



Introduction

Restomod

noun

A portmanteau of ‘restoration’ and ‘modification’

Rooted in rebellion, exclusivity, raw exuberance and bragging rights, restomods have become nothing short of a cultural phenomenon; an easy shorthand to describe a type of classic car restoration that preserves the original style while also using modern components.

Converting an old car into a hot rod is nothing new. Neither is putting a big engine in a little classic car, adding wider tires or a louder exhaust. What the founding fathers of the restomod movement have accomplished is the scalable perfectionism that has established an alternative class of car. The result is an altogether different driving experience reflecting a very individualised mode of transportation.

This shift is fuelled by the abundance of capital, the continued design and performance success of leading restomod carmakers, world-class workmanship, and a level of boredom from traditional carmakers. Add the affluent members of society who are weary of crass commercialism, planned obsolescence, mass replication and the continued race for techno effects and gadgets, as well as an underlying aversion to the ‘keeping up with the neighbour’ mentality, and you have the wherewithal and the clients ready for something new.

While 'restomod' is now an acknowledged category, there are those who deem this endeavour somewhat controversial. For generations there have been two primary options for classic car owners. First, to restore a car to its original condition. Second, to preserve the car without any modifications or alterations to the running gear, paint and upholstery. The idea of putting a big-block engine in a Jaguar E-Type or painting a Porsche a non-standard colour has always been considered a desecration. The more one veered away from ‘the norms’, the more financial risk was involved in holding resale values.

To some extent, this paradigm still exists. Purists would insist on restoring a matching-numbers car by the book, using factory parts. For a preservationist, since a car is only old once, the underlying rule is to keep the car authentic and preserve the patina of aged paint, cracked leather seats and all original mechanical components, without any modification, adjustments or upgrades. Interestingly, in a 2014 Gooding auction, an intact Mercedes 300SL convertible had a slightly higher value than a restored 300SL. Consequently, an untouched ‘barn find’ – a potential diamond in the rough – requires deep consideration on whether to restore or preserve.

Surprisingly, perhaps, a number of major carmakers have taken notice of the Restomod movement and established a sub-category of cars they call ‘continuation’ vehicles. These are cars that replicate those from previous eras and are built by the original manufacturer using the same standards, blueprints, materials and building techniques as the original. While not a traditional restomod, I have included a handful