

Do your own Dash

By Joe Parlanti

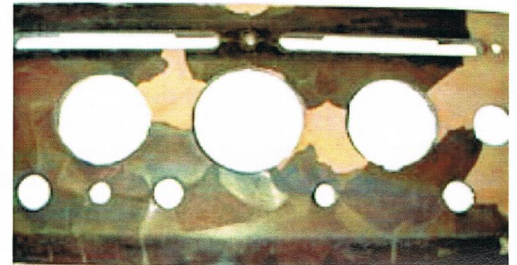
Overview

The materials experts who chose the clear finish used on the Tiger dash apparently assumed it would never be exposed to sunlight because virtually every original dash probably exhibits some cracking of the finish, or worse. A more likely explanation is simply the fact that the finishes used in the mid-'60s were not nearly as UV tolerant as contemporary types.

Depending on the damage to your dash you may decide to replace it with one of the fine solid walnut types that can be purchased through your favorite supplier or restore the one you have. I actually had one of the solid walnut dash's that came with my car but decided to restore the original because I wanted a more authentic looking dash.

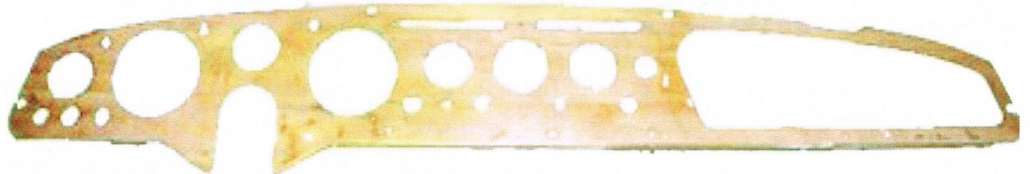
Restoring the dash primarily consists of re-veneering and refinishing. It takes a lot of work but with proper care and time it can look as good or better than the original and last much longer.

Here's a "before" photo of the dash from my car. I had already started to remove some of the veneer as can be seen in the photo. I've never seen a dash that did not have some damage to the veneer and could simply be refinished. Generally stripping the veneer is required.



Stripping the old finish and Veneer

I found that most of the contact cement used by the factory to glue down the veneer had dried and failed on my dash, so it was very easy to chip off of the veneer. If you have to use a wood chisel to get some of the stubborn veneer off, be careful to not gouge the plywood surface. After you've got everything off, give the dash a light sanding to smooth everything out. Here's a shot of the cleaned-up dash.



Acquiring the veneer

The Tiger dash was covered with a burl walnut veneer. There are many types, colors, and styles of veneer available, but I chose the original burl walnut.

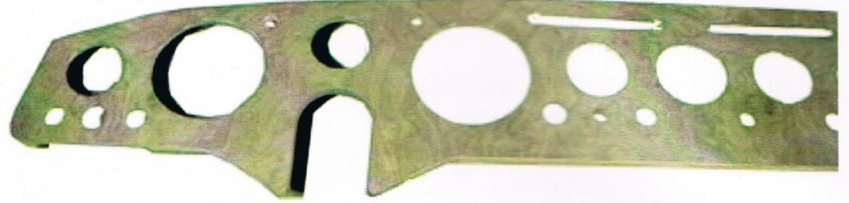
One of the best places to get the proper veneer is a mail-order woodworking supplier named Constantine's. Constantine's has a full-fledged catalog available on-line by following this link (www.constantines.com). Burl veneer has virtually no grain and so it has to be backed by either another grained-type of thin veneer or paper. The veneer I used had the paper backing which simplified things considerably. You'll also need good veneer glue or contact cement, cheap foam brush, and a roller to get out the air bubbles.

