

**CONTRIBUTOR**  
**Christopher P Baker**



**About Christopher**  
Travel writer, photographer and Cuba expert, Christopher is credited with bringing the discovery of Hemingway's Chrysler to the world. His coffee-table book *Cuba Classics: A Celebration of Vintage American Automobiles* is available on Amazon.

**1955 Chrysler New Yorker**  
Engine 5400cc/V8/OHV  
Power 250bhp@4600rpm  
Torque 340lb ft@2800rpm  
Gearbox 2-spd auto  
0-60mph 12.8sec  
Top speed 108mph  
Fuel economy 9.8mpg

**Work since last report**  
Bodywork repairs almost complete. Parts delivered, more parts sourced.

**2** (MTHS) **1890** (£) **0**  
TIME SPENT MILES



The Hemingway Chrysler now sits more comfortably.



**DRAPER Tools**  
www.drapertools.com



An Autopaints package ready to be shipped out.



'A third shipment was bogged down in Customs'



Danny Hopkins at the Lincon factory.



# Slow but sure

## Light at the end of Cuba's bureaucratic tunnel

More than a year has passed since David Soul partnered up with **Practical Classics** to help restore Ernest Hemingway's 1955 Chrysler New Yorker. So far, we have shipped thousands of pound's worth of spare parts to Cuba and made possible the work that we have asked our Cuban specialists, Humberto and Pedro, to undertake. Until recently the convertible was thought lost, now it is heading back to the open road, albeit at a slow pace. I am working with David and with the Red Earth Studios team to document the restoration for the big screen, as well as for the Hemingway Chrysler book that will eventually accompany it.

Many of the desperately needed parts have already been sourced and shipped to Havana. Yet, as David reported in the previous issue, the first shipment sat for weeks in Cuban Customs, as did the second. We fumed, fussed and fretted, but the country's bureaucracy

proved as intractable as a Gordian knot. We learned patience. A third shipment of parts was sent. This, too, became bogged down in Customs at Havana airport as the unwieldy and unyielding bureaucracy – eight different ministries have to sign off on the parts' release – creaked along in first gear.

### Progress on the Hemi

Eventually the parts trickled out and into the hands of our Cuban restorers. When we last filmed the duo at work, in June 2013, the body repair was almost complete, the new chrome was in place, and Humberto had made a start on taking the rusted Hemi engine apart.

I've since made regular visits to check on the car's progress, most recently during the last week of January 2014. At first sight, I couldn't make out any progress since last summer's visit. The Chrysler still rests on a makeshift, alfresco platform of thin steel plates, held



Perfect. Pedro and Humberto unpack parts.

aloft by a miscellany of concrete blocks, discarded timber and defunct batteries. It's a quintessential Cuban concoction that in my mind's eye threatens at any minute to crumple and pitch the precious car into a heap. Last year, a corner of the cobbled stage collapsed beneath David, tumbling him backwards into the bushes. At least the car now sits on proper jacks instead of a flimsy frame of miscellaneous metal.

Late afternoon sunlight slanted in from the south, filtering through the palm fronds to cast faint shadows along the car's grey-primed body. I could make out undulations. 'The bodywork's now complete,' Pedro said.

Still, some heavy duty elbow grease was clearly needed to fill and flat down the body. Pedro seemed thrilled when I told him that PC had now secured the Navajo Orange and Desert Sand paint (for the side panel strip), plus the lacquers and thinners they'd requested. Back in the UK, Danny Hopkins had made the trip to Brighton to see Autopaints, Chrysler swatchcard in hand.

At this point it is worth saying a huge thank you to Autopaints for their attention to detail and lateral thinking in respect to supplying the paints. Navajo Orange was

only discontinued recently, but Desert Sand required some searching on the internet and a flick through the Beautiful New Yorker catalogue we have used as inspiration from day one. Autopaints provides a specialist custom colour-matching service which can identify most vehicle hues. This is usually done either by identifying the colour code or

matching to a sample of the colour – with Desert Sand we had to match it to a page from the brochure. 'It should be noted that colour-matching is always subject to the condition of the existing colour,' say Autopaints... but Danny reckons



Autopaints came up with the colours from brochures.

Proud Humberto shows gleaming rockers and cover.



the code they came up with was just about as close a match as you can imagine. Delivered in double-quick time with high temperature engine paint and topcoat lacquer included, it now awaits shipping in the PC workshop, along with the new battery Danny has sourced from Lincon Batteries in Leigh-on-Sea, Essex.

Lincon is an amazing company. It has been making batteries at its factory since 1908 and is one of the only places on the planet that can manufacture six-volt batteries with enough cranking power for the Chrysler's lump. Watching Lincon put a battery together is both mind-boggling and a bit of a shock. We thought small engineering firms such as this had ceased to exist, but Lincon is shipping its goods all around the world and business is good. Boss Bill Preece can make just about any battery spec you need, to the highest quality. Pedro will go nuts when he sees it.

## Cockerel and doggerel

When he opened the last packages in the latest delivery, Pedro beamed like a Cheshire Cat. As he pointed to the new rear leaf-springs, I tried to compose a shot through the wheel wells. As I raised my camera, a cockerel emerged from beneath the car and scurried past, squawking loudly. Then Pedro's dog peered into my lens from behind the leaf springs. Was this a mechanic's workshop or *Animal Farm*? Whatever it is, this is Cuba.

'Look!' Pedro said, excitedly, drawing me to the front end, where the front axle sported a new brake assembly. Then he pointed to two rusty rear wheel drums and hubs. 'We need these,' he added. 'You mean you can't repair them?' I asked, '*jEstan jodido*,' he replied, using a colloquial expletive that roughly translates

## 'The list of parts that need to be sourced by PC is ever expanding'



Some things can be saved... a lot simply cannot.



### Useful contacts

- **Autopaints** 01273 328698, [www.autopaintsbrighton.co.uk](http://www.autopaintsbrighton.co.uk)
- **Lincon Batteries** 01702 525374/528711, [www.lincon.co.uk](http://www.lincon.co.uk)
- **Longstone Tyres** 01302 714072, [www.longstonetyres.co.uk](http://www.longstonetyres.co.uk)

as: 'They're beyond economic repair.' They've been placed on the ever-expanding list of replacement parts to be sourced by PC.

Humberto added further items, including a starter motor, dynamo and water pump. Several dozen other bits sent over from England last summer are still in their cartons. They can't be fitted to the car until the arrival of other parts still to be sourced and shipped.

Some are proving a devil to find. The Chrysler's front windscreen is badly cracked: a replacement will be expensive to manufacture and will cost a fortune to transport. The same goes for the missing petrol tank.

But, since my last visit, the transmission gear has been wedded to the engine block, which Humberto had taken apart.

Remarkably, the engine's intestines were in working order. The valve covers were off. Humberto ran his fingers over the rocker arms and valve springs. They gleamed like new, although closer inspection betrayed heavy pitting. The V8 Hemi block has been scrubbed free of rust and grime, as have the valve covers, now spray-painted with grey primer. They look new. And the transmission casing has even been given a splash of silver paint. Then Humberto held up a manifold, so rusted that the bolt holes were sealed. I promised to bring him a 46-piece tap, die, and drill set. Our mechanic and bodywork chapista possess patience in heaps. But the end is in sight.

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