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1966 Chevrolet Corvair homecoming – progress, at last

Don Homuth on May 10th, 2019

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Installing the body shell — carefully — onto the rotisserie. Photos by author.

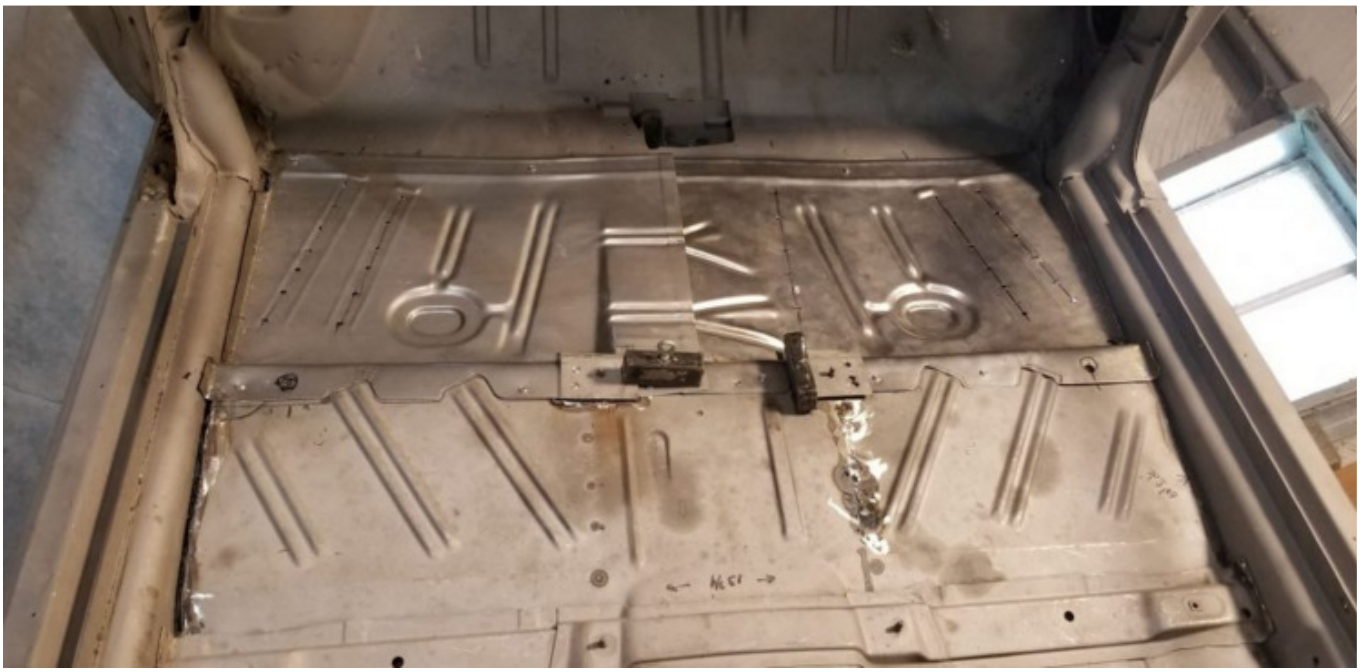
Enough about my personal frustration over the Corvair. This is an actual progress report.

Much has been done. A bunch of subassemblies, all of which will become important later, now await installation.

- The entire drivetrain — engine, differential, and transmission — has been completely and properly overhauled, tested, and run, and is now awaiting installation.
- The entire front suspension, right down to the wheel hubs, has been taken apart, new parts installed where required, blasted and repainted, and reassembled.
- The entire vinyl in the interior has been redone — seats, door panels, interior panels — in the proper color and sheen, all the small shiny bits replaced. It is on the shelf.
- The radio has been remanufactured. It now looks completely stock, as it did when it was an AM-only radio 53 years ago. But all the inside has been replaced with modern circuitry, it can now handle FM stereo, but still looks precisely as it did before.
- The 42 feet of stainless-steel trim on the car has been polished to a jewel-like finish, wrapped, and is on the shelf.
- The bumpers and guards have been rechromed.
- The “wire wheel” covers have been rechromed (after someone sold me a new old stock (NOS) set they claimed had been done properly), new spinners sourced and await reassembly. There is another full set of “driver” wire wheel covers.

