

1949 Packard Super Deluxe
Part 2
The Restoration
By Bruce Sedel

As a follow-up to the acquisition of my 1949 Packard Super Deluxe sedan at an auction in Atlanta Georgia, this part of the story provides some of the details of its restoration.

It was the first week of February of 1999 when I received a call from the driver of the transport company telling me he was approaching Virginia Beach in a fifty foot tractor trailer with a 1949 Packard on board. I had been biting my fingernails waiting for the delivery call after more than thirty days had elapsed following the close of the auction and my patience was being thoroughly tested. When I had previously contacted the transport company, I was told that the car had to be temporarily stored in their warehouse in Atlanta, Georgia due to bad weather continually delaying truckers trying to get underway. Anyway, it was a typical blustery, cloudy thirty-five degree dead-of-winter day when the dude arrived with the Packard. I have to say the driver was one hell of a good guy as he helped me push the car from the street where it was off-loaded a short distance down an alley and into its new home in a clean heated garage. I wasn't about to make any attempt to start the thing up until everything in the engine bay was thoroughly examined, diagnosed and repaired. I gave the driver six one-hundred dollar bills to cover the delivery invoice and an extra hundred dollars for a job well-done.

The first couple of tasks at hand was to get the engine and the attached components back to a reliable running/functioning status. I waited until the weather moderated before delivering the car to Ingenuity Auto Repair in Virginia Beach where mechanic Greg O'Brien went through all systems inside the engine compartment. The radiator was removed and sent out for refurbishment. All bolt-on components such as carburetor, starter, generator, fuel pump, water pump, etc. were removed, cleaned and/or rebuilt, detailed, restored, re-painted, and re-installed. The oil pan was removed, cleaned and re-installed with a new pan gasket. The gas tank was sent out for cleaning and seal coating. All fuel lines were blown out. The block was cleaned and flushed. All four wheel systems were rebuilt with new wheel bearings, cylinders and brake shoes. Four new B.F. Goodrich Silvertown wide whitewall tires completed the package. When everything was buttoned up, the engine was fired up for the first time and it ran just like a Packard straight-eight engine should, silky-smooth, quiet and steady. The inaugural drive from the shop to home was a treat.

As I stood there looking at the car in the driveway, I couldn't stop noticing how beautifully straight the body lines appeared. It was obvious this car had not been damaged or if it had, somebody certainly performed quality body work. But that was the good news. The bad news was the fact that the atrocious yellow paint that I had previously alluded to had to go. So began the disassembly process, little by little, step by step, day by day, bright work, front end grille and bumper assemblies and exterior door handles were all carefully removed. All fasteners were bagged and labeled and notes were made as to what pieces needed to be replaced. Interior window mouldings, door panels, carpet, front and back seats and finally the side window glass panels were removed. As the richly appointed niceties were being removed, the car was becoming

less and less representative of its former elegance and high society and slowly looking more and more unsightly like a ragged old pauper at an urban orphanage.



With the vehicle nearly skeletal, it was time to put up the kid gloves and step up to the plate to the fun part called paint removal. I decided to go the chemical strip route because after disc-sanding a small area on the fender, I discovered there was so much paint material that needed to be removed, it would have taken much of an eternity to complete. Sanding revealed multiple layers of paint and as it could be surmised, the surface was wrapped with around three coats of approximately 25 year old yellow re-paint applied on top of a layer of one to two coats of bonding primer. Below that was the original factory Packard blue lacquer over original primer. So, as you can imagine, it was a huge task to get all of that crap off. I used nearly four gallons of chemical strip solution over a period of four months until original factory sheet metal began to become visible. I feel pretty certain that I will not soon repeat such an effort. At long last, I celebrated a major milestone standing there looking at bare sheet metal last seen by Packard factory workers back in 1949.

