



Under Restoration – P5B and Me By Dirk Burrowes

In the world of Rover, the P5B Coupe is the car that dreams are made of. (Well at least for true believers and the “roverly” insane.) The P5B is the stylish brother to the P5 Saloon model that was introduced in 1958. It has elegant, regal lines and a suspension that is fit for a queen. The infamous story of how the Director of Rover, William Martin Hurst, came to America and “accidentally” found the Buick 215 engine at Mercury Marine that he used in the P5B just adds to its allure. As a Rover addict, a P5B Coupe was always on the short list of dream cars.

Since it was unlikely that I would find a P5B Coupe here in the states, I purchased a restoration project P5 MK2 in 2005. I was waist deep into the restoration of my P5 when, as luck would have it, I got up earlier than usual one morning and saw a post on the Rovernet regarding a P5B Coupe for sale in Vancouver. As much as I really wanted the car, the truth was that I did not need another car after with all I had on my plate. But the allure of the car was too much for me to resist so I sent an email to the owner that morning and got a return call late that afternoon. The car sounded absolutely outstanding and the owner’s assertions had really piqued my interest. I asked for photos and got them very quickly. From what I could tell, it was exactly what he claimed – great condition with original paint and interior. This was all too good to be true. I needed confirmation so I called Ruth Burgess from All British Cars in BC and asked her about the car. She thought the car was the real deal.

Proud New Owner

The owner and I struck a deal and the money was sent. I was now the owner of a P5B Coupe – just like that.

Nothing is ever as easy as that though. As part of the deal the seller was to drive the car over the

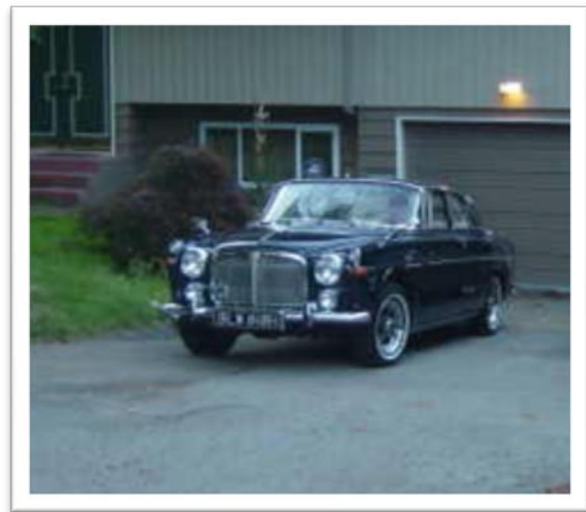


US-Canada border into Blaine Washington and deliver it to a transport company who would then ship it to me in Massachusetts. It seemed simple and easy enough but alas, this is where things got complicated. The first sign of trouble was when the seller called me to cancel the deal because he didn't think he wanted to sell anymore. My immediate reaction was that he had scammed me. We worked through that problem and then he decided he could not deliver the car over the border. After a lot of discussion, it turned out that he was unsure if the import taxes were paid on the car when it arrived in Canada. Prior to purchase the seller said I had all the time in the world to arrange transport now he had given me a week to remove the car and was not showing signs of being cooperative. It's a funny how this came out after he had my money. It became clear I needed to do something quick.

When I am in a Rover pinch, I call my good friend in BC for all things Rover, Ruth Burgess of All British Cars (1-604-294-5747). Ruth sprang into action and in a one two punch (I can see her with a roundhouse kick and chop to the neck of rover problems) got things squared away for me. She had called Eric Russell, the international secret agent man of Rovernet, to solve the problem. Other than an exchange of a few emails over the years, Eric and I didn't really know each other but in a generous and selfless act, he volunteered to acquire the car and store it in his garage until suitable transport arrangement could be made. This was a big relief as I was starting to feel like guy who gave his credit card number to someone in Nigeria over the internet! Given the complications with importing the car from Canada to the USA, I decide it would be best for me to fly to BC and deal with this myself.

