

Veneering or “Ironing away with a smoothing dash!”

By David Hague

It is possible for the amateur to replace the veneer on a Y-type. Fortunately all the veneered surfaces are flat, which makes the clamping needed when gluing much easier. It does however take a good deal of patience and it is not cheap. I have just completed mine during the course of a chassis-up restoration, which meant that all the woodwork was off the car already — if it is not, this would be step one. We are talking, of course, about the dashboard, lower windscreen rail (facia rail) and door cappings.

Much of the old veneer was either already flaking off, or would come off with a sharpish scraper blade. For more firmly adhering areas I used a DIY hot air gun and scraper. Then I removed all traces of old adhesive so had a good flat surface to work on. New veneer was purchased from Messrs J. Crispin & Sons of Shoreditch (Tel. +44 (0)171-139-4857) who also offered much helpful advice and hints over the phone. The veneer is European walnut burr (the best), which is beautifully figured due to being cut from the base of a branch or trunk. For this same reason, it is less readily available and not normally in large sheets — hence the cost.

It is therefore necessary to use two sheets of veneer for the full width of the dashboard — 36 inches. By using two sheets cut consecutively and turning one sheet over, one can achieve the desirable book match effect i.e. matching left and right halves. In fact, originally even the door cappings were made from two pieces book matched. However, I believe this was probably done to save money rather than from any aesthetic considerations.

On the question of cost, the walnut burr veneer sheets cost £12/sq ft for long sheets or £6/sq ft for short, i.e. 1 ft. maximum length. I chose the longer sheets, as otherwise I would have needed to use four pieces across the dash with a double book match. Total cost of veneer for dash, facia rail and four door cappings was £131 including VAT and post & packing — 4 sheets of veneer each approximately 24” x 14”.

The next stage was to carefully decide where the pieces were to be cut from, The most important area being the dashboard, this was selected first trying to avoid the little holes and imperfections in the veneer as much as possible, including those on the adjacent sheet for the book match. The other areas were then roughly mapped out.

Veneer when purchased is rather fragile and very wavy, so the next thing was to make it flat. This was done by first spraying the sheet with water from a greenhouse plant spray, ensuring all the surface was covered. It was then clamped

between two stiff boards — I used 1” MDF with several sheets of newspaper either side of the veneer. After a couple of days I unclamped the sheet and roughly cut out the required shape, allowing ½” or so extra all round and clamped again. The following day, I replaced the damp newspaper with dry, and clamped again. After another day or so it was ready to use, but I must add a cautionary note here. It will start to curl again fairly quickly, so you only have about 30 minutes to work. However, if it curls too much, it can be re-moistened and re-clamped without problem — this is not a job to rush!

I used an old-fashioned animal glue — remember the type you have to heat up in a double skinned pot (my pot was an old saucepan with an empty can inside!). Having got everything ready, I then unclamped the veneer, made the accurate cut for the centre of the dashboard or facia rail, applied the hot glue to the wood and spread it quickly. The veneer was carefully placed on top, then a thin sheet of polythene, followed by quickly clamping the work together. The polythene was used to avoid sticking the veneer to the clamping boards.

At this stage I should say that although I was advised to use animal glue, I think I would try a modern PVA adhesive if I did the job again. The animal glue was recommended since any areas not sticking well could be re-heated with a warm iron and clamped locally. Unfortunately, since the glue cooled very quickly, I had rather too many areas not sticking well, although they did respond well to the warm iron treatment. After leaving overnight, the clamps could be removed and the veneer cut near the correct size, final trimming being with a sandpaper block. After locally treating any bubbles as above, the next stage was to fill in any small holes or cracks in the veneer, small ones with Brummer stopper (similar to plastic wood), larger ones by inserting tiny pieces of veneer, glued and clamped again.

I then sealed the surface with glue size, (as used for wallpapering) before rubbing down with progressively finer grades of sandpaper. As I could not obtain a good colour match with the stopper, I carefully touched up the treated areas with a little wood dye and an artists brush before the final sanding. The newly veneered woodwork was then given several coats of polyurethane varnish, removing any imperfections with fine sandpaper between coats. After hardening for two weeks, it was wet flatted with 1200 grade, wiping off excess water quickly to avoid damage to the veneer. Finally, rubbing compound was applied followed by T-cut and a final polish to bring up the desired deep lustre.