

Beta Maxed

It took 30 years for Clive Moss to find his dream Lancia.
Once he did, that was when the real work started

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Clive Moss has never been without a project. His back catalogue is full of fascinating restorations and upgrades. Many itches have been scratched and automotive challenges overcome, but there was one car he could never quite pin down. 'I had always wanted a Lancia Beta Coupé. I had loved them ever since I saw my first one in the early Eighties. They are such a beautiful car.' After owning a couple that turned out to be basket cases, Clive was worried he would

never find the right one. 'I wanted a car to restore, but it had to have a reasonably sound shell. I spent hours looking on the internet without success, then, one day I saw it... but it was on the other side of the world.' The Australian car was a 1977 2000 and it was just right: 'There were lots of photographs so I could tell it had a decent shell,' says Clive. 'I am happy welding, but with Lancia it is different. Even on shells with minimal rust there will be a huge amount of work – they rot from the inside out. Once it gets started in a damp climate it's virtually game over. ▶

AS FOUND



Fresh off the boat. Aussie import is OK, but Clive wants perfection.

THE RESTORER

Clive Moss trained as an engineer and then moved on to construction. He also worked in specialist painting services. He is a self taught bodywork man, working with a pro to hone his skills. He has restored cars, bikes (and a chopper) and has just passed his bike test.

THE BIG RESTORATION /

That's why I was looking worldwide, I had seen (and owned) ones here that looked OK, but were already too far gone.'

Lots of negotiations via Whatsapp ensued, the seller sending further extensive photographic evidence. Finally Clive parted with the equivalent of around £3000 and arrangements were made for shipping. 'Getting it here wasn't as expensive as I had anticipated. It cost around £1600 plus stamp duty (5 per cent of value) and a couple of hundred quid import duty.'

Arrival in Southampton was a tense affair but as soon as the car was out of the compound Clive realised it was undamaged and as described. 'It was firing on three cylinders by you can forgive that after a voyage around the world.'

He transported it back to Cambridgeshire and formulated his plan. 'I decided to make the car a Series 1 lookalike. It wouldn't be too difficult with the grille being the only main difference. I like the twin headlamp look as well.' Clive searched through the extensive history file and made a note of all the work that had been done. Then he took the entire car apart. 'Even though it was in apparently good condition, I wanted absolute perfection.'

Clive also wanted to get the restoration done to a deadline, under a year. He had a clear aim. 'I had originally wanted a Series 1, but there are literally none left that aren't silly money, or rotten, so I opted for this, the next best thing, an early Series 2.' Being dry state and covered in Waxoyl, the shell was pretty good. But once it was



ABOVE All original instrumentation and radio.

RIGHT Steering rack damper, the last component to go on the car.



stripped it became obvious that even 'pretty good' in Lancia language means 'slightly frilly'. 'I knew I would have to tackle some rust,' says Clive with a knowing look. 'Within a month I had it stripped to a shell and cleaned of its rustproofing.' It then revealed its rotten corners. 'The top of the scuttle was gone on the corners and it needed its front cross member refabricating (they always go). Other than that there was just a bit where the inner wings meet the front of the sills.'

Clive set to with the MIG, rebuilding and reinforcing the cross member and the other areas that needed it. He did all the bodywork up to primer level then it was time for paint. 'I changed the colour from the original Verde Green

TECH SPEC

Engine	1995cc/V4-cyl/OHC
Power	117bhp@5800rpm
Torque	129lb ft@3000rpm
Gearbox	5-speed manual
0-60mph	8.2sec
Top speed	119mph
Fuel economy	24mpg
Weight	2205lb
Price new	£3995
Value now	£15000

'The top corners of the scuttle were gone, as was the front crossmember'

because I don't think that colour really shows of the lines. I had always liked the light blue so that's what I went for. It's a colour I think the coupé looks great in.' Not for want of trying, however, Clive could not find the correct paint code. The closest Pale Blue he could find that was easy to formulate was Porsche Mexico Blue, 'it's a very close match and looks great.'

Clive then donned his protective gear and breathing apparatus and painted the shell himself. 'I'm happy using two-pack paint, but I still had to do it twice. I wasn't happy with some of the prep I had done. I redid the face filling on the swages and painted again. Much better second time.'

The pursuit of excellence

Clive started on the engine early on to take a break from welding the shell. He stripped it down and sent the heads away to be skimmed. He also had the block rebored with new high performance pistons sourced from the USA. 'It required specialised head skimming, being a 'v' head it had to be done in a special jig.' RH Engineering Services in Kings Lynn did the honours.

Clive cleaned and repainted everything in the correct shade of grey and built the engine back up. The engine was only on around 48,000km but, once again, for Clive, only perfection was good enough. All new bearings and an entirely rebuilt braking system went into the mix despite the huge history file and rigorous servicing that had gone into the Beta over the years. He removed the rear load sense valve, rebuilt all the calipers and plumbed in the lines. 'There isn't a single part of the car that I haven't taken apart, checked, rebuilt or renewed.'

Getting the engine finely tuned was the next hurdle. 'The carb was the biggest issue. The original had an emissions system that reused all the vapour from the tank. It is a standard issue in Australia. I liked it and I wanted to replicate it but the carb was beyond repair. I bought brand new Weber, almost the same as the one that came with the car, bar a manual choke conversion. I added the extra pipes from tank, adapted a new pipe union on the carb and tuned it. It works a treat.'

