

Tales of Restoring an IMSA GTU Car



He added that the team's sister car was in Corona Light Beer livery number 88. We ended our two hour-long conversations with a tentative agreement that I would purchase the car pending more information and detailed photos.

My first phone call on Monday morning was to Pablo Mobius, asking him to hold off on upgrades to my old car, at least until Friday while I continued my research on the new car. Thirty phone calls later; I discovered that the last owner of the car had raced some Porsches afterwards and now lived in nearby Venice Beach.

Further phone calls to Mazda USA, virtually every Mazda Performance Company and Tuner, from Roger Mandeville on the east coast to Joe Huffaker on the west coast and every body between, as well as the IMSA series revealed nothing. On a whim, I decided to call old friend and



Porsche guru, David Bouzaglou who said, "Your man is Bob Farham. He used to race in IMSA and now has a body shop in Venice Beach CA".

Twenty-eight hours after leaving a message, Bob finally called back. He described his experiences running in the IMSA series, his team, and the Corona car. Halfway into the conversation, he casually mentioned, "Oh by the way, I've had the second car, the Corona Light number 88 car sitting here in my garage for the past 10 years, but it is missing the engine transmission and a rear upright". After my initial excitement, we settled on Friday afternoon for me to visit him and inspect the car.

It wasn't until after I hung up the phone that I realized why the thought of a car with a missing upright seemed so familiar. The conversation that I had with Richard eight months earlier suddenly came back to me. So after a call with Richard, followed by another twenty to thirty calls to everybody

STORY AS TOLD BY BENOIT PEQUEUR

IN THE SUMMER OF 2003, I was trying to sell my 1988 13B peripheral -port Mazda RX7 racecar on Ebay, and was looking for a tube frame racecar to replace it. One of the Ebay bidders, Richard Gray, had come over to inspect my car and mentioned in passing that he had seen a former IMSA GTU racecar for sale about eight months ago. But he felt that the car would be too expensive to restore as it was missing the engine, transmission, and the rear upright. My dream car has always been to own an IMSA GTU class RX7 and even though Richard decided not to buy my car, I immediately began my search for this car on Ebay. Sadly my search came up unsuccessful, but I saved my search settings for an automatic update.

As the season ended in late 2003, I still hadn't sold my car so I decided to repaint it, add a new carbon wing, and just work on some finishing details for the 2004 racing season. It was the first Saturday of January 2004 and I had spent the day delivering my car from the body shop to my fabricator Pablo Mobius so he could reinforce my roll cage and install my new Racetech seat. When I got home, I checked my email and my Ebay search alert showed an ex-IMSA Mazda RX7 for sale. I immediately sent an email inquiry for more details and pictures to the seller who was in Pennsylvania.

The next morning, I finally spoke to the seller who informed me that the car was not original as it had been fitted with an incomplete 20b three-rotor engine, as opposed to the original 13b two-rotor peripheral port engine. While he was not sure about the complete history of this car, he did know that this car formerly belonged to a two-car team. This particular car was in Corona Beer livery number 72, which he had since repainted white.

that I could think of who used to crew on IMSA teams during the era (thank God I was calling from work "Pennyweb.com", I found the original Chassis builder, Joecarr Racing, based in Petaluma, CA. It took a quick phone call and very little convincing for them to agree to try building me a new upright. Now all that was left was for me to transfer the engine and transmission from my old car to the new one.

I made Bob an offer for half the amount of the other car, which he accepted. "What the hell, take it out of the garage" was the exact reply. Lest you think the hard part is over? YEAH RIGHT!

Once the car arrived at my garage, I began to dismantle it in preparation for a full ground up rebuild. At the same time, I began the complete dismantling of my old racecar so that I could sell every part except the engine and transmission on Ebay. In the end, it took about 65 auctions to sell off the pieces. But trying to investigate who made each part on the new car and where it was made on was like trying to piece together a 1,000-piece jigsaw puzzle with no picture, while being partially blind!