The Adventure Begins

Even though it was a bit touch and go with the purchase of the car, once things settled down I felt pretty good about everything. My son Curtis, who has been a big part of Rovering with me and is a



Rover nut in his own right, wanted to be a part of the fun so we decided we would go together to Canada to collect the car. Plans were made, tickets were purchased and we were ready to go. With this in place we thought we could meet up with other like-minded individuals from the Rover Car Club of Canada. Ruth, to the rescue again! She arranged a wonderful dinner with the hierarchy of the RCCC. The only thing left was a place to stay for the nights we were there. The always generous Eric and Linda Russell invited us

to stay with them. How can this get any better?

Well, we arrived in Vancouver and were greeted by Linda at the airport and off we went. When we arrived at the Russell's home, there in the driveway was the infamous Coupe. What a car! We took her out for a quick drive and I was hooked right then and there.

Ruth had arranged dinner for later in the evening with Malcolm and Barbara Tait, Ruth Burgess and Marlene, Peter Hester and his wife Marie and of course Linda and Eric. as well as John Kilfoil, a Rover nut visiting from South Africa. We had a great time and it was decided right then and there we should become members of the RCCC.

The next day was the moment of truth. It was time to drive the Coupe through US Customs and down to meet the truck in Seattle, Washington that would return her to Massachusetts. I had never driven a car right hand drive car for any distance. This would be nearly a 3-hour ride in a car I had driven for less than 2 miles, but we were up for the adventure. The next morning we awoke early. The Russell's fed us, said our good byes and off we went. To be honest it felt a bit like meeting your girl friend's father for the first time while driving your father's new car without permission - exciting and scary all at once.

Things went well until we got to the border. I had researched the procedure for importing the car into the USA and done it once before from Canada when I imported several parts cars from Ontario. So with paper work in hand I proceeded to US Customs. In many ways it was rather funny. The first agent I spoke to had no idea as to the procedure for importation of an automobile 25 years and older. So after awhile he gave up and a rather stern looking female supervisor took over. At this point it must have been decided in the background that I must be trying to sneak something into the US because she immediately ordered a complete inspection of the car. No less than 6 agents were involved in the process. I have to say though that they show the car great respect and were quite gentle if not thorough. Many questions were asked and in the end the agent in charge admitted that they had never had a classic car imported through this border crossing. So given that I had had a bit of experience and they had none, I was invited behind the counter to assist with the paper work and the procedure. With the duties paid and a handshake we were off to meet the transporter and to catch our return flight home.

After leaving the Customs office, I called the transporter. Given the way things had been going, it was not at all surprising that we ran into more problems. He was running late and our meeting time was fairly close to our flight time. In the end I did what I now consider to be one of dumbest things I have ever done. On the instructions of the truck driver, I went to someone's house that I had never met and left the car with a woman who was expecting a car from the same transporter. He would pick up the car when he dropped off her car. To this day I do not know what I was thinking. But to

give credit where it is due everything went off without a problem. We made our flight and the trucker picked up the Coupe and delivered it to Boston.

The Eagle has landed.

With all the hard work done and stress behind me, now the real fun could begin. I have a P5B Coupe and one in fantastic shape, at least I thought...

I was so excited about getting the car that I decide even before I got her that I would enter the Rover in a Concours show event called the British Invasion. It was clear after a close look at her that she was not quite as described. The Coupe had several touch up paint jobs and a number of other minor issues with the body. The chrome was not as stated along with a few other areas that were not close to being up to going to the show. This was too much for my ego and exactly the challenge I needed.

It was late June 2007 and the show was in mid September so I did not have a lot of time. I began the process and it turned into an all out race against time. We stripped her down to bare metal fixed the sins of time, repainted her with 3 base coats of paint and 2 coats of clear. We had the chrome redone and cleaned the interior.