Veneering the dash

Cut the veneer (scissors work fine) leaving a few inches of clearance all around the dash. Do not attempt to cut any of the holes at this time. Brush the veneer glue onto the dash and the veneer and wait the amount of time specified on the can. Carefully lay the veneer on the dash and work the bubbles out using the veneer roller. Significant pressure should be applied to insure a good bond and no bubbles. Be careful around the edges of the holes to prevent cracking of the veneer. *Continued on page 8...*

Trimming the veneer

I used an X-Acto knife to trim the veneer to the perimeter of the dash and all of the interior holes. Take your time and replace the X-Acto blade if the veneer starts to crack and not cut. Here's a shot of the dash after trimming:

**Applying the finish**

Sand the veneer with very fine sandpaper taking care, as it is very thin. I inquired into the best finish for my application at a local Wood Crafters center. I was looking for a gloss finish that could be built-up with several coats. Most importantly, it needed to be UV tolerant so I wouldn't be doing this again in a few years. I intend to drive the car often when it's restored so it will get a fair amount of sun exposure on the dash. I wanted a contemporary finish that would hold up well. I ended-up using EF High Performance by General Finishes of New Berlin, WI. It is a UV stabilized, high-polyurethane content water based system. This type of finish produced a rather light look to the finished product. Larry Paulick used the same piece of veneer on his dash with an oil-based finish that yielded a much darker look.

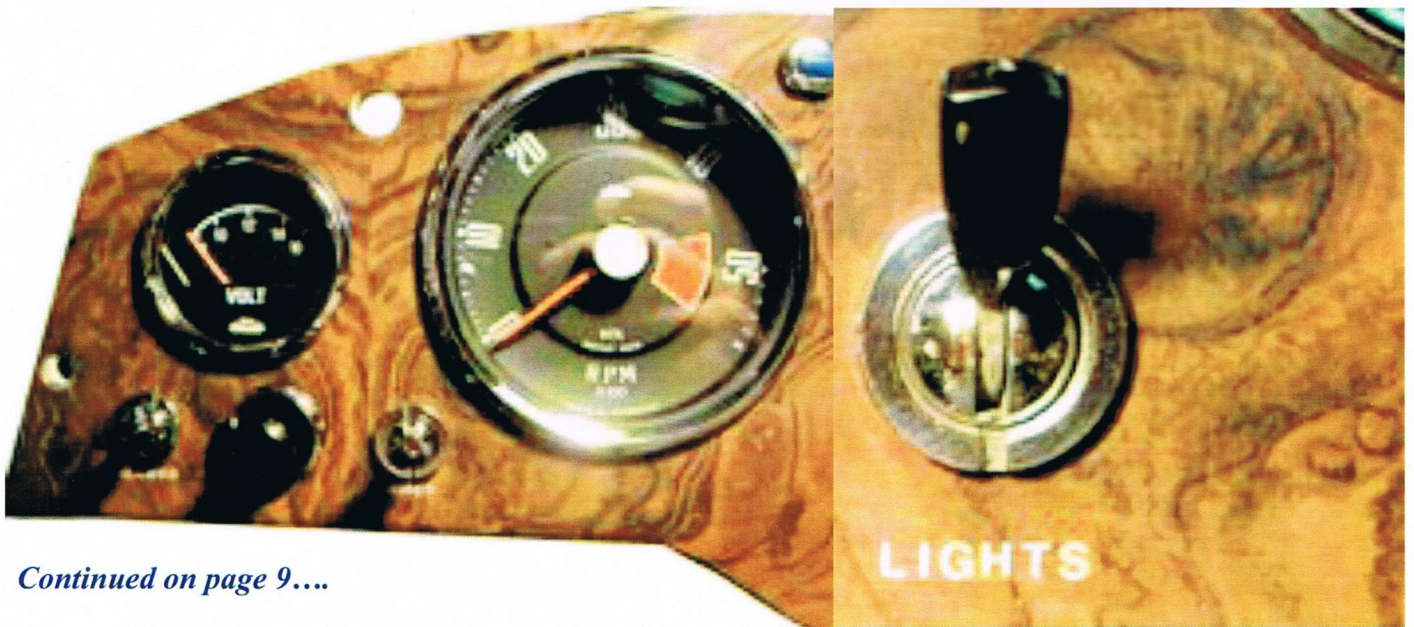
Application was with a foam brush and I would lay on about 3 coats and let dry for a day or so. Be sure to finish all sides and the back of the dash with at least 1 coat primarily to seal the dash against moisture which will prevent swelling and warping.

