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## 1966 Chevrolet Corvair homecoming – 2018 summary report

[Don Homuth](#) on Dec 28th, 2018



*Loading the newly acquired 1965 donor car onto the flatbed. Photos by author.*

I very nearly gave up.

After the fiasco with the blaster destroyed some important parts of the Corvair, and revealed some really serious problems with it that the previous owner had covered up with large globs of Bondo, there was a point when I didn't do anything with the car, and thought seriously about just abandoning the entire effort.

Three things stopped that:

- I am saddened, even disappointed, when I see abandoned project cars listed for pennies on the dollar, not to mention a bunch of lost time and hope expended on a vision that will never see the light of day.
- After having declared my intention several times to readers hereon, I'd feel downright stupid just to walk away from it and admit defeat.
- I still have that vision of getting it done, actually driving it, entering it into a show or three, and enjoying my last special interest car.



***Part of the donor car haul included a new-in-box fuel tank and sending unit.***

There came a day when I shrugged my shoulders, and said “Whatthehell anyway. In for a penny; in for a pound. Might as well just get on with it.”

*Part of the donor car haul included a new-in-box fuel tank and sending unit.*

I did a brain reboot, rethought the process of starting this part over again, and decided to carry on.

(Another unsolicited word of praise for my long-suffering wife. She continues to support the project, even as she thinks I’m slightly daft for undertaking it in the first place. It might be done by our 30th anniversary come August. I do love that woman!)

This time, I will take the entire car right down to bare metal. No more surprises. Whatever needs fixing or replacing, whatever components need to be sourced will be. However long it may take is what it will take to do it properly. No more schedules or timelines. Just get it done right!

Then something unexpected happened. It involved actual progress — and some relief.



While visiting my body guy to discuss the difficulty of fabricating a fix for the problems, his friend visiting the shop offhandedly mentioned a 1965 convertible project car for sale in Nampa, Idaho. Though mine is a 1966, nevertheless some of the components of that car would work for mine.



***New brake drums and suspension parts, and a rebuilt four-speed transmission were included as well.***

The online photos suggested the luggage and engine compartment lids were in remarkably good condition. The floor appeared sound in the pictures. Convertible floors are different from the floors in coupes, and finding a good one is no easy thing. It also had a manual convertible frame mechanism, with which I could replace my own power top, since my car didn't have that when new.

There was some hope that the entire luggage compartment section front-to-back and side-to-side would be useful. The pictures suggested it would be. They were wrong. The owner had started to "fix" things by cutting sections out. For my car, that won't do.



*Loading the trailer for the trip home.*

Pretty much everything was off and out of the car. It had no suspension or wheels, so I borrowed a flatbed from Duane Wentland, my restoration guru, and set off with a retired USMC Sergeant Major gearhead friend to get it. Five hundred miles one way. The weather gods helped, delivering two days of clear weather.

A friend of the owner brought over a tractor with a hoist, and the car body was strapped to the trailer, along with the drivetrain — a two-carb engine with a three-speed manual transmission and everything still attached. Not useful to me, but it came with the package. That filled the trailer.





*The luggage compartment is too cut up to be useful.*

In a couple of earlier phone conversations, the owner said he had “some parts” in boxes that he had picked up to use as his project. I had no idea.

The back of the  $\frac{3}{4}$ -ton Xtra-cab pickup (with camper shell) got filled front-to-rear and top-to-bottom with loose parts, plus nine boxes of other parts, including some NIB items. Things like a brand-new gas tank and fuel sender. A rebuilt four-speed transmission. A remanufactured steering box and shaft. A dozen or so pieces of new sheetmetal, two of which will perhaps be useful. All the trim, including some in really nice condition. All the suspension bits underneath. All the hub and brake mechanisms, with redone drums. Curiously — rebuilt front and back seat frames and cushions, but with the original discolored white vinyl reinstalled.



*The luggage and engine compartment lids from the red donor car are far better than the ones I was going to recondition.*

Some of the larger bits were put into the empty car body shell. They weren't about to blow away.

Quite literally a ton — actual weight — of things. All of the entire car separated from the unibody frame.

Back across Oregon, with the weather still sunny and dry. Up through the Ochoco National Forest, above 4000 feet, with spectacular scenery. We stopped to pull out a van that had gone into a ditch on an icy road. Still no problems getting home.





*The seats were rebuilt, but then covered in the original discolored vinyl.*

I delivered the body to the body guy next day, which proved to be another adventure. He didn't have a hoist that could lift the entire car, but he did have a wooden dolly on wheels that could get under and near the trailer bed. Using an engine hoist, we got the front end up far enough to get some plywood underneath it, and inched the car forward. Once it was on, we then raised and slid the back and got it balanced onto the dolly. It got parked outside the shop, to await the floor being cut out.



***On the dolly at the body shop. The car is/was way too seriously rusted out for an actual restoration.***

(Which doesn't sound like that big a deal, till you realize that right in the middle of the action, a strong storm front came through, bringing 50-mph winds and driving rain. A miserable experience.)

Back home, it took more than two hours to unload the trailer. Even for small cars, things like suspensions and all that cast metal are heavy. I got them arrayed across the shop floor, more or less sorted into major components. But none of the boxes were unpacked.





*The floor, on the other hand, is solid and not corroded.*

The next morning, I delivered the motor and drive train intact to Rex Johnson, who had rebuilt the same for my car, and returned the trailer to Duane. It took the better part of four days all told, but the body guy has the donor car for whenever he can get to it. When he gets the floor out, I'll take off the doors and manual top frame assembly and the rest of it will go to Rex. There are parts of it, like the rear clip, cowl, windshield frame, etc. that might be useful to someone some day. Just not to me.



On Monday, Rex and two friends came over to have a look at the parts on the shop floor. A bunch of them really are quite good — the previous owner had planned to use them in his project. Only a few will be useful for mine, but that's OK. I cut a deal with the guys doing the sorting that rather than charge them money for the parts, what I really needed more would be some useful work when it finally comes time to reassemble what I have into an actual car. A lot of time can be saved with three to four people bolting things together instead of just one or two. The heavy lifting will go easier as well.

After the holidays are over, Mark Dustan, whose own project is a 1965 Corsa convertible, turbocharged with air conditioning (really) says he will come by and we'll do a photo session to put much of what I have up for sale. I am predisposed to be generous, and offer good prices for the stuff my own friends don't need or want. (To that end, the four "cocktail shaker" harmonic balancers mounted at the corners have already been sold for \$80 the set to a guy who really only needs one. I won't sell one — it's all or none. Three aren't very useful to me.)





I will chemically strip the luggage and engine compartment covers myself this time. I won't risk having them blasted and encounter the same problem again. Maybe the doors the same way. I will nab the manual top frame. It will all be stripped and prepared for later reassembly.

At this point, about the only thing I really still need is the entire luggage compartment interior, pinch weld to pinch weld on both sides, and cowl to fascia. I don't need the floor bottom — I have two of those now, both brand new.

It's a mental relief to have restarted this project on a positive note. My wife says I was really stressed out when I was considering abandoning it. She notices things like that.



So that's where things are — a week before Christmas 2018.

I don't intend to do much with anything for the next two weeks or so. Life beckons, and the annual holiday and solstice celebration is compelling. The house is decorated, I will be about doing some of my holiday baking, visiting friends, and making merry for a while. It's been kind of a tough month, and I figure I've earned a hiatus. The body guy agrees — he won't do much till the New Year. Duane is taking three vacation trips with family.

2019 beckons! Car projects are secondary for the time being. It surely feels a lot better knowing things are moving along once again.