Near the end I had the whole family working to get her done in time for the show. At exactly midnight before the day of the show we finished. We loaded her on the trailer and started out in the pouring rain on our 4 hour ride to Vermont to the "British Invasion"

We arrived early that morning to on again off again down pours and a very messy show site. In fact we had to drive the car through mud puddles to get to our spot. The car was a mess and in the end we were taking buckets and filling them from puddles to wash the car down. But I have to say that



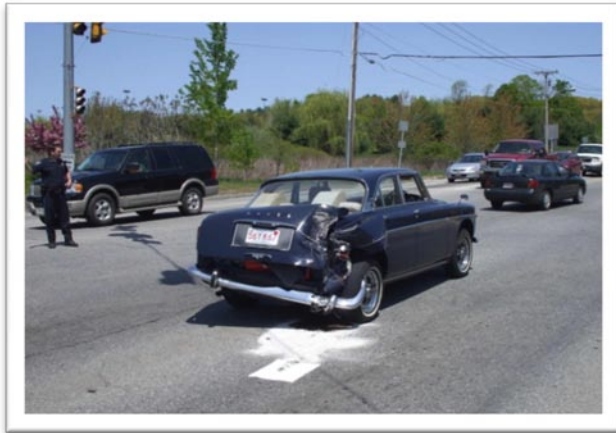
there were a lot of dedicated British car enthusiasts on hand that braved the weather with us which made for a great gathering none the less. The weather never improved so the awards were postponed to the next day.

Sunday morning we drove down to see who had won what class. The good news was it was a nice sunny day but still quite muddy. I decided to leave the car on the trailer and just sit and listen to the ceremony. When I got there I got so much crap from the other owners for not coming in with the car that I went out and brought her back in. No sooner had I done that they made an announcement that she had won 1st in her class. I really did not expect to best of the many fine

cars, including impressive Rolls, but we did. It made the effort all seem worth it.

Fast forward to 2008

Well the win and all the effort that went into it carried me through the balance of the year. The P5B was put away safely for the winter months. When spring finally came, I was anxious to get the cars out for the season. Naturally, the first out was, you guessed it, the Coupe. With a ½ hour of prepping she was ready to go. For the next week I enjoyed her and drove daily to and from work and around town and even brought the kids to school in her.



On May 14th just 2 weeks before last year's event I decided to visit a weekly British car lunch meeting held near me. Fate was following me on the way there. At a stop light I was rear ended by a large landscape truck and trailer going full tilt. The impact pushed me nearly 40 feet from a dead rest.

I have to say the car stood up well. Remarkably, the door gaps stayed and the front and rear doors opened without a problem but it pushed the axle and the boot forward right under the rear screen. The early safety designs envisioned by David Bache, when he was involved with the seat design, worked as planned. Those ET head rests saved my neck from injury and the seat brake gave way so that it fell backwards. Looking at the pictures, it is even hard for me to believe that the door seams did not change and I simply open the door and got out.

The driver of the NEW Ford F 450 was not so lucky even though his vehicle did not show as much damage. He was never conscious at the scene and was taken away by ambulance.

Determination sets in.

I decided to set things right. I could not bear to let the car languish all summer in this sorry state. So I undertook to revive her to her former glory and to enter her into the same Concours event that I did last year. This was sure to motivate me to get her done. Needless to say another night and day effort began. Those who came to RoveAmerica 08 will



remember the trip we took to the body shop and the sight of the car with the back cut off it was quite a sight.



We cut the back from a relatively rust free MK 2 P5 saloon. Pierre in London found a NOS boot floor and outer wings as well. A LOT of time went into making it right and making sure that even Rover themselves could not tell that car had been in an accident. Lysiane (my wife) and I decided we should also redo the interior so we worked together on this which turned out great. It was fun working together on the project. In the end it was exactly a repeat of the year before we worked until

midnight before the day of the car show to get the car there. This year however it was minus the rain.

Award time came and I was proud that in the face of many outstanding British cars we took 3rd place.

The most important lesson I have learned besides using a rearview mirror when at a stop light is that it is really about the experience and the emotional journey you take when you undertake the ownership of a classic car. The P5B has provided more adventures for the money then anyone could have ever expected and it has been the impetus to meeting people I am proud to say are lifelong friends. These adventures will be remembered for the rest of my life and can't say I really regret any of it and that I guess makes me a Rover NUT.



I wonder what is in store for me next....

