

Four weeks in the life of Rover SD1 Twin Plenum Vitesse - D330 ENH

I acquired my Rover SD1 Twin Plenum Vitesse in July 1993 and spent the next ten months eliminating every possible fault that I could find. Now it is late May 1994 and its time for the big decision. How much money should I commit to body- work repairs and the consequent re-spray? Let's face it, the car was not in too bad nick following a paint job by the previous owner two years earlier but it was scabby low down and getting worse in about nine places. They could have been spot treated with amateur skills for not very much money and even some of the professional advice was sceptical, stating that it looked perfect so why bother?

But one chap was consistent! Phil Smith of Bedford declined to undertake the work in November 1993. His advice was to "give it another winter to get worse" and warned that even if he treated the scabs locally and did a good job on the associated panels below the line of the side-rubbing strips there were still three places above that line including the roof which needed attention and of the twelve main exterior doors/panels only three were unaffected so rust would soon re-appear on the parts of the arches and door bottoms that were not replaced. Just like it was doing now, two years on from the efforts of the previous owner.

In spring 1994 his recommendation of a complete re-spray to follow new metal replacement of all wheel arches, the bottom three inches of the doors and defer a decision regarding the sills until they had been stripped to bare metal came as no surprise. He did caution me that it was radical and had pitfalls regarding possible door warping, but the long term advantage was that the rust would not reappear at those places for a long time and if it broke through elsewhere it wouldn't be serious and could be treated locally.

Phil knew my motive for upgrade was to keep the car as a hobby vehicle and that I was on a "budget" due to my recent retirement, so we discussed ways of limiting cost to something affordable. He suggested that because I was pretty handy with the spanners, I should strip the car myself and deliver him as near an empty shell as possible saving me several days of expensive work. We agreed a price and a finish date and I went away to contemplate the task ahead! Four weeks before the Rover SD1 Club Nationals at Gaydon and one day before Phil wanted the drivable shell delivered to his shop, I started stripping, labeling and storing the following parts in my garage:-

- All interior door trim, door handles, electric mirrors and exterior chrome trim.
- All tail-gate trim, radio aerial, rear wiper system, ventilation flaps.
- All rear lights, hatch surrounds, rear trim panels, rear bumper, towing gear.
- All interior "A/B/C/D/E post" upper/lower trim panels, courtesy lights/switches.
- All seats (except drivers), glove boxes/lights, boot carpets, doorstep chromes.
- All front lights, indicators, belly pan, front spoiler, front bumper, grills, wipers.

The side rubbing-strips would be re-used if possible but were left in place for expert removal as were the roof gutter chrome strips. Thus it was delivered to the body shop with only engine, transmission, wheels, instruments, driver's seat and steering

wheel in evidence, enabling the car to be driven. As soon as the car was delivered in close convoy with family members the damaged front screen and the rear screen were removed by Dennis of "Bedford Windscreens" and Phil was ready to start.

Within two days it resembled an automotive version of Frankenstein's monster. Great patches of multi-colored exterior with welded stitching all over the place. I watched Terry the welder at work and his method on the doors was to make a single tack, cool it immediately with a sopping wet cloth then, moving elsewhere, tack and cool again. He explained this technique would eliminate any warping tendency on the SD1's extra wide doors. Eventually there were new L-section strips stitched and folded along the length of all the door bottoms and new wheel arches welded in the same manner. The sills were also fully stripped and no corrosion to be seen. So the rust was not coming from within. Good news! A hole as big as my thumb behind the near side front suspension turret was patched as was a roof scab at the top nearside windscreen area. The challenge on the tailgate was to reproduce the original double curved shape along the bottom of the door, which came out pretty good.

With the car now jacked up in the body shop, I retrieved the wheels and delivered them to "Fred the Tread" at Woburn Sands where they removed the tires for "Pristine Wheels" to bead blast away all the paint and corrosion then stove enamel and lacquer the alloys as new! "Fred the Tread" then fitted new metal valves and cleaned-up my nearly new tires (including one new one) and balanced the wheels with the weights hidden inside the rim, all in two days!

In the same period I cleaned up all twenty wheel nuts and washers back to bare metal with files and emery paper and delivered them to "Vehicle and General Plating" at Arlesey where they bright-chromed the lot for fifteen quid. Upon returning the wheels and nuts I retrieved the side rubbing strips that had since been removed from the car and in my workshop, peeled off the sticky pads and cleaned them up. Those sticky pads are a real problem to remove! Two were sufficiently damaged to justify new replacements.

Back in my garage the bumpers were disassembled. The irons and tow-bar metalwork was sandblasted for five quid and then sprayed red oxide and matt black. A cracked over-rider was repaired with cyanoacrylate which seems to melt into the plastic. They were delivered to Phil for painting. He removed all traces of waxes, other silicones and paint, then primed and finished them in satin black as near as possible to original texture using a paint formulated for Glass Reinforced Plastic. I retrieved them early from the paint shop for re-assembly to their bright trim with some new retainers as required, irons, brackets and headlamp wash pipes/nozzles. The deep front spoiler had also been delivered to the shop for painting. Fortunately it had no damage other than a missing lug which could be substituted with a customized bracket made from soft aluminum.

As for the interiors I was able to deep-clean all the upholstery and carpets and attend to the replacement grey fabric on the "E" posts. I avoided Evostick so it wasn't that easy to get good adhesion until discovering a spray contact adhesive, the trick being not to try and get it too taut, but lightly water-shrink the fabric in-situ after the glue was well

set. The door interior plastic trims were cleaned using domestic carpet cleaner with troublesome stains being carefully eased out with thinners. Both hard plastic skirts around the bottom of the front seats were hanging loose so I strengthened around the damaged holes with doublers for permanent repair. An easy job with the seats removed.

