

RESTO HERO

'It was condemned by a professional restorer'

Bought as a wreck for £150 and working on a budget, Will Goldsmith turned his Alpine GT into a concours challenger

WORDS NIGEL CLARK PHOTOS BOB ATKINS

OWNER PROFILE

Will Goldsmith is an electrical engineer and has worked on high voltage power supplies. He has a natural gift for learning to understand and fix pretty well any mechanical object. Will's taste in classics is eclectic, including Minis, a BMW M3 and even a classic camper van.



Will Goldsmith, by his own admission, is a perfectionist. He says: 'However well I've done a job, I always strive for a higher standard and if it's not quite right, I always want to do it all over again.' His personal philosophy of perfection makes the starting point for his restoration all the more surprising.

He had long wanted to restore a Sunbeam Alpine, as both his father and brother are devoted Rootes Group fans and both have Alpines of their own. His dream took flight when he picked up an advertising flyer during a visit to the Bromley Pageant of Motoring back in 2006. The advert promised a 1968 Sunbeam Alpine GT, complete and ripe for restoration. Will contacted the owner, who had bought the car a few years earlier for a project that never got started. Soon he had acquired the car for the princely sum of £150!

'Why so cheap and why didn't the previous owner restore it?' you may well ask! Will explains his project predicament: 'When the previous owner took the car to a body specialist, he was told it was too far gone, as pretty much all of the lower half of the body was rotten. I could see a car that hadn't been messed about, no one had tried to restore before, and it was totally complete, save for just one of the twin horns.' Better still, it had originally been supplied locally in Kent and the registration document revealed only one owner from new. Having a complete car with which to start certainly helps but surely only the bravest of home restorers would take on a project that already been condemned by a professional.

For the next six years, Will's Alpine festered under a tarpaulin on his father's driveway, while he bought his first house and then built a garage. The moment the garage was ready, Will's father obligingly



ABOVE The Alpine as it was found – very crusty!



The finished result is testament to Will's skill and determination.

RIGHT Retrimmed interior is as fresh as the day it left the factory back in 1968.

BOTTOM Five coats of lacquer mean that steering wheel looks amazing.



'Will meticulously bagged up and labelled each nut, bolt and bracket'

dumped the tired old Alpine in front of its brand new home. It was September 2012 and at last the first phase of the restoration, the big stripdown, could commence. True to his perfectionist nature, Will meticulously bagged and labelled every single nut, bolt and bracket as it was removed, until his Alpine was stripped right back to its component parts.

Out with the old

Now the welding began, with every panel from the Alpine's waistline down having the rot cut out then new metal hand shaped and let in. Front wings and sills were available but at the rear, Will needed to fashion his own repair panels before welding them in place and grinding the welds back until they were nice and smooth. The industrial-size bottle of MIG shielding gas at the back of his garage testifies to just how much metalwork was needed. The body repairs took over three years, more than half the total project time. Asked if he ever found the restoration too daunting, Will recalls: 'The welding

WILL'S WORLD

Workshop tips and shed experience

1 My first success

'I was pleased with the fit of the new sills,' says Will. When fitted in the factory, Alpine sills curved slightly from front to back, in addition to the obvious curvature round from the door shut to meet the floor pan. Many restorers expect this panel to be a straight run from the front to the back wheel arch, and try to 'correct' the curve by straightening it. Will is delighted to have got this subtle panel shape spot on, just another example of how his Alpine is correct to every last detail.

2 My biggest fail

Will does admit to some naivety before starting the project: 'I got the car home straight after buying it. Never having done a major restoration, I looked at it and thought I can fix that up quickly and have it back on the road in 12 months'. Once he realised how long it could take to restore the Alpine to his high standards, a big re-think about timing was on the cards.

3 My best bodge

Asked about bodes, Will frowns: 'If something's not right first time, I can't accept that and have to do the job again.' There are numerous examples of this. He spent hours removing and refitting the covers on the seat bases until they were perfectly smooth and found the chrome trim around the rear window

was tricky to fit. He remembers problems with the trim panels in the rear seat area: 'the vinyl just wouldn't follow the correct contour. I learned to stretch the vinyl over the foam underlay and apply glue in some places not others until the panels were perfect.'

4 My favourite tool

'As the bottom half of the car of the car was completely rotten, welding was by far the biggest part of my resto,' says Will. His MIG welder with a big bottle of shielding gas was high on his list of essential tools, as was a huge collection of clamps in various shapes and sizes. The further his welding odyssey progressed, the more he found his battery-powered grinder was essential: 'The battery grinder is so much more controllable than a mains grinder, and easier to use for delicate cutting.'

