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Why a £300,000 restoration is worth it to make your classic car roadworthy

Lovely to look at but no fun to drive in modern traffic? A 'restomod' updates classic cars with uniqueness and contemporary equipment

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The very thought of upgrading a rare collector's car with modern-day features can leave purists sobbing into their leather driving gloves. However, for those coveting a classic with individual styling and able to cope with 2021 road conditions, a restomod may be the answer.

Restomodding has been around for decades – hot-rod jalopies fitted with V8 engines were once a rite of passage in the US. In Britain, we were more reserved, adding bolt-on spoilers, go-faster stripes and an aftermarket sound system that made the seats vibrate.

Now there's an up-and-coming industry in Britain reimagining classics into one-off designs, many worth hundreds of thousands of pounds. These aren't based on old Vauxhalls or Fords saved from the scrapyards. Instead, they are genuine, sought-after rarities, further modified and tweaked into unique showpieces.

The companies who build them are often specialists in one marque, beavering away in old farm sheds or garages, building just a handful of restomods a year. They sell to enthusiasts with deep pockets, owners who want a car way beyond the exact nut and bolt restorations on display at a stuffy *concourse d'elegance* events.



A recreation of Bentley's Blower car

Unrestricted by the confines of originality and model nerdiness, these are buyers who enjoy the 'customer journey' of putting their own stamp on a classic, just as much as taking delivery of their finished masterpiece.

The mainstream manufacturers have helped fuel the trend with a showroom of 'continuation' cars in recent years – vehicles that are neither a replica or original but have the cache of being factory-built to duplicate an iconic classic.



Aston Martin DB4 GT Continuation

Aston Martin offer a DB4 GT Continuation for £1.5 million, based on a model from the late 1950s. It may look the same as the original driven by Stirling Moss but is upgraded with a larger, 4.2-litre engine. Then there's the £2.75 million DB5 Continuation, based on James Bond's car, complete with all the spy gadgets.

Jaguar's flagship example is the E-Type Reborn, priced at £295,000, which is more of a restoration than a restomod but still has subtle differences. Bentley's recreation of the legendary Blower from the 1920s is already underway and restricted to just eight examples at £1.8 million each.

A Porsche 964 from Theon Design | CREDIT: Dean Smith

Adam Hawley and his wife, Lucinda, run Theon Design, based in an old farm barn in Oxfordshire. The five-strong team reimagine Porsche 911s, based on the classic 964 model from the early 1990s. Even their son Theo is involved – the company is named after him.

“Every change we make to the original car is designed to enhance and improve. It’s way beyond a total restoration, adding a range of precise enhancements that the customer would like.

“The engine is improved to add a third more torque than the original and we fit a vastly superior six-speed gearbox from the later Porsche 993 model. Even the power steering and air conditioning are redesigned and no longer suck power from the engine.”

The interior of the Jaguar E-Type Reborn

Prices start at £300,000 but the car I've been allowed to drive has a further £50,000 of bespoke options and will be flown back to its owner in Hong Kong a few days later. The interior is finished off with lattice-work, green leather seats sporting a dashing single yellow stripe.

Even the period radio-cassette player has been replaced with a wireless charging system for a smartphone, which is ingeniously held to the dashboard by magnets. The unit connects via Bluetooth to a premium brand Focal speaker system – although the exhaust sounds equally intoxicating. A reversing camera with a hidden, fold-down screen adds the finishing touch.

The Blower's interior

As you might expect, a 964 restored and enhanced at such great cost can more than keep up with modern traffic. However, this is still unmistakable a 1990s car in character and design - and all the better for it.

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