The floor boards from the boot area were O.K. but discolored and the metal edges at the front of the boards were loose on their rivets which were removed and replaced with suitable screws. The wood was cleaned and sanded smooth and the whole lot sprayed satin black from an aerosol, as were the internal plastic covers for the rear light clusters, rear wash/wipe and sun-roof motor.

The rear spoiler was a mess! Two studs were sheared and it was fading to grey. The damaged studs were drilled from the metal plates buried in the molding and new ones screwed in. It was then rubbed and scrubbed with anything that would remove multiple layers of wax and silicones that had been variously applied since new. Why do we use that stuff, it always looks worse in the end? The unit was then blacked with multiple applications of black boot polish, making it really easy to maintain. When re-mounted, gaskets made from an old inner tube would be used.

All five door handles/locks were stripped, cleaned, greased and re-assembled but not before the concave finger recesses and other black parts on hatch lock were prepared and re-painted in black satin. Likewise the electric door mirrors were disassembled so the cast metal mounts and plastic surrounds could be similarly painted. Identical treatment to the window lift switches produced a smart finish in comparison to the prior faded plastic. Grills and air ventilation intake were prepared with wire wool, cleaned and painted.

Having previously successfully separated the off side headlamp for cleaning and re-sealing I tried the same with the near side unit but it wouldn't split so it was cleaned up inside with soft cloth bound to bendy wire and canes before sealing the bottom edge with silicon. One of the rear light clusters was strangely warped and it took a while to figure out why. What had happened was a seriously overheated earth connection to one of the retaining studs which had distorted the plastic lens molding splitting it from the interior cover. A fiver secured a good replacement from the local breaker.

It took all of the three weeks the stripped car was at the body shop to carry out the off-car work mentioned above before the day came to fetch it home. I turned up just as Phil was fitting the side rubbing strips and his mate was buffing the last coat of polish. It was superb! Apart from the obvious pristine finish there was new paint right into the door shuts, hinge areas, scuttle and bonnet under-edges. The window surrounds were fresh black again and the sills had been treated with stone-guard paint that would normally have an orange peel finish but had been rubbed down nearly smooth at my request before being finished to original body color. Within the wheel arches was treated to fresh black sealant as was the rear panel below the bumper line. A new windscreen had been inserted by Dennis and the rear glass refitted to the hatch. I paid the bill and with no running lights at all, drove home in close convoy with a couple of family members and parked it arrogantly on the front drive

The condition of the engine bay was not too bad, being dirty rather than paint damaged. First I stripped most of the readily detachable parts from the engine bay such as air cleaner, air-flow meter, resistor pack, wash bottle, expansion tank, fuel filter, battery, brackets, etc, exposing as much of the bay paintwork as possible. I then T-Cut all the accessible paint inside the bay and bonnet. It was a remarkable transformation which did also expose some scratched and messy bits of paint which were prepared and sprayed using a matching aerosol. A very close match it was too! The under bonnet blanket looked a bit of a mess now the rest of the car was so much improved with bits hanging loose and some exposed areas of contact adhesive from prior unsuccessful repairs. All this was patiently removed with petrol and the blanket secured with impact glue and extra clips. I then masked up everything and lightly sprayed the pad with black acrylic paint. Now the car was ready for re-assembly commencing with the engine bay with all its components on fresh black painted brackets as appropriate.

I found the front bumper, deep spoiler and belly pan a really difficult job to refit. They seem to continually interact with each other and I'm sure there is a good sequence I haven't discovered yet! Anyway, the headlamp washers worked OK without seepage for which I was grateful. With the badge, grills, head-lamps and indicators refitted and new clips for the chrome finishers it was already looking a pretty picture from the front.

At the rear, the tow-bar was re-assembled and fitted first, followed by the rear bumper, badge bar and rear light assemblies with very special attention to sealing all these units with appropriate gaskets or body caulking to prevent water ingress. At this time I discovered that a previous owner had incorrectly wired in the trailer socket on the wrong side of the bulb failure unit so I corrected his errors and tidied up all the local wiring inside the boot for good measure.

The door locks presented a different problem altogether. There was simply not enough room for my large arthritic hands to work properly in the confined space but my son-in-law, Malcolm, has quite small hands and is a very good and patient mechanic. He needed all these attributes and a lot more, to install the door locks and linkages without damaging any paintwork. It would be a lot easier if there was no glass in the doors. After that everything else was plain sailing to refit door interior panels and trim, glove boxes, interior lights, courtesy switches, seats (but not before triple cleaning the main carpets which had attained a red/grey hue during their time at the paint shop), all the rear hatch trim, carpets and boards, rear wash-wipe motor, new rear finisher, radio aerial, etc. I even found a petrol hatch lock chrome ring in better nick than mine and replaced a broken number plate lamp-holder with items from the local breakers yard. The headlining was double cleaned using foaming upholstery cleaner with clever soft brush attached to the aerosol. It worked really well! New number plates were fitted and yea verily, the store of parts was empty!

So! In four weeks front-to-back the job was finished on 9th July 1994, one day before the Rover SD1 Club Nationals at Gaydon, which, as it turned out was being shared by maniacs peppering the display area with buckshot from a nearby shooting range. Is it

any wonder that I was so angry when I ran up the hill to confront the organizer and challenge his right to life, even though he had his 12 bore loaded and cocked! After all that work and money ploughed into a new paint job, wouldn't you have too?

Ramon

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