

A night of Marques.....

When the Sprite Club received an invitation to tour Sprite Club Member, Gerard Miller's Marque Restoration and Motor Repair Workshop at Kilkenny, many calendars, tablets, mobile phones and iPad were marked with the date.

Therefore, on a cool, chilly Friday night nearly 20 Sprite Club Member and friends arrived at the Workshop.

Gerard started to the tour with some of the finished and completed vehicles in his workshop.

First vehicle on the tour was a HK Monaro GTS that had a fairly hard life, have various repairs, hitting a tree and the usual rust bugs. After 1000 hours of work, the Pale Yellow with GT Striped vehicle is now finished awaiting trimming, engine installation before returning to the road.

Next stop was the Spray Booth where a recently painted Iso Grifo was sitting. Still with the masking tape on the vehicle, this lovely Blue and Silver Iso is one of four right hand drive 427ci V8 powered Italian Coachbuilt beasts. Valued at approx. \$500,000, these two vehicles were excellent examples of the standard of finish that Gerard and his team produce at the workshop.

Gerard explained that he has a high standard with 3.5mm panel gaps, and all surfaces true and straight. The easy part of any restoration is applying the colour coats, the hard and costly part is getting the bodywork correct in the first place.

Passing a XW Falcon body that now is a two door coupe, with its chassis alongside, made by Gerard and team, fitted with an all alloy V8 worth \$100,000, tricked transmission and final drive, this is something out of the ordinary for the team to do. We then headed to the mechanical area where a 1920's Delage Straight 8 is having some fettling, tyres and adjustments, a Type 57 Bugatti with a broken gearbox case and gears, an Aston Martin DB2/4 in for minor work, A HT Holden Belmont for some preparation work before its restoration and a 3 litre V12 Ferrari Motor having some external components repaired before being refitted into a body that is being restored in the next workshop.



1920's Delage Straight 8

With the Delage and Bugatti each having a value each of 2 Million Dollars, the Mk II Sprite of Clive Spreadbury sitting on the hoist looked like a poor cousin. Even though the little Sprite's value was far less than the other vehicles surrounding it, Gerard emphasised that he was putting the same effort into Clive's Sprite, as it had been a victim of poor mechanical work in its' past life. Brakes, front suspension and shockers were all receiving treatment before Gerard would let the vehicle return to the road and track.

The smell of cooked sausages and steak soon came from the Body Workshop, so we followed our noses to be greeted with a range of vehicles undergoing various body repairs and constructions.

A 1920's Riley Red Wing having its polished alloy body rebuilt, the bonnet currently being completed before this vehicle heads to South Africa for a tour. A Ferrari 250 GT/E body is on the rotisserie having its "lead wiped" body repairs removed and metal work correctly replaced. These previous repairs included panels pop riveted over rust holes and lead wiped, until the paint was removed no one would be wiser.

With over 700 hours of bodywork required on the Ferrari, it was a chance to see the detail in the bodywork that the original coachbuilders did, as well as the work that Gerard and his team have completed already.



Ferrari 250 GT/E Bodywork

In the corner is a Rolls Royce that had been involved in a roll-over having the passenger's side repaired, a lovely Porsche 365 is having some additional rear bodywork skirt handcrafted, and another Ferrari 250 GT/E having some minor work and sorting.

Sitting in the centre of the workshop is one of Gerard's special vehicles. This Ferrari is for a SA customer and is one of the hand-built replicas that Gerard has a specialisation for. Having completed the Alfa Ala Spessa a few years ago, this Ferrari 330TRI/LM is the next in line of an exceptional piece of craftsmanship.



Alfa Ala Spessa



Ferrari 330 TRI/LM

Starting as a mid-1980's Ferrari 400i, the bodywork and mechanicals removed and the painstaking task of determining what will go where, how it will fit and how to mount items were a major undertaking. Gerard described this as one of the hardest part when creating a new body for a vehicle.

The 330TRI/LM was a purpose built factory racing car for Le Mans, so has a sporting presence. Gerard's version has a higher windscreen, roof and air conditioning neatly fitted below the dash. The aluminium body has been hand crafted and shaped from 1.6mm aluminium sheets, and curved, shaped and welded together to create a fantastic and intriguing shape.





This vehicle will be road registered and will have some competition use, so has had roll bars, side intrusion bars and other safety items added to the body so it will meet all the safety standards for these tasks.

Gerard also outlined the price for some of the Ferrari parts, and the difficulty of obtaining the correct specification for these parts. Even items as simple as a spring shackle bolt, the replacement is undersized and cannot be supplied with the correct nut. Gerard has now undertaken to have these machined locally to his specification so it fits, works and looks like the original bolt and nut did.

This is the level and standard that must go into to these restorations and recreations of some wonderful motoring vehicles. Around the walls are various body panels demonstrating further examples of Gerard's craft and the standard of workmanship produced by his team.

On behalf of the Sprite Club I would like to thank Gerard and his team for allowing us to visit this most interesting workshop for a great night, and look forward to visiting again to see further progress in the Ferrari and other projects that are in the pipeline.

Gordon Boyce