

# PRESERVATION



## Rust *Repair* Instead of *Replace*

By Arvid Svendsen

One of the most spirited discussions in the musclecar hobby concerns the philosophy behind a restoration. Do new parts adversely affect the originality of a musclecar? Most, if not all, enthusiasts are astounded and grateful for the flood of reproduction parts already available or soon to hit the market. Cars that were once considered fit for the crusher are now being rescued. Full factory-style quarters, new fenders and hoods and even some entire body shells are a phone call away. The availability of reproduction grilles, bezels, interiors, chrome and trim pieces is constantly expanding. Amazingly, these reproduction parts are often better than OEM parts they replace. Restorers are happy, to say the least.

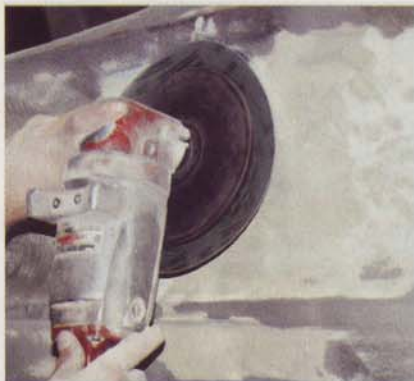
But clearly, there is a line that one crosses in which a car has lost so many of its original parts and panels that the car itself is more a replacement than a restoration. In other words, certain mus-

clecar purists would insist there is a point at which the car ceases to be the same car, that it is instead an amalgamation of a crusher-worthy shell and, in their view, inferior reproduction parts.

The argument escalates as the value of the car increases. This Aztec Bronze Nova is one of 5,481 L79s built in 1966, and one of 3,547 L79 SS versions. Many Nova people would call the '66 L79 the zenith of the line. This particular car retains its factory motor and transmission, though it is missing the original 12-bolt rear. At one point in its life, it was hit on the front driver side. The fender and door were damaged beyond repair, but the car is solid and presently undergoing a rotisserie restoration at Rt. 66 Motorsports in New Lenox, Illinois. This car should be returned to bone-stock and roll on steel wheels, hubcaps and redlines, and for that reason, this restoration is proceeding with a strong eye toward preservation of original parts.

Bill Jelinek owns both Rt. 66 Motorsports and our subject Nova. Jelinek decided to replace and patch rusted metal without replacing the quarters or the passenger-side fender (the driver-side fender was beyond fixing). In his words, "I just want to keep as much of the original quarter-panel as I can. That way, all the seams, lips and spot-welds are original. I just like to keep stock metal." In this case, the restoration takes on a decidedly "preservation" approach.

Don't get us wrong. We want the reproduction parts to keep coming. We love the high-quality repro parts that are becoming more and more available. But for those cars that can be built to maintain originality, especially in terms of exterior panels, the car is simply that much closer to OEM. A nice side benefit for our purposes: The rust repair work performed on the Nova can be accomplished in the average-guy's garage with a few basic tools and a MIG welder.



**1** At first glance, the Nova's passenger-quarter's overabundance of filler suggests major dents and damage. Bill Jelinek of Rt. 66 Motorsports thought otherwise and set out to uncover the actual condition of the metal by buzzing the filler off the panel with an 8-inch grinder fitted with 3M 24-grit 9-inch discs.



**4** The 3-inch cutoff wheel went to work to remove the rusted metal.



**6** Jelinek checked the patch's fit before doing final trimming and deburring.



**2** After the filler was removed, three trouble spots became evident: a fairly large, low area directly above the tire; a low spot near the Super Sport emblem location and a dent in the rearmost bottom corner of the quarter. The rust along the bottom of the quarter and wheelwell lip is minimal and can be easily repaired.



**7** The panel and inner structure were ground clean before Jelinek sprayed HTP Prime-A-Weld, a weld-through primer, on the bare metal edges.



**3** Cut lines are drawn on all cancerous areas. Jelinek was very conservative to remove the least amount of metal necessary.



**5** Using a piece of cardboard, Jelinek created a template for the sheetmetal to be replaced. Next, he traced the shape he needed and cut the patch from 18-gauge metal.



**8** The rocker/wheelwell lip patch was MIG-welded to the car. It was first tack-welded to ensure proper fit, then finish-welded, with Jelinek taking care not to overheat the surrounding metal.



**9** With the new panel in place, Jelinek used a 3M 24-grit 5-inch grinding disc to smooth the welds.



**10** Moving back to the rear quarter-panel, Kevin Rock took over and continued the careful process of metal repair.



**13** Rock worked the metal in the corner using the dent-removing slide hammer, technically called a Morgan Nokker, but more commonly referred to as a slugger. The weight slides down the shaft and strikes the handle, creating a pull on the panel. This process is time-consuming but very effective for removing dents.



**11** Rather than having one big patch, smaller patches were used in order to more accurately follow the factory shape along the bottom of the quarter-panel.



**14** After Rock's efforts, the quarter-panel began to take shape, but it still needed repair on the wheel lip.



**12** At this point, the dent at the rearmost bottom corner must be fixed.



**15** A small patch of metal is hard to handle, so Rock used a stud gun to attach a stud to the metal. By doing so, it can be held properly during welding.



**16** Rock welded the metal to the formerly cancerous portion of the wheel lip.



**18** That stud was used as an attachment point for the Morgan Nokker. The slugger was inserted over the stud, and the metal was worked out to eliminate low area.



**17** An H&S Uni Spotter Delux Stud Welding Gun sent a stud to the quarter at the low point.



**19** When the metal was where it needed to be, the stud was cut off and ground smooth. This method is far superior to drilling holes into panels in order to accomplish the same result.



#### Sources

Lincoln Electric  
216/481-8100  
www.lincolnelectric.com

Morgan Mfg. Inc.  
800/423-4692  
www.morganmfg.com

Rt. 66 Motorsports  
815/462-0090  
www.rt66motorsports.com

**20** The newly repaired wheel lip was ground completely smooth and then readied for further prep. After finishing the repairs, Jelinek and Rock were both glad they didn't cut out the quarter-panel. *MCR*