5 My best advice

Will got busy with his camera, taking plenty of photos before he started the stripdown and advises all restorers do the same. 'Take photos before you touch the car and take more as you take things apart,' he says. 'Then as you strip your car, keep the parts you remove in labelled bags, for example all the bolts from each door should go in a single bag. That way, when time comes to reassemble it years later, you won't struggle to remember what goes where.'

BOTTOM New metal was hand shaped and let in where required.



MY PROUDEST MOMENT

'One of the best moments for me was shortly after the body came home from the paint shop,' says Will. 'I had put the engine back in, and refitted all the engine bay's shiny painted brackets and all the fasteners and clips that I had spent hours cleaning and nickel plating. At this point it really started to look like a proper car again and I couldn't stop smiling. It's moments like these



that keep us all going with our projects, and often make the final fitting out the most enjoyable phase of any restoration.'

just went on and on. I simply couldn't put the hours in now I've got a young daughter. The summers were the worst, as you still need to wear all the protective gear to avoid burns, but it gets too hot to carry on for hours on end. At times I just had to walk away for a few months and then come back when I felt refreshed again.'

Eventually the body was straight and back to solid, faultless steel: 'I couldn't leave any area untouched. Even hidden parts of the body were replaced, so there's literally no rust anywhere at all,' he explains. Now ready for paint, Will finally decided to let someone else work on his one man Alpine, taking the shell to Bumper2Bumper in nearby Deal for painting. This body shop came highly recommended by a friend and had recently completed a stunning paint job on an Aston Martin DB MkIII, reputed to be the very car that inspired author Ian Fleming's choice of transport for James Bond no less. Never one for an easy life, Will planned the timing of the paint job to coincide with moving house, so the car was safely out of the way during the big move. Naturally his new house is also something of a project: 'I've gutted the interior and am just starting to replace the bespoke staircase,' he says cheerfully. Sleep clearly doesn't feature highly on his agenda.

Learning on the job

When he wasn't welding, Will was busy developing new skills to refurbish other parts of his Alpine. 'I bought a kit to learn nickel plating' he says, 'then I spent time online researching how to clean and plate all the nuts, bolts, clips and brackets from the engine bay'. Using a car battery as the power source and a plastic bucket of green coloured nickel salts, all the original engine bay fasteners have been returned to as new condition. Inside the car, Will spent serious time on the gorgeous walnut veneer dash and wood rim steering wheel. 'The steering wheel took a long time,' he recalls. 'Unlike the dash, because the wheel wasn't made of walnut it had to be stained to the correct colour then finished with five coats of clear lacquer.' Both dash and wheel now look absolutely showroom fresh and original.

Resplendent in Rootes Mediterranean Blue, the bodyshell was finally ready for fitting out and trimming. Will found this part of the project moved along quickly and gave the greatest satisfaction.



TECH SPEC

1968 Alpine GT
Engine 1725cc/4-cyl/OHV
Power 94bhp@5300rpm
Torque 110lb ft@3100rpm
Gearbox 4-speed manual
0-60mph 12.3sec
Top speed 98mph
Fuel economy 27.3mpg
Weight 2360lb (1071kg)
Price when new Unknown
Value today £20,000

Hands-on attitude served Will extremely well on this project.

WILL'S CLASSIC CV

1973 VW Beetle 1303 S

Will's very first car. He ended up replacing the engine himself to keep mobile.

Mini Mayfair 1.0 Auto

Owned from 2002, Will was getting ambitious and fitted a 1275cc Metro Turbo engine for a little extra pep.

1986 VW LT Karmann Camper

Bought earlier this year, Will has already restored the timber framework, which had rotted badly.



Once again, his obsessive approach was much in evidence, with several trimming jobs re-done until he was completely satisfied. 'My wife says my perfectionism is an annoying habit,' jokes Will. The Alpine's clock exemplifies his attitude: 'Most original clocks don't work now but I couldn't accept that. I replaced the timekeeping mechanism with electronics; it still loses five minutes per day, so I must try taking out and oiling it again'.

Asked about why he feels the need to go to such extremes in pursuit of excellence, it becomes clear there's a little sibling rivalry in play: 'My brother restored an Alpine and won the Sunbeam Alpine Owners' Club concours then the following year he won the masterclass. I'm hoping to take over his crown at the club's National next summer.' Having seen the complete originality and sheer flawlessness of Will's car, there's every reason to think he will succeed. We wish him the luck he so clearly deserves. ■

USEFUL CONTACTS

- ▶ **Bumper2Bumper**, bumper2bumper.co.uk
- ▶ **Sunbeam Alpine Owners Club**, saoc.demon.co.uk