

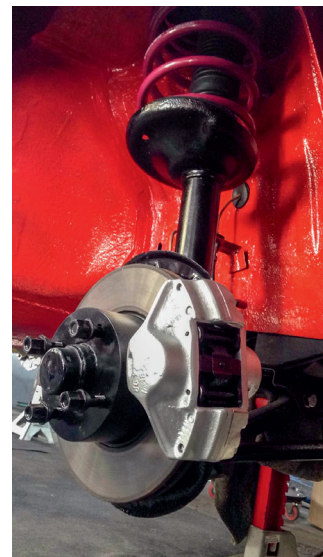
Octane Cars

BY OCTANE STAFF AND CONTRIBUTORS



Left and below

What began as a simple respray has turned into a restoration; new front suspension struts wouldn't accept new damper inserts; rear roof seal now unobtainable, so original is reused.



Hidden depths



1981 BMW 323i TOP CABRIO

SANJAY SEETANA

PATIENCE IS A VIRTUE, they say, in which case I am something of a sinner. I have only myself to blame: the Baur went into Automo in Berkshire for a repaint but the job has escalated almost into a full restoration. Sourcing the necessary parts has resulted in the car being stuck in limbo for most of the last two months.

First major hurdle was the front suspension struts, which arrived from BMW looking terrific – but the new Bilstein shocks would not fit inside the struts, only going about a third of the way in. Apparently, the welding process now used is not the same as the original and it left very little room for certain dampers to fit. Eventually we decided to refurbish the original struts, after which the Bilsteins fitted perfectly.

Next big problem was the rear quarterlights. The Automo team had removed them but discarded the rubbers, not realising that they are now as rare as hen's teeth. When Baur made the conversion, the rear quarterlights were shortened and therefore the saloon quarterlight rubbers, which are easily available, do not fit. Thankfully, Jeroen De Laat at BMW21.net managed to source a set for me from Holland, costing £150 delivered.

Then the most unassuming of all parts ended up taking weeks to solve. The 323i has a headlight washer system but, boy, are these parts hard to find now. I ended up paying €49 for a single headlight wiper blade online, something of a scam because four blades were shown in the image but only a



single blade arrived in the post. When I queried this, the vendor said 'I will let you have the other three for €99!' How generous.

But the hardest part of all to find was the washer bottle. They are different for RHD and LHD cars, due to the alternating position of the brake servo, and BMW doesn't make them for the handful of RHD survivors.

Furthermore, if you have a headlight washer system, it's a different bottle again. Sorting that was a rather painful experience.

Fortunately, most of the rubber seals for the Baur roof are

available, with the exception of the important one between roof and bootlid. I have looked almost all over the world but with no luck, and we are going to have to re-use the old seal.

Despite all the problems, with luck the car will be back on the road soon. Its MoT has now run out so its first outing will probably be straight to the testing station. Wish me luck.

THANKS TO Chedeen Battick at Automo (www.automo.co); Katrin Mölle and Benjamin Voss at BMW Group Classic (www.realoem.com).