It was about the end of June when I drove the bare metal car over to Auto Elite Collision Center in Virginia Beach where painter Brian Dodson began the process of returning the Packard back to its original color of Packard Blue Metallic. That was to say at least as closely as possible. As many of us know, most manufacturers of automobiles built through the post-war period used lacquer-based paint material. Body shops today are so regulated, most no longer use lacquer paints and instead utilize acrylic and other urethane-based two-part systems such as flat base colors topped with high gloss clear. This is what the body shop recommended for the re-paint of the Packard and I was fine with it.



I drove by the shop often to check on the progress and happened to be there on a day in early August when the guys had just pulled a partially painted vehicle out of the paint booth. Brian and his staff were always amazed at the amount of surface area and the fact that it was all curves with hardly a flat spot anywhere on the car. In order to achieve a better overall job, Brian painted the car in two stages doing the top and the door jams first and then the rest of the fully prepped and primed body followed. Everyone in his shop appeared very pleased with the way it turned out and, from the comments I got from the paint staff, everyone seemed to enjoy working on the old Packard. The stately old beast was looking better and better clad in its fresh new urethane clothing!

The following week paint work was complete, but Brian informed me he wanted to wait thirty days for the clear coat to cure before his guys would do the finish polishing. The high-volume low-pressure application of paint material resulted in an extremely smooth finish. The minimal “orange peel” was eliminated with a good amount of wet sanding

and polishing which finished off a beautiful and professional job. I was so pleased I simply couldn't wait to begin re-assembly of the stainless and bright work.



By the time I was able to pick up the Packard from the paint shop, it was mid-September and I had already picked up all of the chrome plating from Royal Silver, located in Norfolk, VA. The stuff was so shiny it almost gave me headache. I pulled the car into the garage and immediately began. First the long body side-stainless mouldings were fastened. This was not a particularly difficult task as the clips used were the pressure spring type so you merely just line up the clip with the hole and simply tap it right in place. The grille assembly was much more complicated due to the extremely tight fit. Everything had to be properly fastened so the assembly could slide comfortably into the grille opening. For those that have dealt with bright work on senior Packards of this era know all about large numbers of nut and bolts that hold these assemblies in place. All in all it was not a terribly frightening experience getting everything bolted up. It was in fact much easier re-installing than it was disassembling. The car was definitely getting closer to completion even though every inch of a Packard seems like a mile. I had a number of issues with the interior, so I spent a long winter ordering mohair material for the door panels and wool blend carpeting, jute underlayment and windlace all of which was purchased from Bill Hirsch. The remainder of the interior, headliner and seat upholstery was original factory material and I was determined to save it. The following spring I turned the car over to interior master, Paul Cho Auto Interiors of Virginia Beach.

Paul was able to sew the mohair material into the portions of the moth-damaged door and interior panels so it closely matched the existing factory material. Paul also re-stitched much of the seat upholstery where the stitching that had deteriorated and pulled loose. As we were able to save so much of the original factory material, Paul's job turned out to be not so extensive. The entire headliner as well as the door-panel inserts and the three-striped broadcloth seat upholstery are original from 1949!

There still remained a list (the list was getting shorter) of other items requiring Packard expertise such as detailing and painting the engine, installation of a new wiring harness, some repair and attention to the R-11 and other final assembly details. Even though I was excited at the fact that I had made it this far in the restoration, financial limitations slowed things down. About a year later, I was ready for these final series of tasks and of course there is no better person to turn than Ross Miller of Speedwell garage. Ross has these bathtubs so figured out that it is only a matter of fitting the vehicle into his repair schedule. It has always been comforting to me when my Packard is in Ross's hands as he is thorough, fair and extremely detail-minded. What would any of us do without Ross??

Today, after more than forty-thousand trouble-free miles, I have just replaced the tires marking the first time in my life that I have ever drove the tread off of a new set of tires on an antique car. The odometer quit working in 2009 at around sixty-five thousand miles and I still have not repaired it. Instead I've been keeping a log of all the miles driven so I know the mileage is over eighty thousand. To date no one has ever been inside the engine other than the replacement of the clutch assembly three years ago. The Packard still runs and drives like it would have back in 1949 and that makes this old car a keeper!!

Bruce Sedel