As we approached the middle of April, the car looked to be near completion except the infamous rear upright, was still a no show. I had not heard from Joecarr so, I since turned to Cliff Cappos from Unique Metal Product, a fabricator

near San Diego, for help. We determined that the spindle was from a Mid 70's Corvette with a Porsche 930 flange that is bolted to short off road axles connected to a Speedway Engineering rear end. Now I just had to make everything bolt together onto a Mazda

RX7! I learned about CAD Design, CNC equipment and EDM wire cutting. When you start getting parts at places where they have NASA certification logos mounted on the wall like "Hamilton Engineering of La Crescenta, CA," you know it's not going to be cheap.

Finally on April 24 Cliff Cappos delivers on the new custom built upright, and ironically we meet in the parking lot of Mazda USA in Irvine being the halfway point between us both

Through multiple forum postings and even more phone calls, I received a lot of information about the original owner of the car. I have to admit that I received a lot of help from passionate people and it will take me some time to personally thank all of them

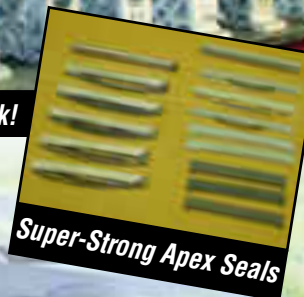
My car was previously owned by Mike Henderson of San Diego; and the sister car belonged to John Daley from San Diego as well. I finally was able to talk to Mike and got a better understanding about the history of the car as well as valuable technical information. He told me who originally built the car and was surprised to learn it was Unlimited Metal Product! I immediately called Cliff and said, "you never told me you built that car." Cliff was

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equally surprised and revealed that he bought the business in '93 so it must have been the previous owner

As for the rest of the car, most of it was pretty straight forward, especially when my teammate and dear friend, Tim Spencer, the guru of knowing the

most useless specification on parts that no one has ever heard of, got involved in this project "For once his extensive knowledge paid off". HRP World was a tremendous help as they sourced and rebuilt the air jacks, as well as the brake and fuel systems and numerous pieces. Our friend Tony Woodford at AWR Racing also fabricated some parts as well as Pablo Mobius from Palmdale CA, while Mazda USA provided additional advice and directed me on the right track. Despite all the outside sources of help, it still took close to three months of 20 hours weekends with Tim, myself and another friend, Kevin Corish, to get the car to its current state.

In May we were invited by Mazda to display the car at the Road and Track Sports Car Invitational at the Mazda Laguna Seca Raceway. Despite the tight deadline we were able to show the car, although unable to run it. I'm hoping to have the car to be race ready by the end of August where I will campaign it with HSR vintage races and NASA Endurance series, with a hope to run the Thunderhill 25 Hours Endurance in December 2004. The car will also be at the Sevenstock at the Mazda R&D center in Irvine California in September.

So here is my advice before taking on a project such as mine:

- 1) Make sure you have an understanding wife and baby!
- 2) Get an Ebay account.
- 3) Make sure you have good friends as you will ask for their help a lot. Your neighbor will hide from you knowing you will always be asking for help.
- 4) Be very patient and nice to people that you will call five times in a row within an hour.
- 5) Refinance your house and hope your baby will be too dumb to go to college.

Summary of The #88 Corona Light car:

- Built for Mike Henderson/ John Daley, owner of the Daley Corporation .
- Fuel Injection system built by Crower.
- A total of two (2) Identical cars were built; the #72 Corona Beer sponsored car and the #88 Corona Light Beer sponsored car.
- The maiden event for the #88 car was the 1989 Portland IMSA GT race where John finished 10th in the 90 minute IMSA GTU race.
- The next outing was at Laguna Seca Raceway, followed by the season finale at the Del Mar Grand Prix.
- In 1990, the car DNF'd at Topeka, San Antonio and Del Mar, but managed a 10th place at Portland again.
- The car was later sold to Bob Farnham and Gary Biehl of Redondo Beach under the "Beach Boys Racing" banner where it continued racing in 1991, at Laguna Seca, followed by the season finale at Del Mar where it managed a 7th place finish, its best to date.
- In 1992, Gary Biehl gave it another shot at Laguna Seca where he finished 11th in class .
- In 1993 the team sporadically entered races including Sebring and the Daytona 24 hours. **RX**



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