

The Rise of the Unrestored Collector Car
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Slide 2: The Changing Paradigm: To Restore or Preserve

For years in the collector car world, only shiny and perfect and new would do. It's been argued that the collectors who are now passing on are the people who grew up during the Great Depression and then during World War II, when one simply made do with the old and the used and the shabby. So that these folks who had done without for so long found success everything they touched needed to be bright and shiny, as if to compensate for the years of deprivation.

Slide 3: Restoration in its Infancy

Like anything else, the concept of shiny and new changed. At first, as restoration became more common following World War II, much of the work was superficial, resulting in cars that looked good from a distance, but probably wouldn't have stood close scrutiny. But for the most part, collectors didn't know better as car collecting and restoration was so new.

Slide 4: Restoration Evolves

The quality of restoration improved throughout the 1960s and 1970s and so it seems did a frequent disdain for that which hadn't been restored. By the 1980s and 90s, restoration had evolved to the point where the quality of the finished product frequently far exceeded the way the car had originally left the factory

It wasn't uncommon for very nice, unmolested cars to be completely disassembled and restored to the last nut and bolt.

Slide 5: Erasing the Fingerprints of the Masters

As a group accustomed to fine furniture, paintings and other collectibles, you're probably incredulous about now. Why take something with the finger prints of the craftsman and eradicate all of his signatures in search of perfection?

If you stripped and disassembled a Chippendale drop-leaf table, applied a new finish and sourced new hinges and other hardware, the value would be decimated. So why has the market tolerated and even encouraged full over-the-top restorations of automobiles that were sound and presentable?

Slide 6: Justifying Restoration

The answer may lie in the simple fact that even the finest automobile was at some level a manufactured product, not hand-crafted like the finest violin, vase or hard wood furniture. Also, with so many automobiles being damaged through use and exposure to the elements, it may have been natural to assume that if it was acceptable to restore an example in poor condition, there was no reason not to restore one that remained in relatively good condition.

Slide 7: Difficult Decisions Driven by Changing Values

Values—and I don't mean monetary—are changing in the collector car world. What was once valued is now less desirable and what was usually pushed away or totally made over is now in vogue and commanding a premium. What does this huge shift mean to collectors and to appraisers? Does it make sense to leave a car unrestored even if it means preserving modifications such as a revised headlamp treatment or altered rear window as on this Type 57S Bugatti Atlantic? Or was restoring it to compete at Pebble Beach the right decision? Some would argue that it should be left and others would assert that the modifications make it more than justified to undertake a full restoration to original specifications. In this case, the result was well-rewarded when the Bugatti won Best of Show at the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance, which is the most prestigious concours in the United States and rivaled only by the most exclusive European events.

Slide 8: The Smoke and Mirrors of Restoration

On the other hand certain collectors like to enhance their chances at winning top prizes by taking certain liberties to make their cars sleeker, sexier and more visually appealing. If a judge or spectator or show official haven't seen the original car sometimes the modifications work to earn top prizes with cars that are undeniable, but are certainly not as their makers intended.

Slide 9: More Advantages of restoration

An original car is what it is. But if you don't like what it is or think you can do better, restoration offers many opportunities.

Slide 10: Changing Times

But still the times have changed. Several class winners at Pebble Beach in 2012 were unrestored cars, and we're not just talking about the preservation classes. This evolution in sensibilities hasn't been sudden by any means as with each passing year there is more and more interest in cars that have been preserved rather than restored.

Slide 11: It Started in Europe

Europeans and Britons have long recognized the glories of cars that haven't been restored. It might be reflected in the vastly smaller numbers of concours and large selection of driving events. In Britain it's not uncommon to see classics being used in somewhat battered or worn condition. As early as the mid-1990s unrestored cars were beginning to be cherished in Europe and were appearing at top events such as the Concorso d'Eleganza Villa d'Este.

12: Honoring Preservation:

In recent years, the movement to keep cars in their original state has gained huge momentum. The Fédération Internationale des Véhicules Anciens most valued classification for collector vehicles is unrestored. In the United States FIVA classification and judging is carried out by the Historic Vehicle Association (HVA) which is FIVA's North American Affiliate.

13: Surviving and Preserving

Many major shows, including Pebble Beach have classes for unrestored vehicles and at a much more grass roots level, the Survivor's Car Show, formerly of St. Charles, Illinois, celebrates much more ordinary cars by documenting the degree to which they retain their original finishes and components. To receive the highest or "Zenith" award, a car must retain 90 percent of its original finishes and components and be suitable to use as a template for the restoration of other vehicles.

