

ESCORT MEXICO

Original classic Fords: This straightforward rebuild turned into an extensive restoration, because when it's the oldest surviving Special Build Order AVO Escort Mexico, you have to get it perfect.

Words Mike Renaut Photos Adrian Brannan

Back in 1989 although Mk1 Escorts were still commonplace, genuine Mexicos were rare. So when Mark Liddiard paid £700 to his friend, Richard (Dick) Griffin for this 1972 Mexico he was pleased to see several aspects that made the car even more unusual. "Paperwork that came with it suggests it was on the stand at a motor show and sold there to Sir Jocelyn Stevens, then MD of Express Newspapers," explains Mark. "It quickly passed to Beaverbrook Newspapers and through four further owners before Richard bought the car

in 1983. I'd love to know more of its early history. It's unusual in being painted black from new and the AVO Owners' Club have indicated it's the oldest surviving AVO special-build car. It's the third one built, I understand the first two were press cars and they've since been destroyed."

The Mexico boasts options including bubble arches from the factory (rather than later dealer fit,) a vinyl roof — unusual on a black car — Webasto sunroof, Ford AM radio with back shelf speaker, centre console, wood trim and sports driver seat.

"I used it as a daily driver for a while including when I lived in Scotland and had some restoration work done. Then I stored the car for about eight years."

In August 2016 Mark took the Escort to Majestic Motors. "It came to us in August 2016 for some basic jobs and an engine rebuild," remembers Majestic's Commercial Director, Chris Clarke, "but things quickly escalated. In December that turned from a rebuild into a complete restoration that we finished in October 2019. It took 1133 hours of work. The car had →





been rallied and had many previous poor repairs; we peeled it back like an onion and realised the work required was a lot more extensive than anyone could have realised. On the plus side, it was an extremely complete example."

Majestic's Technical Director, Ben Thompson takes up the story: "The Escort looked pretty good although it had sat for a few years, we got it mechanically right and ready for MoT as per Mark's wishes but noted there were a few holes and filler. Mark requested we repair the body and the project just escalated. Normally we have a set process when stripping a car, but because this hadn't started as a full restoration we'd disassembled the car in chunks, for instance removing the rear axle and suspension as one complete unit. Now we began to take it apart piece by piece."

Tacked on

"The rear wings were the most alarming aspect, they'd been replaced in the past and there were clouds of filler. Although original, the arches were tacked on over standard size wheelarches so the tyres rubbed. Normally there would be an extension from the wing to the arches but these were essentially only held on by sealant."

The door panels were wrinkled and creased from theft damage and had been 'repaired' with filler. Replacement door panels were carefully fitted, with all mechanisms replaced. "The new left-hand wing wasn't correctly aligning with the door and the rear wing, I then realised the A-pillar was bent toward the centre of the car — probably as the result of a roll — and the scuttle panel was curved in the



"IN MANY WAYS WE WERE CONSERVING THE CAR RATHER THAN RESTORE IT"

wrong direction. We dug out 4 kg of lead — it was over half an inch thick in places — realigned everything and then seam-welded the joins. In the process we leaded the seams and did away with the inherent rust traps in the flitch panels and bulkhead. It still looks standard because we carefully etched the join line into the lead."

The Escort had been raced in amateur rallies and grit had artificially aged and corroded the floor panels. "There was a big hole in the sill and the driver's side floor had been replaced by a sheet of metal — obvious from underneath because all the swage lines were missing. Previous repairs were new metal over old so the driver's side floor was 3 mm thick — about double the standard thickness — so those floor sections were cut out and replaced. We also repaired about five inches of the outer edges."

Engine improvements

The engine is now a 1700, with uprated oil and water pumps, uprated rocker gear, plus some head work including hardened valves seats and a Duplex timing chain conversion. "It didn't have any obvious issues but was

"The transmission tunnel had been beaten about too," recalls Ben, "presumably for a series of different gearboxes. After discussing things with Mark we left it untouched as part of the car's history. In many ways we were attempting to conserve the car more than simply restoring it."

Once Majestic had done the metalwork the Escort was rolled the short distance across to Steve Holmes at Double H Restorations where it received 12 coats of two-pack black. "He had the car for about six months, there's over 250 hours in achieving that perfect paint."



