

PROJECT SA: Part 1

U-Hell and Hurricanes

By BRIAN SIEBER
RXTuner Staff



BEING THAT RXTUNER is a “tuner” magazine we thought it was necessary to have a tuner project car that we could build from the ground up and track it’s progression for you, our readers. Ryan and I debated back and forth on what we wanted, even went so far as to test drive a ‘93 R1 that a friend was going to let go at a very good price. (insert Dan’s FD) As some of you probably know from my customer service emails we are not a big publishing house with lots of magazine minions and deep pockets. Our limited—read poor—budget just wouldn’t allow us to dump an enormous amount of cash on a project car. Ryan and I both have our FCs, but that’s kind of like cheating wouldn’t you say? So, when my friend Adam (Mazdaspeed7) offered us the donation of a lifetime—a 1979 SA—we jumped on it. My first car was a 1980 RX-7 GL model, so for me, the idea of having one of the first Sevens in this country held a special appeal.

The 1979 model RX-7 (SA22) was the first RX-7 imported into the United States. It was a great handling, good performance, no-nonsense sports car available at an attractive price which made it extremely popular. This first generation RX-7 was powered by a 105-bhp, carbureted 12A rotary engine, not much by today’s standards, but at the time was one of the fastest, best-handling import sports cars available at that price point. The first gen was highly successful. Needless to say, our goal for this project car is to maintain the original heart and soul of the SA and bring it’s performance levels on par or to exceed today’s import sports car standards. Personally, I want to see this thing just embarrass a new 350z on the street! :D

So, after several instant messages and phone calls back and forth with Adam, we set up a day and time for us to go pick up the car. My good friend Wayne Smith, an avid rotary fan who’s done more than his fair share of helping out with the magazine offered to come along. He was just as excited as us, as his history crosses paths with the RX-7 in several way and though he favors VWs, he’s attended many local meets and attended Rotary Revolution 2004 with me. Wayne is along for the long haul and his participation, friendship and time is greatly appreciated.

The SA was residing in Adam’s backyard in Savannah Georgia, protected by a thick layer of dust and pine needles. We set off from Jacksonville, Florida—

about two hours south of Savannah on a hot Saturday morning. We loaded the mini-van with drinks, tools and tunes and headed off to U-Haul to get the hitch and trailer that we reserved the night before. From here on out U-Haul will now be referred to as “U-Hell”. What should have taken 15 minutes to install a hitch and pick up a trailer was drawn out into a three hour, mind numbing ordeal. I won’t get into details as it hurts my brain to do so, but I will say, if you have to use U-Haul...DON’T.

With the sun at it’s highest point in the day we headed out again...trailer in tow. We arrived at Adam’s house after an uneventful trip North and got our first glimpse of the future project car. You really need vision, or rather, a vivid imagination when you start a full-bore restoration project.

My first look upon the ‘79 made me think I needed some hardcore hallucinogenic drugs on top of my already vivid imagination. You might say it was a diamond in the turd, in the mud and pine straw in the rough. It was rough. But as soon as I saw those split tail lights my mind immediately started whirring into action. Turbo! Mariah wide-body! Slick paint! Custom Interior! If you squint really hard and look at it at the right angle you can just about see that sexy little car hiding under the years of decay. This was a special car that deserved the kind of attention we were about to bestow upon it.

We removed most of the pine needles and prepped the car for travel. We started to push it to get it up on the trailer and it didn’t budge. The front right brake caliper was frozen. Adam quickly removed the wheel, then the caliper and she was ready to roll. The SA was strapped down, secured and Adam said his goodbyes. The trip back was uneventful—except for the “Oh MY GOD! We’re being tailed by a First Gen!” jokes. There were plenty of those.

We got her home to Wayne’s garage—he sacrificed both of his GTIs for the cause—and put her away for safe keeping while we planned our next steps.

Shane of Rotaryworks.com, Middleburg, Florida for you locals, has graciously offered to donate a refurbished 12A engine and has even offered to do all of the porting and prep at no extra cost. We’re in the process of determining what seals and assorted internals we want to use for the build. Our goal for the SA is a 400RWHIP, boosted 12A and we’re now left with determining which snail and fuel system will fit the bill.