- Three full sets of 13-inch steel wheels and tires have been sourced. One set is for radials, to be used just for driving. One set is a Coker bias-ply replica Firestone 7.00-13 with a whitewall of the proper width. Those will be show-only. (I don't recommend driving the car any distance on bias-play tires any more.) Two sets have been blasted and powder-coated to the proper sheen. The third set of wheels came with the donor car, and will be used when the chassis becomes a roller to be moved from place to place.
- The aluminum bits, like the rocker panel trim, are new and on the shelf.
- The dashboard and glovebox door have been stripped, primed, and repainted crinkle finish black. New sticker decals are in an envelope.
- All the instrumentation has been removed and rebuilt, tested, and reinstalled in the dash.
- Most all of the fasteners have been blasted and replated — some in cadmium finish, others galvanized, painted, or anodized.
- New brake lines await reinstallation, along with a rebuilt proper master cylinder. The brake cylinders have either been installed on the front, or are in the box for the rear.
- All the spindles have been cleaned, and all wheel bearings properly lubed and installed.
- The tinted glass has been removed and checked to ensure that its date code is appropriate for a 10/65 build car. It is. The windshield is new. The glass provider charged an extra $65 to provide one with the proper LOF logo and date code.
- The interior window and door hardware has been removed. It will be cleaned and reinstalled after the car is painted. I have a spare set of doors with everything intact from the donor car to be a template.
- Both passenger doors, and the lids for the luggage and engine compartments have been removed and stripped by dipping. All attaching hardware has been blasted and cleaned, including replating the proper bolts.
- The gas tank and sender and filler tube are new in the box.
- The steering box has been rebuilt.

There's more, but you get the idea. When the body is ready, only then can these components be reassembled on the car.



New front floor pans are welded in

Back seat area cleanup. This was mostly okay.

Cowl corrosion, beneath the windshield. This will be replaced with a full-width new piece

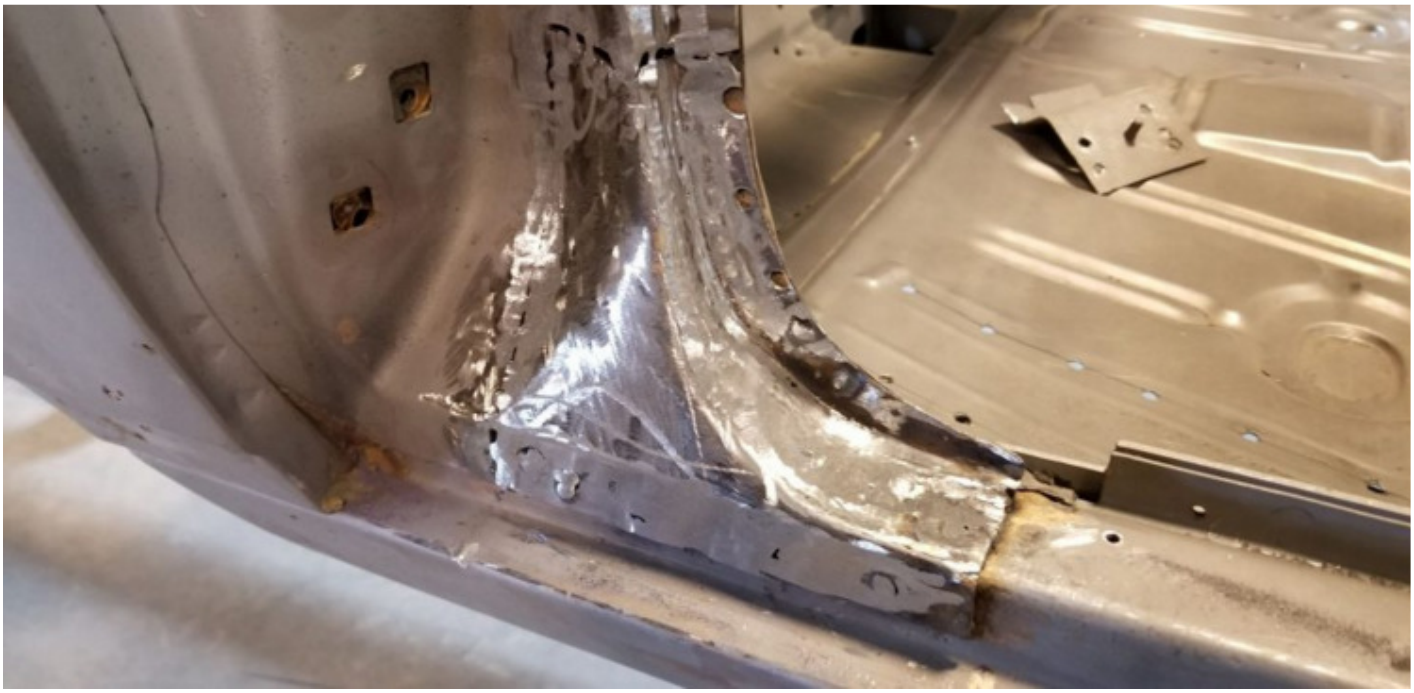
As of now, the upcoming summer projects are:

- The convertible manual top frame has been removed from the donor car, awaits disassembly, blasting, recoating, and installation when the car is ready to be painted. I have a separate, but really in bad condition, manual top frame to use as a template for reassembly. The new top fabric will wait till the frame is in the car.
- The last window trim, especially for the vent windows, has been removed and sent to be rechromed.
- The steering wheel shaft will be chemically stripped and repainted.