Clive uprated the cooling system with a bigger core radiator and separate cooling fan and thermo switch for good measure. Moving on to the exhaust system Clive helped the breathing (and the noise) by making his own exhaust. 'I made a two-inch exhaust straight through system with my own pipe benders. Careful measurements were required but it looks good now and sounds great.'

The home stretch

Fiddly jobs took up the next few months. Clive unravelled, unpicked, cleaned and restored the wiring loom, 'Cars from hot dry places always have brittle wiring. It was essential that every part of the loom was checked, refreshed and made sound.' Clive also stripped, cleaned and revived all the lights and instruments.

Clive wanted to keep as much of the original interior as possible: 'The inside of the Beta is as beautiful and perfect as the exterior. I didn't want to mess with it.'

Here's how Clive did it



1 JULY 2019 Crusty

Despite dry state origins, the Beta needed a new battery tray and crossmember plus further 'tidying'.



2 JULY 2019 Scuttle issues

Top corners of the scuttle surround required work among other areas. Lancia metal with rust built in.



3 SEPT 2019 Phwoar V4

Clive rebuilt the engine with new pistons, valves and cam. Skimmed rebored, flowed and ported.

OCT 2019 Porsche perfect

Bodywork complete and Mexico Blue paint applied. The next few months were spent fitting all the new and revived componentry including the rebuilt engine and gearbox.

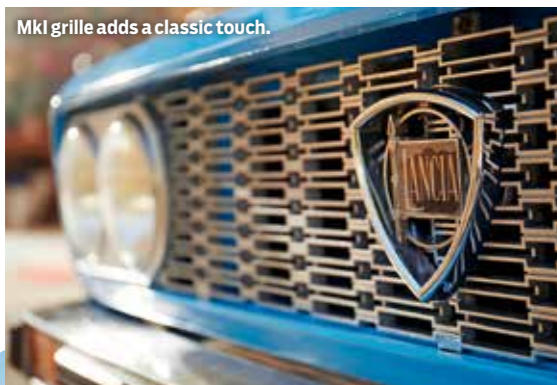


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Protect and survive

The final bodywork task was the complete rustproofing of the entire car. Every hole and box section and the entire underbody were treated with a combination of wax and chassis black.

Mk1 grille adds a classic touch.



BELOW LEFT Limited rear vision, but who's looking back anyway?

BELOW RIGHT Better-than-new 1995cc V4.





WHAT'S IT LIKE TO DRIVE

Clive is right, the inside of a Beta is as perfectly formed as the outside. It's bright, airy, the cosy driver's seat hugs your buttocks for maximum feedback and the driving position is pure Italy. Long arm, short leg.

Acceleration is brisk thanks to the uprated Lampredi V4 up front and while Clive's home brewed straight

through exhaust might not add many horses, it certainly provides joyful music. You can play tunes in this Beta.

The MacPherson strut suspension is firm but compliant and coupled with the short wheelbase teases you to go into tight corners a bit too fast. I play slingshot roulette with increasing confidence. Rear vision is rubbish

but you'll never want to look back anyway, until you get out.

Beta stylist, Piero Castagnero, was a clever chap. I know this because, at the end of my drive, after all that road fun, I walk away, look back and wish I was taking it home. It's addictive. A bit like crack cocaine, or watching puppy videos on Youtube.



This meant weeks of careful cleaning and repair. In the end the only part of the interior that needed replacing was the door cards. 'Again, the heat had got to them and I couldn't get them back. I made templates and cut the new boards out before covering them with a vinyl of an identical grain which I then repainted with the correct colour plastic paint.'

One of the biggest faffs involved the heater box. 'It's unobtainable, so when I discovered that all the delicate controls and their connecting lines and levers were broken my only option was research or repair.' Clive took it apart and painstakingly worked out what was required for the delicate mechanism. 'This is where the forums come into their own. I put a call out and eventually found the parts I needed. There will always be someone somewhere who has something, even something rare, that they might be willing to part with. Not cheap though.'

The final job before putting everything back together again was a decent round of rustproofing. 'Even though the shell was relatively rust free, it is still made of that special Lancia steel, so no corners were cut here. I treated and waxed every corner and hole I could find. The problem with the Beta, like most contemporary Lancias is that it rusts from the inside out. You just can't take any chances.'

Bringing it together

Clive's workshop was humming, but there was no room. 'I am so glad that I had things labelled and kept them labelled as I worked.' Long days and busy nights followed, reconstructing the Beta, building it anew. 'It's a dream car, and it was a real pleasure putting it back together. Finishing it was awesome, plus I did it in just under a year, start to finish.' As for that first drive in May 2020? 'Honestly it was like being back in the Eighties when they were new. That is point of aiming to do something like this really, really well. You can recreate a car as it was when it was new. That's proper nostalgia for me.'

'I'm really looking forward to getting it out and driving it in the sunshine and then, when we can, taking it to shows. I can't wait to show it.'

For anyone wishing to do their own Beta there's a simple piece of advice. 'Find the best shell you can afford. When you do find something, check it in detail. Look inside box sections if you can.' ■

USEFUL CONTACTS

Beatboyz Lancia Beta Forum, betaboyz.co.uk

Lancia Motor Club, lanciamc.co.uk

RH Engineering, rhenginecentre.com

Restorer of the Year 2021

Later this year you will be able to vote for your favourite restoration featured in PC via practicalclassics.co.uk. Then you can look forward to the 2021 Practical Classics Classic Car and Restoration Show here we will present the most popular restoration.

