

THE WINTER PROJECT

(Or, 'What your partner wished you'd never read')

We thought some of you might like to be reminded that a few rusty chassis rails on your beloved Marcos is not the end of your motoring exploits. But perhaps, just for this winter. N.B. this applies to the steel chassis brigade only; wooden chassis cars can now breath a sigh of relief.

Some of you will already have experienced the joy of having located, and sheared off, the last bolt holding the chassis to the body. Then comes the creaking and groaning, both of the helpers and the car, as the fibreglass is CAREFULLY released, at a precarious angle, from the lump of rusty metal below. And to think, after all that, your work has only just begun.

So where do you start. Firstly, it's not nearly as difficult as you might imagine, but don't ever think it will be easy, and certainly don't even attempt to remove the body without at least 4 helpers; with at least two of these being reasonably tall, but more of that later. Basically, all you have to do is remove between approximately 58 and 75 self tapping bolts. The earlier, 60s cars, seems to have fewer fastenings than those of their 70s and later cousins.

As a start, remove the following items:

Bonnet, doors, boot lid and petrol tank.

Hand brake, heater hoses, heater control cables.

Pedal box and pedal assembly, battery box and inner mudguards.

Door striker plates and gear lever.

Disconnect the loom from the chassis by removing all wiring connections and collect rear loom together and poke through gear lever hole to the underside of the car. Roll up engine bay loom to where it comes through bulkhead.

On some cars the alloy kicker strips on the door openings will be screwed through the fibreglass into the chassis tubes beneath. Take them of just in case.

You would be wise to also consider removal of both front and rear screens. These come out relatively easy and, to be honest, it's a lot less to worry about when you come to remove the body.

During this overall process, it may be prudent to label any wires that are disconnected, especially if your loom isn't quite as tidy and methodically colour coded as it might be. It's always easy to say, ' Oh, I'll remember what that one was for.' But, 4 or 5 months on - yes, it might take that long - your memory will probably have failed you.

The body can be removed with the engine, gearbox and all suspension still in place, provided you remove the 4 radius arm bolts at the rear and replace them with 4 x ½" bolts (with the heads reduced to a minimum thickness) feeding these in from the outside.

These bolts should be just long enough to pass through the inner metal upright, but not any longer or they will foul the body on the inside when you lift it. The reason for reducing the head thickness is to allow the body to pass on the outside. However, you may find that you need to chop these bolts off, and cut through part of the fibreglass, if there are steel plates bonded onto the body at this point, needing clearance from the remains of the bolts.

You can now concentrate on the body screws. At this point you may wish to invest in an angle grinder, or you may be lucky. You can expect to find self tappers in the following locations, depending on the age of your car:

Behind sill cover plate	5-7 per side
Body beneath sill	5-6 per side
Footwells	4-5 per side
Front of dash	5, evenly spaced
Behind seats	3-4 per side
Headrest level	5, evenly spaced
Rear parcel shelf	3 per side
Boot floor	4-5
Behind petrol tank	2
At door check strap	2 per side

The most difficult ones to remove if they are old are the ones on the rear parcel shelf. If you have not removed the rear screen, soak the bolts with WD40 for a day or two. A ratchet pozidrive and your socket set should now ease removal.

Once you think you have removed all the bolts, free the body from the chassis by gentle jacking (using a spreader board) under the floor pans and the boot floor. You should be able to lift the body slightly at the wheel arches when it is free.

At this stage you are ready for the full lift. Position your four helpers, one at either side of the bulkhead and one at each of the rear wheel arches, to control the lift. It is recommended that the owner runs around and checks for snagging points during the lift (or just panics).

With the front screen out, care must be taken at the front pillars as the body is very weak here. Also, don't attempt to lift the shell at the rear, or you could find yourself with cracks above the rear wheel arches.

Raise the body slowly; swinging the back up until the floor pan clears the top chassis rail at the seat back. Withdraw the body at this angle until the foot wells come clear. Your two helpers at the back are now lifting up and back at about a 20 degree angle, not the most comfortable of positions. It's at this point that you may well experience the groaning and creaking mentioned earlier.

Obviously, stop if the body seems to be stuck and check to see if there is a fixing you have missed. The body may catch at the front of the rear wheel arch on the door striker plates and the rear of the body on the uprights securing the radius rods. A little springing of the body should clear this.

Subject to a successful lift of the body off the chassis, you will, hopefully, have none, or very little, cracks or grazing on the paint.

At this point you will feel very pleased with yourself. But, having found a suitable place to store the body (I seem to remember ours spending quite a few months precariously suspended across a railway sleeper from the garage rafters) you will suddenly find yourself confronted with a very rusty chassis, the likes of which you can never imagine being well again.

This is where the real work starts, as you sort out which of the chassis tubes need to be replaced - not all at once please, remember the structural nature of the chassis - and what sort of protection you are going to apply to the revamped metal. If you remember nothing else, remember the gallons of 'waxoyl' you need to refill the chassis tubes, and don't forget to put the bungs back.

And then there's the suspension that doesn't look so good anymore, and the engine block with the paint falling off, and the myriad of wires that have seen better days, and the 5 speed gearbox that you'd always promised yourself, or the tired old engine that you might as well uprate, now that you can get to it easier, and don't forget the new carbs to finish it off. Need I say more?

So, the vital question is - will your bank balance, sanity and the goodwill of your partner stand up to this test? If you can't answer yes to at least the last of these, don't start. Otherwise, happy days, and see you on the road in the summer. OK, so I didn't say which one!!

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Thanks go to Mike Payne, Simon Keeley and Dave C. for the information for this article.