Applying the dash lettering

The Tiger dash originally had white lettering silk-screened onto it to identify the headlights, dash lights, and wipers. The blower switch used a tag (ala Alpine) but I think the dash lettering looks much better so I put it on as well. I did however, place it such that the aluminum tag will cover it if I decide to stay with the original look. Luckily, the original placement relative to the switch works well for this scenario. I used a white transfer lettering to reproduce the original look. I had some Chartpak 10 pt. Helvetica medium that I had used in a similar application on my Alpine several years back. Since the font wasn't quite right, I started looking around for something closer. No one is using this stuff anymore and it's getting very hard to find. I went to a local art supply store who allowed me to rummage through their stock in the back room. They weren't stocking it and were selling it for \$1.00 a sheet. Unfortunately, there were very few white lettering sheets and the ones I found were the wrong size or font, so I stuck with what I had.

Use a burnishing tool, pencil, etc. to transfer the lettering down to the dash. Careful measurement and "eyeballing" it will produce nice results. If you don't like the look of a letter, scrape it off and start over.

I then put down another 15 or so coats of finish to build build-up the thickness and seal in the lettering. Here are a couple shots of some of the lettering:



Continued on page 9....

Polishing the dash

After brushing on the finish, it will probably need to be smoothed-out. I did this by wet sanding using 400 grit paper. This is another reason that sealing the sides and back is important. I tried sanding with a vibrating hand sander but found that I had more control by hand sanding. Be careful if you use a powered sander to avoid melting the finish. Also be careful over the lettering so that you don't go through the finish. After you're finished, you'll need to polish it back out. I used Maguires polish and an orbital buffing wheel like you would use on a car. Once again, be careful to not get the finish too hot. When you're satisfied with the gloss you're just about finished.

Finishing-up

The last thing to do is repaint the areas inside the cubby box opening and around the steering column. I used a brown enamel and brushed it on.

That's it. By now you should have a beautifully restored dash that you can be proud to say you did yourself when someone asks.

Windscreen Wiper Wheelbox Lubrication, a DIY tech tip by Tiger Tom.

The "Wheelbox" (The official British Lucas term for the gear box with the knurled nut that the wiper arm is pressed on to and common to most sports cars) desperately needs lubrication on older sports cars. Even if the wipers work OK and to your satisfaction, the wheel box should be lubricated for preventive maintenance.

Slow running or stalled wipers many times may be attributed to binding of the shaft in the bearing sleeve of the wheel box. How can you tell? If installed in the car, remove the wiper arms. The knurled nut should be easy to rotate back and forth to feel the play with the internal drive mechanism. If out of the car, the wheel should spin freely.

It is impossible to lubricate the bearings with conventional means, but there is a trick.

Step 1. If the wheel box is installed on the car, remove the chrome nut and bezel.

Step 2. Slide a 5/8" heater hose over the housing.

Step 3. Secure hose with a hose clamp.

Step 4. Pour in an ounce or two of about a 30 weight motor oil or low viscosity lubricant of your choice. NO WD40.

Step 5. Apply 20 to 40 pounds air pressure in hose until oil is purged from the hose through the bearing. Rotate the shaft while doing this process. The fluid forced through the bearing flushes contaminants and leaves a lubricating film behind. This process may take a few minutes. Flush additional oil if contamination is severe.

Note: If doing this in a car, turn wiper mechanism on. Place rag under wheel box to prevent dripping in car interior.

Step 6. Remove hose, wipe off excess oil.

When reinstalling "wheelboxes" in a vehicle, remember that wipers typically have different arc ranges. That means that each "wheelbox" provides a different amount wiper arm arc. If uncertain, assemble outside the car and compare arcs.

You are now ready for the Spring rains and can drive the rest of your life without a worry.....at least about wheel box failure.

