



# First Fuelie Goes Green

PUTTING #10 BACK TO ITS ORIGINAL SHADE OF CASCADE

BY JOHN AMES

**When restoring a car, the main points that will determine whether or not the restoration is a success are typically the steps that you'll never see, unless they are not done correctly. Items like the finish work to the body are just one such instance.**

If done correctly, it makes everything else look that much better by becoming invisible. But, if it's done wrong, it is undeniably obvious. The folks at J&M Enterprizes were at that stage for our First Fuelie project car, and they've put together an overview of the steps that it took to bring this year's project vehicle back to as good as new.

First, we had to access the body from the bottom and the top to see what we had to work with. We noticed a few rough patches, like someone took some 3-inch by 3-inch fiberglass cloth patches and put them at different places under the body. We first thought we would have to fix all of them, but when we had Ken look at them, he told us that this was how the good old boys fixed small repairs on the line. So, a little research saved a lot of work

on the underside. We just cleaned the underside to get all the old dirt and paint off, and then we used thinner and rags to wipe down everything on the bottom side of the car. The wheelwells were a bit tougher; we ended up using paint stripper to get the majority of the paint and undercoating off and then came back to finish it with lacquer thinner.

We then went to the top side and started by stripping all the paint off. We used a chemical stripper (Captain Lee's stripper) made specifically for Corvettes and fiberglass. There were a lot of coats of old paint to go through and a lot of color changes over the fifty or so years. Starting from the top layers, we found two black paint jobs, a silver blue, some red, and finally the original Cascade Green. The interior had a couple of coats of red, then Shoreline Beige.

The interesting thing we found in the interior was the Cascade Green under every other color. We found this almost everywhere. You wouldn't think they would have bothered to paint green in the interior, under the hood on the firewall, and the complete trunk area. They must have had a lot of Cascade Green to get rid of because it was everywhere.

Now that the body was stripped, we determined what was good and bad



1 One of the best ways to remove layers of paint is with a stripper agent. Once we got down through several layers of different colored paint, the original Cascade Green began to show through. We could also see the original grease pencil marks from when the body was originally constructed.

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2 Our Corvette Image front end already has the upper dash panel attached, but we needed to remove the metal bracing under the dash panel to attach it to the new body panels before mounting.

3 This is a view that not many enthusiasts get to see – the backside of their dash panel from the top. Notice that all of the bonding areas have been sanded in preparation for a solid bond to the new pieces. If there are any

with the body. We know that the one-piece front end was not original. We noticed that the first time we looked over the car, so we ordered a jig-fit piece to replace it. After calling all our suppliers, we got our jig-fit front end from Corvette Image, who was the

repairs to holes or the panel necessary, this is definitely the time to do it.

4 Likewise, this is a front view of the passenger-side door hinge. Again, all of the bonding areas need to be cleaned, and the new panels installed and checked for fit before any bonding agent is applied. Taking this necessary step ensures that all of the bonding strips are solid and that the body will be as strong as the factory designed it.

only company with one available. While talking to them about their process, they said the front end would be double-baked in their oven so there would be no gelcoat problems. Since we are in Florida and they are in Washington State, we wanted everything to go right

5 The Corvette Image panels are jig-fit as they are assembled. This provides for a clean fit once they are joined with the original body. We used their jig-fit front end and the inner fenders to keep consistency between the panels.

6 The metal bracing that we removed from the old front end was bonded to the new piece before installation.

the first time. It took eight weeks for the part to be made, plus a week for shipping, so planning ahead is a must.

After receiving the front end, we started to remove the old one-piece hand-laid front clip. We noticed that the inner fenders looked to be original

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7 Getting the front end to fit the body isn't nearly as hard as keeping it there until the bonding agent has a chance to cure. Screwdrivers align various holes, while the army of Vice-Grips keep the panels in place until the bonding strips can cure properly.

8 This car originally had RPO-419, (Auxiliary hardtop) as well as RPO 473 (Power-operated folding top) as

panels. We needed to determine what to use and decided to go with the Corvette Image inner fenders so they would match the front clip. The complete front end at all the seam areas was removed, and we made a bonding strip for the rocker area to have the best bond. After cleaning and preparing all the bond areas, we test-fitted the front end to make sure we liked the fit. We probably did this three or four times to get everything right and made sure we could replicate the fit when the bonding agent was applied. The next challenge was to get the front end on and in place before the bonding agent started to set. After setting the front end, we had to clamp it in many different places to keep it from moving once it was in place. We let it sit overnight and then removed all the clamps.

evidenced by the holes in the rear panel. This car was to be the media test vehicle for the new fuel-injection system. Since a power top didn't help performance, it was removed when the engine and fuel system were swapped out by Chevrolet Engineering. We are restoring this car to that configuration, with its originally installed fuel-injection system, so the power system will not be installed.