14: The Advantages of Restoration-

With the rise of interest in unrestored cars, other issues have arisen. A car that is little more than a pile of rusty parts can be restored. The result is a gleaming show piece. If it is damaged, it is simply repaired. If a high-quality shop is used, the result is indistinguishable from the car before it was damaged.

15. The Perils of Originality

But what happens when the car is an original paint 1928 Stutz or an unrestored 1930 Packard and it's dropped off a lift, damaged in transit or involved in an accident? This poses a whole new set of challenges for owners, insurers and appraisers.

16. Soaring Values of Select Unrestored Cars

This problem is a result of accelerating values for unrestored cars. It seems that the rarer or more desirable a car, the greater the chance that an unrestored example will eclipse a fully-restored version. For example, in December 2011, an

unrestored Aston Martin DB5 sold at RM's London sale for \$546,000, at a time when a really good restored (number 2 condition car) was expected to bring almost \$25,000 less. Granted, a provenance that list George Harrison as a prior owner helped, but consistently, unrestored Aston Martin DB4 and DB5s out-perform their restored counterparts. Meanwhile, an example requiring a complete restoration pulled \$458,000 the prior May.

17. Original or Unrestored: That is the Question

The case of a pair of 1960 MGA Twin Cam factory Sebring racecars is a great example. Their owners—and leading experts—value the cars equally. Yet one is a battle-scarred unrestored survivor and the other is a pristine restored machine. Instincts would say that the perfect car would be worth more. But increasingly, the market is willing to pay the same or more for a car in weaker condition, but retaining the finishes applied at the factory even if those finishes come with a few nicks and scrapes. The biggest difference is not that one car is near perfect and the other isn't. It's that the restored can be made whole if badly damaged. The unrestored car can be repaired, but the result will be 'just another restored car' with modern work techniques and paint systems. Without question, a rare and well-preserved car that is damaged and restored will suffer diminished value.

18: \$1.5 Million for That!

Why was a 1911 Olds Limited worth \$1.5 million yet its finishes had suffered over the years and its tires were dessicated? People are willing to pay a premium for cars that may be aesthetically inferior. It took two years for another Limited—restored this time--to top that price and when it did, the price was doubled at the 2012 RM Millhouse sale.

19: The New Reality

At the Arizona sales in 1911, a Mercedes-Benz 300SL roadster in unrestored condition sold for \$951,000 at a time when top dollar for a fully-restored car was approximately \$755,000. That same week, a Gullwing, which typically sells for quite a bit more--and in this case was in better condition-- brought \$858,000.

20: Valuing a Good Original Car

So not only is there the challenge of what to do when an unrestored car suffers damage, there's the question of how to value it in the first place. Most Price guides are modeled on past sales, which are dominated by restored vehicles. And if you check all comparables, the vast majority will have been restored as well.

21: The Rarer the Car the Greater the Premium for Originality

As the Aston and Mercedes 300SL suggest, for limited production cars—and I can't emphasize this enough-- the value of an unrestored car needs to be set at least one class up. For example, an unrestored car in number 3 condition should probably be valued as the equivalent of a number 2 or even a number 1 car. As for lesser priced machines, like a 1965 Ford Mustang, a fully-restored car and a good original example should probably be fairly close in pricing.

22: What the Savvy Collector Can't do Without

Television's Chasing Classic Host Cars' Wayne Carini feels that original cars are going to become increasingly important and he thinks that one of these days an unrestored car will win a top concours like Pebble Beach. He also asserts that just as the great collections now tend to have a Duesenberg, a Mercedes-Benz 300SL, a Ferrari 275 GTB, a Porsche Speedster and a noteworthy '32 Ford hot rod, in the future they'll have an unrestored car from each decade.

23: An Auction Where the Cars Aren't all Shiny

And as further proof that the model of collecting that we've known for years has shifted, today at the Simeone Foundation Museum in Philadelphia Bonhams is holding the first ever auction consisting solely of unrestored cars.

24: The Trickle Down Theory of Automobile Preservation

So with this rising tide of interest in unrestored vehicles, it's really important that we accept that automobiles are finally coming into line with the rest of the collecting world. Excellent original cars are rising to the top and will be valued accordingly. Right now this rule is applying most to limited production cars in high demand. It will take much longer to trickle down to mass produced cars, just as values of manufactured furniture and home items have been far slower to climb than those of hand-made items.

25: The Challenge of Appraising Unrestored Vehicles

What this means to you is that until there is separate price tracking for unrestored cars, properly valuing a nicely-preserved original machine will be a challenge. But it's a challenge you're more than up to.