar wheels in their shed whenever I visit. I told them that Aunty's wheels were mint, irreplaceable, super rare, and must be taken great care of. I had decided to have a heavy coat of satin black powder applied to the wheels then have them back to allow me to flat them down all over before having a second coat of high gloss black applied. When I collected them they looked excellent in their new coat of powder. The manager told me they were the best set of artillery wheels they had ever seen in over 20 years in business. I knew they were exceptional but it is nice to have it confirmed. The wheels are due to return to the powder coater's in the morning.



When I get them back I will have to carefully mask the rims of the wheels which must remain gloss black, before applying a number of coats of Cobalt blue cellulose to the spokes. The wheels on early 12/4's look splendid in their two tone colour scheme but are often seen in just black due to the difficulty in achieving a pleasing finish. I hope to succeed!

I have a new set of 760 x 90 Dunlop Chevron tyres, a set of new Michelin reinforced inner tubes, and a set of new old stock correct valve caps to complete the

restoration of the wheels.

## FROM DAVID



Hi Ash,

I've had a flurry of activity recently. We spent 3000 hours on body restoration and felt a break was in order! I put the Cloud into storage with a specialist company near Worcester which has allowed me to really get going on Aunty Betty. I've taken the body off the chassis (single handed) and totally stripped the chassis over the last week. The chassis has been a revelation to me and in a small way will re-write conventional wisdom on the correct finish for an Austin 12/4.

My car is one of the very last 2TT cars. When launched late in 1921 the Austin 12 had a 4' track. Those early cars were so narrow the steering box was mounted outside the frame and a tin cover was provided for it above the front wing. The model was designated TT by Austin denoting Twelve Tourer. Lord Austin had wanted to produce the car with a 4' 4" track from the outset, but due to the dire financial position of the company at the time the official receiver (who was then in control of the company) refused to sanction the cost of tooling or materials for the 4' 4" axles. In order to be able to make the 12/4 at all Lord Austin chose to use the remaining stock of the Edwardian Austin 10/12 axles left over at Longbridge.

The model was an instant hit with the public and started to sell well. Relatively small numbers were produced in 1922, but even so the stocks of 10/12 axles soon dried up giving Lord Austin an opportunity to

finally tool up for the 4' 4" track axles. A host of detail alterations and a wider body came on stream in late 1922 and the 2TT series was born. 2TT stood for 2nd series Twelve Four chassis Tourer body.

Austin produced the cars in a very limited standard colour range depending on which of the two specifications available on the 5 seat tourer a customer ordered. The standard tourer was very basic indeed, it had no spare wheel and tyre, no clock, no spring gaiters, no Auster screen and was only available in Elephant grey. The special tourer had all the equipment missing on the standard tourer and was available in Elephant grey, Royal Blue and Maroon. Any other colour could be ordered at extra cost should a customer desire it.

It is conventional wisdom that the cars were finished in oil based coach paint and finished with a coach lacquer. The wings, side valances, bonnet boards, stays and chassis were finished in black stove enamel. The wheels were two tone, black rims and hubs with body colour spokes.

You can imagine my surprise therefore to find my chassis still has 95% of its original paint still present on it and that the paint is not black but Elephant grey. The paint is in incredible condition and there is absolutely no rust of any kind on the chassis due to the whole frame being coated liberally with gas tar at some point in its life. As I'm about to send the chassis in to be jigged I needed to remove the tar and as much paint as possible to make things easier for the chassis specialist. Gas tar sticks like chewing gum to the cat!! It is horrid stuff to try to get off and requires a strong solvent to dissolve it. I've been using cellulose thinners which eventually removes the tar with plenty of scrubbing. As I washed away 85 years of dirt, grime, and 1/8" thick gas tar I revealed shiny grey paint. I soon discovered the whole chassis was grey. Quite amazed at this discovery I rang Tony Smallbone to ask his opinion. Tony said that body colour chassis were popular on Edwardian Austin models, but he had never seen one on any vintage Austin car. He suggested the paint was probably primer. I felt certain that I was right about the paint, I do after all know the difference between primer and gloss enamel. I continued cleaning the chassis and to my further surprise found lettering on the rear cross member. By the time I realised what I was looking at the cellulose had destroyed a significant amount of the lettering which dissolved far quicker than the gas tar! I switched to using white spirit so I might preserve the lettering to enable me to photograph it, measure it and take a tracing of it so I could reproduce it when the chassis is restored. The lettering reads TT 8096. My chassis number is 8096 and it is fitted with a tourer body, so there we have it proof that not every Austin 12 started life with a black chassis!



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It's a silly little detail I know, but to me its archaeology and valuable information. I have now carefully taken a tracing of the lettering and will have a stencil made to reproduce it exactly. The lettering is in stencil font originally designed by Linotype so it can be easily re-produced on a computer.

I've attached a few pictures so you can see how things are progressing.

Hope to chat with you soon.

Best regards

David

