



PROGRESS MADE ON 'CHICKEN COUPE' RESTO

Finch Restorations acquires set of rare NOS rear quarter panels as XA Falcon GT body restoration continues.

Restoration on the 'Chicken Coupe' XA Falcon GT hardtop that was auctioned by Grays in 2020 and sent to Finch Restorations in SA is continuing, with body repairs well underway, including the fitting of fabricated and NOS panels.

BODYWORK CONTINUES

As reported previously, the initial phases of this mammoth project involved photographing and documenting every element of the car, cleaning it, stripping it down and cataloguing all components.

After the shell was chemical-dipped and given a layer of protective primer, body repair work completed in the first half of the year included replacement metal sections around the A-pillar and base of the windscreen.

Since then, the front and rear windscreen frames, including the pillars, have had repair panels made and fitted, with new roof gutters fabricated and trial-fitted.

With the roof skin unstitched from the body, new roof sections have been fabricated and prepared for welding, with the gutters to be spotwelded to the inner roof frame before the skin is reattached.

Reproduction sills and seat floor braces have been purchased and small fabrication adjustments made to ensure they match those that came off the car. Finch Restorations say attention to detail in areas like this can't be overlooked, as they make all the difference to observers who really know their Fords.

LUCKY FIND

While Finch Restorations have the skills and experience to fabricate a vast array of

metal panels and structural components, the availability of a set of genuine Ford NOS rear quarter panels presented both an opportunity and a dilemma.

A tip given to the Finch Restorations team led them to the panels, which being NOS, were of better quality, despite those on the coupe being quite repairable.

A meeting of the Finch Restorations team, led by project manager Molly Spalding, ultimately decided that the NOS panels were the way to go, as original Ford Australia steel – when it's good enough – is always a better alternative to a modern patch panel.

"While it's always nice to showcase one's panel fabrication skills, nothing beats the genuine article," Molly explained. "As Ford nuts will agree, New Old Stock parts are like the holy grail to any authentic build and will only add to this restoration."

The existing panels won't be discarded. Given they're repairable, Finch Restorations will see they live on with another XA coupe – or two – in the future.

The rear quarters were unpicked at the same time as the roof skin, with the NOS replacements to be refitted once the inner roof, gutter and pillar work is completed.

Fortuitously, removing the original quarter panels revealed more damage caused by weather and rats over the decades, requiring repair of underlying braces, frames and support panels. Molly confirmed most of this underlying work had been completed at time of writing.

Removing these panels has also allowed rust-inhibiting epoxy to be applied in the factory style, which adds time to the restoration process, but ensures a much better and longer lasting result.

"[With the panels removed] we will be

better able to follow the factory's build process in terms of applying details like anti-flutter/sealer and sound deadener," Molly explained. "This cannot be accurately re-created with all the body panels in place, again giving a closer representation of a concours build."

Rebuild work to be completed shortly includes refitting of the wheel tubs, followed by the aforementioned seat floor braces, boot floor and sills, with those NOS quarter panels next, then the boot opening panels and, finally, the roof skin.

INTERIOR WORK

As reported previously, rats had made nests in the Chicken Coupe's seats and made a real mess of them: "Oh, boy, did the rats have their way with it!" Molly laughed.

Despite the seats and doorcards appearing mostly complete when the Chicken Coupe was auctioned, none of the material is salvageable, so Molly has been working closely with Finch Restorations' specialist trimmer to source cloth and vinyl that's either period correct or as close as possible to what Ford originally fitted to this XA Falcon GT in 1973.



To match this car's 'MacRobertson's Old Gold' orange paint, orange fabric inserts were added to the white vinyl seats, most likely through the selling dealer (Metro Ford in Brisbane), as there's no evidence to suggest Ford offered fabric inserts of this type from the factory.

"Finding the '70s-era 'art deco' woven fabric inserts, has been the biggest hurdle," Molly revealed.

Using surviving samples of this fabric, efforts are currently underway to locate the correct yarn type, size and colour. Once sourced, the material will be recreated from scratch on a loom, ensuring enough is available.

"We'll soon be making patterns from the original seat covers, with close attention to detail, to ensure we get [the replacements] right," Molly added.

ENGINE AND MECHANICAL WORK

Since the factory 351 V8 and four-speed Toploader manual were removed from the car earlier this year – one of the earliest stages of the disassembly process – the engine block, heads and crank have all been tested and machined, ready for reassembly.

Following crack-testing, the transmission has been fully reconditioned, with new bearings and seals added. At time of writing, the four-speed was only awaiting reproduction factory QC paint markings.

"On the 9-inch LSD, crack testing revealed a fracture in the hemisphere cover, so a replacement has been sourced," Molly said.

Of the other mechanical componentry, the brakes are being fully refurbished, retaining original components where it's safe and practical to do so. The booster housing was too corroded around the ID and part number areas to be reused as is, so a decision will be made soon whether to repair this or find a replacement.

Identifying part numbers on the brake lines are being saved where possible, with a new gold zinc plating to be applied in the factory style.

The attention to detail undertaken by Finch Restorations here includes the fitting of new ferrule and snakeskin/basket weave patterned hose, with fittings at each end clocked correctly to avoid coiling or kinking once replaced.

COMMON SENSE APPROACH

With a restoration of this nature, NOS is king, hence the decision to go with the NOS quarter panels. Contacts made through the course of this restoration have led Finch Restorations to other NOS parts, too, like



plastic loom ties, GT bonnet clips and a driver's side door mirror, to name a few.

"We are aiming to preserve the Chicken Coupe's heritage as much as possible. If we're able to refurbish parts in the first instance, then this will rise above all else," Molly said.

However, Molly concedes that things like the brake lines and wiring loom will use new or reproduction components to ensure the safety of the finished build.

"For critical systems, we have been mindful to go for newer sources. Let's face it, if those old and perished brake lines - regardless if

they are NOS - fail and the owner writes the car off, the risk is not worth the trouble."

WORK ONGOING

Finch Restorations' top-quality work on the Chicken Coupe is ongoing. The owner of the car has not set a deadline for completion and, with the effort required to reproduce the interior trim, as well as the repairs, it will take time. Molly expects work to be completed in late 2023.

Watch this space for more updates on this restoration as it progresses.



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