The guy who has been doing much of the tin bending, welding, and replacing has had some recent medical issues, and the project has lost the last three to four weeks. Nevertheless, the new floorpans to replace the old corroded pieces are in. The floor braces underneath were blasted and properly installed. The reinforcing brackets for the seats are ready. The entire corroded piece at the bottom of the windshield will be replaced.

Driver's door sill corrosion, front. This area was previously covered with Bondo.

Same area, with the metal cut away for a patch panel.



The front of the driver's door sill, with the patch panel welded in place.

Corrosion at the rear of the driver's door sill. You guessed it – this was covered in Bondo as well.

The same area, with much of the corrosion cut out.

The repaired driver's door sill, rear.

Those two badly corroded areas at the lower corners of the driver's door were cut out and replaced with original pieces from donor cars. They await final grinding and smoothing to get the seams at the proper height. Most of the right rear fender was cut away, to be replaced by a NOS piece that Duane Wentland picked up on one of his many trips to swap meets that I can't get to. The corrosion in the wheel wells of the luggage compartment still needs to be cut out and replaced, but a donor front clip will be sacrificed once the old piece is removed to be used as a template. Then the bottom of the luggage compartment can be welded in place.

The right front wheel well, inside the luggage compartment showing what needs to be cut away and replaced.

The left front wheel well showing the same.

The donor front pan awaiting surgery

The left front fender which can still be saved.

The right rear quarter panel has been cut off, awaiting a new old stock (NOS) replacement. The “repair” done by the former owner was too far gone to fix.

To assist with that effort, I purchased an original Fischer Body Manual and an Assembly Manual. These date from 1966, so whatever gets done can be researched. They were reasonably priced, and having them in the library is a fine idea.

Prior to doing any more paint or filler work, there will be a final inspection with Duane and Rex Johnson — two local Corvair gurus. If they give their okay, work will proceed from there.

Planning the sequence of the next few steps is an ongoing process. To make the reassembly work properly, there is an order to it.

Off the rotisserie:

- The inside of the doors, which have been chemically stripped, will have a special coating rather like bedliner applied. It's supposed to slow down (there is no Prevent) rust and also lessen any door skin "oil can" vibration after everything else is installed.
- The undersurface perimeter of the engine compartment lid and the luggage compartment lid will be painted with the exterior gloss color.

On the rotisserie:

- Paint the interior surfaces of the passenger and engine compartment in the appropriate factory color and sheen. That will avoid overspray later.
- Paint the underside and undercoat the wheel wells according to factory drawings. The entire underside does not get undercoated.
- The interior of the luggage compartment will get the appropriate spatter paint it. (I have it on hand.)
- Four of us will bring the suspension pieces to the body shop and install them while the car is still on the rotisserie. It will then be taken off.

Body reassembly:

- Once on wheels, body flexing — common in convertibles — can be dealt with. The luggage and engine compartment lids can be installed, the doors hung and shimmed properly. Panel gaps and fit will be adjusted before paint is applied. Temporary wheels and steering will be installed.
- Then and only then will it be ready for filling, blocking, sanding, priming, and exterior paint. It will be the original Tuxedo Black. I am leaning towards clear coating it.
- The rear cove must be painted separately in Argent Silver with a 60 sheen satin finish clear coat. The rear valence panel has an area around the aluminum grille insert to be painted, and the C-shaped pieces of the rear cove must also be painted in the same color and sheen.

(Isn't this just fascinating?)

After that's done, it will be time to install other components and reassemble everything else.

Left rear showing corrosion behind the engine.

Right rear, also behind the engine. Both areas will require patch panels.

It is now completely clear that the car will not be ready for the July concourse at Forest Grove as I had hoped. I seriously doubt it will be ready even for the long shot September journey to the Hemmings Concours either. Spring of 2020 will be the most likely time for it to be rolled out for public view.

Patience has never come easily to me. But it's important to attend to every single detail in proper order.

I've gotten comfortable with that. It still remains more important to me that the car be done right than done fast.

And now for something completely different….

Always open to new adventures in motoring, a month ago we purchased a brand new tractor for here on the farm. First one I've ever owned. Handy thing! Front end bucket and mid-mounted mower. It's a bow to advancing age — there are now some things I just cannot do manually any more, and this will keep me on the place longer than I could otherwise.

I've dug up and moved six to seven good-sized rocks, dug out several stumps and have moved 5 yards of topsoil to fill in holes around the pastures. What used to take two days of mowing with the garden tractor mower can now be done on the entire place in a tad over four hours.

The hydraulics of the front end loader is a new skill, so I managed to smash a fence rail. No matter — I was going to replace the rails with 4-foot wire later anyway. Embarrassing.

I'm tempted to write a "road test" review of it, just for the fun of it.