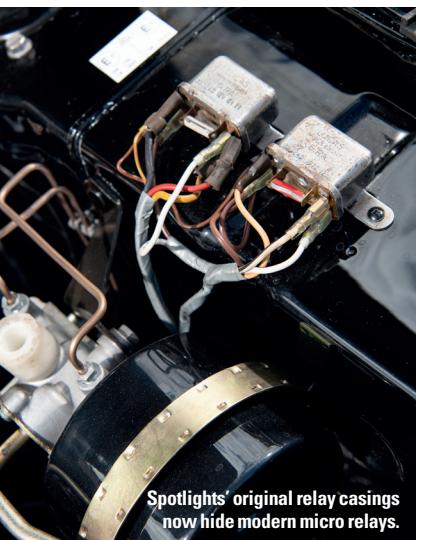
Majestic Motors have done a superb job in making sure this Mexico doesn't look over-restored.



The Mexico's hard-to-find centre console was missing so a replacement had to be tracked down.



The Mk1 ended up needing a major restoration but it's now better than new.



Spotlights' original relay casings now hide modern micro relays.



The Mexico's now ready to hit the road and shows...

rebuilt for peace of mind and because everything else was being redone to a high standard. It's now got plus-90 pistons and came with a lairy Piper cam which we retained, we also opened the ports to match the tubular steel manifold. It then needed a better inlet so after discussion with Mark the original Weber was replaced with a pair of rejected Dell'Ortos, which give a great induction roar." Meanwhile the rear axle and gearbox went out to 2 Spec Transmissions for rebuilding.

"Mark previously had all the seats reupholstered, I sourced a new centre console and we fitted a new carpet set. New doorcards and kick panels were bought from East Kent Trim Supplies but we restored the rear seat panels because they had the optional armrests. The original walnut wood trim had been replaced by cheap plastic versions, but I managed to find a

complete set and we had it re-veneered. The dashboard is original, as is all the glass although we had it all polished before it was fitted. Our now-retired local trimmer, Mark refitted the Webasto and a new vinyl roof.

"I stripped the wiring loom," continues Ben, "removing some extra wires and fitted a resistor for the two-speed heater — Ford's method for adding resistance was fitting a metre of extra wire. Naturally we retained the original fusebox but, although 6RA relays are easy enough to find, replacing the original Lucas 6RA fused-type relay for the spotlights was going to cost about £100. I managed to instead re-engineer and hide a modern micro relay inside the casing."

Speaking of the spotlights, the chaps at Majestic are especially proud of that part of the restoration. "The Cibie lamps arrived with severe corrosion and damage, and

replacements proved impossible to find. Precise measurements were taken and a spin-form mould created allowing new lamp bowls to be manufactured. The reflector bowls had rusted away so new ones were made using a forming tool to produce them in steel before having them chromed. A precise paint colour-match was taken from the original part." Once the bumpers were rechromed by Marque Restore in Coventry the Escort was complete. "It was a really nice car to work on," says Ben, "especially knowing the pedigree and history."

Owner, Mark is certainly happy with his restored Mexico: "I haven't had much chance to drive it because of the Covid restrictions and currently it needs a few hundred miles of driving then another rolling road session, but

when you get behind the wheel it's exactly like a brand-new Mk1 Escort. Those Dell'Ortos sound like the end of the world! With this level of restoration it's never going to be a car I can leave in a supermarket car park, but I'll certainly be taking it to local shows. I'm now thinking about buying a Mk2 Escort, a rust-free one, to go with it."

Thanks to: Majestic Motors (01926 658923, www.majestic-motors.co.uk), Double H Restorations (07779 455674), East Kent Trim Supplies (01233 500280, www.eastkenttrimsupplies.com), Ford AVO Owners' Club (www.avoclub.com), Marque Restore (02476 622225, www.marquerestore.co.uk) and 2 Spec Transmissions (01564 779010, www.2specgroup.co.uk) **CF**



Mark's Mexico features the optional Contour front seats.



The Crossflow's capacity is now just shy of 1700cc. The lairy cam has been retained, now joined by a pair of Dell'Ortos.

"IT WAS A GREAT CAR TO WORK ON, ESPECIALLY KNOWING ITS HISTORY"



THE SCIENCE BIT

TREATING THE METALWORK

Ben has a specific process for painting metal components. "We dip parts then carefully shotblast them. Even gentle shotblasting takes some metal away so we mainly use it to provide a key for the paint coats that follow. We'll then E-Coat the part, Electrophoretic Painting, that removes any remaining grease and oil and it puts paint into the tiniest crevices, such as the join between two welded panels. Then we powdercoat it, which gives it an attractive, smooth finish. Powder coating is purely cosmetic, it won't protect against corrosion and it doesn't like being applied on sharp edges. You shouldn't ever powdercoat the area under a critical fastening; the powder coat contains plastic and it relaxes, so if you torque up a bolt over a powder coated surface chances are a week later it will be loose."