The next step was to move on to the rest of the body. We started fitting the doors to the rockers and jamb areas again (we had to pre-fit all of this before the front end went on). Then we checked the upper deck, the trunk, and the taillamps. We didn't like how the trunk lid was matching up with the rear surround – one side had a very small gap and the other side was way too wide. After a few days, we made a big decision on the upper rear surround. Since we found all kinds of repairs and a lot of bondo everywhere, we bit the bullet and ordered a rear upper surround & lower rear valance. Once again, we called all of our suppliers. Because our time frame was getting close to the wire, we had the good people at Sermersheim's Corvette make it. They pushed it out in a week, and shipping

9 Paint stripper was used to remove the layers of paint in the trunk area. Again, you can see the Cascade Green showing through from years of re-paints.

10 Here you can see the gap difference between the rear upper surround and the trunk lid. We installed a new upper surround and rear valance panel from Sermersheim's Corvette.

only took a couple of days. So, we got it in and started getting it ready for fitting into place. After fitting two or three times, we bonded it on and had a lot better fit in the taillamp, trunk & upper deck areas.

Meanwhile, we found some time to check out all of our chrome and stainless pieces, which we sent to J&M Chrome & Stainless Repair in Bunnell, Florida. After looking at all of it, they said they weren't able to do the taillamps. They informed us that it took a special process and recommended we contact Advanced Plating in Nashville, Tennessee. We called them only to find out it would take eight to 10 weeks. The taillights were rushed to them so we could get them back in time for Corvettes at Carlisle.

After all of the big changes in plans,

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11 That meant removing the entire upper surround. Note again that all the bonding strips have been dressed and prepared to ensure a strong, proper bond to the new panels.

12 After all the body panels were fitted properly, it was time to gelcoat the entire body. The Corvette Image pieces required using a special gelcoat by Evercoat to keep the warranty on

we were finally able to get to the final fit and minor body work. Now that we were happy with all the seams and gaps, we moved on to the gelcoat. Corvette Image has a special gelcoat by Evercoat that needs to be used in order for them to warranty the fiberglass. We ordered extra to do the entire car, put the first gallon on, and waited about four days before we blocked it out. Then, we reapplied the other gallon and a half on the entire car. Once we had a nice build of gelcoat over the whole body, we blocked it again to give it a nice foundation. The other half gallon of gelcoat was saved for coverage on the jambs, trunk area, and floor boards. After all the body work, gelcoat, and blocking, it was time for primer. We applied about a gallon of Dupont primer and block-sanded the body again. This

the panels. We simply used the same material over the entire body to keep consistency with the materials.

13 After the gelcoat has had time to cure, John at J&M sprayed a light coat of contrasting color on the body as a guide coat. The idea is to block-sand the entire body, allowing the guide coat to show any low areas that will need to be corrected before priming. This ensures a nice,

process was repeated as necessary to get the body looking and feeling how it should, before moving on to paint.

We washed the body with soap and water to help get the dust off and any grease that may have come in contact with the surfaces. Then, all the places that shouldn't be painted had to be masked off. More cleaning was required with grease and wax remover, and we did a final check of all the surfaces to make sure they were prepared properly. Finally, we got to the final cleaning and wiped the entire car down with a tack cloth. After all these steps, we were finally ready for the sealer and Cascade Green. We matched the Cascade Green to original paint found in different areas on the car. Chris from Automotive Paint and Supply came to our shop and did the final tinting to make sure it was

straight body once the paint is applied. Again, one of the steps that will never show up once the job is done, unless it's done wrong.

14 Once the body is straight, it was time for primer. J&M used DuPont ChromaPremier primer to ensure that the paint will stick properly to the gelcoat and allow for a super-smooth finish.

an exact match. Once we were done spraying the green, we did the interior with Shoreline Beige.

After drying for a week or so, we did a final sanding and buffing to our satisfaction. Then a good cleaning got the compound off the edges and small areas. After the painted areas were looking good, we sprayed the undercoating in the wheelwells and blackout paint in the engine compartment and any other areas it's required. After all that was finished, we moved to the final assembly.

On the #10 car, they're aren't any fuel-injection emblems to go on because GM didn't want anyone to know that they were working on it with this car. We will install all the pieces in the proper places and get it ready to come up for Corvettes at Carlisle in August 28-30, 2009.

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15 Once all of the unseen work was completed, it was finally time to apply the shiny stuff. The Cascade Green was matched to the color found underneath various interior panels and was mixed by Chris from Automotive Paint and Supply to ensure accuracy.



16 The body, entirely painted, is a thing of beauty. Once it is mated with the chassis again and filled with all the necessary interior and brightwork, it will be a thing of beauty. But, you'll have to come to Corvettes at Carlisle to see it in person!

## THANKS TO ALL WHO HELPED OUT ALONG THE WAY:

My Wife Mary Ann  
 My Sons Jason, Joe, and Tim  
 Dennis Clark  
 Gary Clark  
 Ken Kayser  
 Gail Parsons  
 Jim Hornaday  
 Paragon  
 Eckler's  
 Corvette Image  
 Sermersheim's Corvette  
 J&M Chrome & Stainless Repair  
 Advanced Plating  
 Auto City Glass  
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 Chicago Corvette Supply  
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