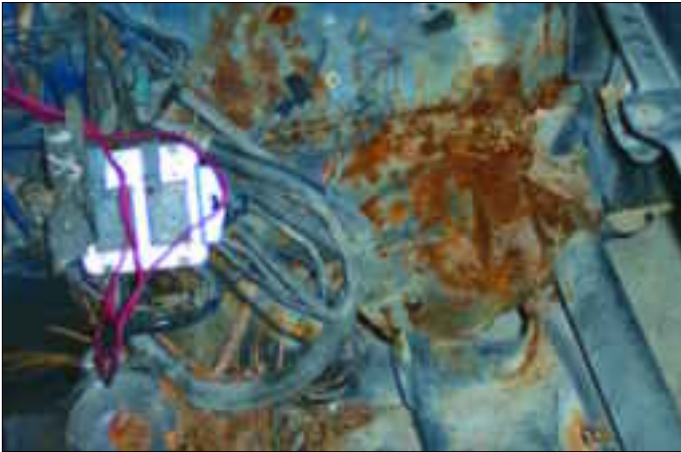
I will soon be meeting with Tracy of TGFabrication to discuss his participation in the fabrication and body work for our project. Tracy is a highly respected member of the Northeast Florida racing community and is known locally as one of the best fabricators in town. Tracy has many years of rotary experience



Ready for the ride back to Jax.



Passenger-side engine bay rust and wrinkles.



Driver-side engine bay rust and wrinkles.



Front cap removed.

under his belt and maintains several FDs for local customers. Check out the build on his 911! http://www.tgfab.com/new_page_4.htm

The recent rash of hurricanes had knocked down several trees in Wayne's backyard, thankfully they didn't fall on the house—or the garage :D This past Saturday I loaded up the Protege 5 with the chain-saw, the wife's digital camera (a rogue wave from Shamu destroyed my trusty Kodak) and my son, Nikolas, to head on over to Wayne's for a photoshoot/tree surgery get-together.

I tried to get shots of the most serious damage. As you can see in the photos, the damage and rust seem to be the result of a front-end hit. There is some crumpling and rusting, but the frame seems to be untouched. We'll have to decide whether the replace the front with a clip from a donor car or see if Tracy



Rear deck cancerlicious!

would be willing to fabricate something for us. As for the rest of the body, you can see there's only one bit of cancer on the rear deck that will have to be cleaned out and filled. Wayne and I will do as much as we can ourselves in the coming weeks to prep the shell for our vendors. This includes stripping the car down to bare metal, stripping the interior and pulling any extraneous systems off the car to make the fab and installs easier and cleaner for everyone involved.

Thankfully most of the sheet metal is straight and free of dings and dents. The missing panels and bumpers are stored in the cabin along with the headlights. Aside from prepping for paint and installing the to-be-determined body kit, there shouldn't be too much body necessary. The headliner is in excellent shape, and will probably remain. The original interior is black on black and we'd like to keep that theme no matter what we do. Due to the excessive cracking and peeling, the dash will need to be replaced along with most, if not all of the plastics and door cards.

We really want this to be your, the reader's, project car and as time goes on we'll post threads on the forums in which we'll be asking for your guidance on what we should do with the project. For this installment, I'll start a thread on www.rxtuner.com, with a link on the 7club site, asking for your opinions on the



One clean side.

car in it's current state and what you'd like to see for future installments. We'll need input on just about everything, from paint schemes, engine management and interior/exterior customization to wheels and suspension.



Rough roof.

Make sure to check the [RXTuner](http://www.rxtuner.com) site out in the coming weeks to participate in

the polls and to provide feedback on the project. Let us know what you want to see as all input is greatly appreciated. There'll be lots of parts and services that will be needed throughout the project, that we'll make known as needs arise, and if you have any suggestions regarding vendors or would like to donate yourself please contact us and let us know how you can help. **RX**

