

# THE WRECKING YARD BIT

By **RUSS KELLY & LEN GRIFFING**

**I**N this hectic world of today, where nothing seems permanent or predictable, how can you be sure you've really "arrived"? It's easy—you're "there" when interest is evidenced in what happens to your bones.

American enterprise being what it is, an auto wrecker on the West Coast and another on the East Coast now have more than a passing interest in the physical remains of foreign cars. They are supplementing their domestic-bred stock with worn-but-undamaged parts conceived in Coventry, Stuttgart and even, if you're real lucky, in Modena. The remains of hundreds of cars sitting in boneyards, ranging from a 1935 Alvis to a domestic Continental, still attract the parts-hungry home-mechanic who can't go the gaff on a new assembly or just plain owns an "oddball". Need parts for your Thames? Your Rover? Has a big-finned job run over your Taunus? Chances are that Sherman Way Auto Wreckers in North Hollywood or Frank and Al's in Westbury, New York, can help you.

Jerry, at Sherman Way, cheerful and pleasant to talk to even when he's telling about the DKW that got away, claims the biggest trouble he has is keeping enough stock to meet the demand. Attempts to work out a mail order system didn't work out, because by the time customers got the list a good percentage of the parts were back on the road in new self-propelled homes. As a commentary on West Coast driving habits, the fastest moving parts are gear boxes, grilles and bumpers. It's possible to order parts by mail on the have-you-got-it basis—and if they do they'll save it for you—but a day makes a lot of difference in what they've got on hand.

But Jerry always has a large supply of parts cataloged and put away. A quick tour of the one-acre-plus lot turns up a model of almost every MG series since the war. The same thing goes for Jaguar, including one of those reasonably-rare Mark V four-door sedans. The English Ford lines are well represented by damaged-but-intact Anglias, Prefects, Consuls and Zephyrs. Proportionate numbers of Triumphs and Austin Healeys can be found in various stages of disassembly.

In the New York metropolitan area you talk to Tony, at Frank and Al's Auto Wrecking, who is also a very helpful

fellow when you need a part. He seldom keeps more than ten or fifteen foreign-made cars intact at one time, however he does have a sizeable pile of components. As with Jerry on the West coast, Tony finds that certain parts move a lot faster than others—and American drivers are pretty much the same, East or West.

I asked Tony what parts are in most demand. He replied, "Taunus. We have only one left on the lot, and it's literally a skeleton. Also Fiat. We even bought one Fiat that had no body at all on it. The owner had started to make it into a special and only got as far as shortening the frame. Of course, most of the sports and foreign cars are pretty bad when we get them."

In answer to ordering by mail: "It is possible to get a part that you want badly through the mail. We watch the various 'parts-wanted' columns, and if we have the part we make the contact ourselves, if it's a real odd part. Last month we notified one fellow in Canada that we had a particular head that he'd looked for all over without success. He was a happy guy. But of course a phone call is much quicker than a letter, and our stock changes by the day. You know, every time I see a Cord drive up I know the driver will swarm over that picked-clean shell we have, and usually come up with something that everyone else missed. When two in a row miss, we'll melt it down".

Prices? Tony impressed the fact on us that none of Captain Kidd's progeny found their way to employment at his place "Average prices? Naturally they vary, but recently we sold a Taunus transmission for \$25, and got \$30 for the rear end assembly. We sold the engine from a Triumph—it may have been beat or it may have been like new—for \$40. Wire wheels go for five dollars each, and we've got a big pile of knock-offs over in one corner. You've got to pick out your own."

Wrecking yard shopping is an art to be learned if the most is to be gotten from these fascinating boneyards. There are bargains everywhere and most operators like Jerry and Tony are only too glad to help you find them. On the other hand these are busy men—they're not going to lead you by

*Bill Sadler didn't get Jowett Jupiter chassis for Sadler Special from a wrecking yard, but here's one waiting to be bought.*



*This 1935 Alvis "Grey Lady" still has lots of usable parts on it that are very difficult—to say the least—to purchase new.*



*This Jaguar, hit from the left-front, makes purchases of front suspension parts a very risky business.*

the pinkie either. You must know what you want; the operators don't magnaflux every component before they sell it to you.

Engines are a good case in point. Some engines are bargains of the highest order—others are worthless. It depends largely on the circumstances of the corpse's arrival in the yard whether the power plant in question is worth anything. A flipped car or one that has been smashed from the side or rear will have the best chance of owning a good engine for several reasons. First, of course is the direction of the damage, i.e., away from the engine. Secondly the car was running when wrecked, a point which carries the logical implication that the engine was and is in running condition. Finally, the chances are good that the vital accessories on the engine such as generator, starter and ignition were left undamaged. These last, incidentally, are items that a purchaser should insist be part of the deal when buying; they cost like the dickens if you have to buy them separately from a franchised dealer without the old item for a trade-in.

Rear-end gears and assemblies should only be purchased when the major source of car damage has been from the side, quartering from the front, or a roll-over. The reason for this, of course, is that blows along the axis of the driveline tend to mess up bearings, bushings and gears. Further, a hard enough blow from the front, through the long axis of the engine, can actually bend the rear axles and their housings. The same warning applies to transmissions for the same reasons. A blow at the side of the transmission can in rare instances damage it, but it would have to be a brutal blow indeed since the strong side members and the X-members will absorb a pretty fair amount of punishment before passing it through to the gearbox case.

So far we've not mentioned fire damage. Material which has suffered from fire presents an entirely different problem in that the *type* of fire makes the difference whether the engine, gears and running equipment are useable, or just worthless scrap. A fire that occurs in the body of the car or under the hood destroys only those items that are subject to flame damage, items such as generator, carburetors, wiring

and interior trim. These can be listed as write-offs in any fire, but the heavy parts—block, gears, suspension, brakes etc.—will be completely useable. On the other hand, if the car has been damaged by fire that occurred outside the vehicle (such as a garage holocaust, brush or forest fire) avoid it as you would the plague. The reason for this is that such a fire acts like an annealing furnace, softening all metal parts and in some cases even melting pistons in their cylinders and bearings in their journals. A car damaged in this way is valuable only as scrap and no reputable wrecking yard operator will handle it if he knows the history—we mention it primarily as a warning to avoid buying such a "bargain" from a private party or insurance company.

One prime fallacy that should be laid to rest, however, is the old canard that the junkie will do you if you don't watch out. There are undoubtedly a few lice in this particular woodpile as there are in any business—buyers of stolen parts and the like—but in the main the wrecking yard operator is as reputable a businessman as the used furniture salesman, except that he's in the business of buying cars and selling parts. Without the wrecker there would be far fewer immaculate classics on the road today. The wrecker's scale of prices is pegged not so much on what the market will bear, but on the cost of the original car from whence the parts came, coupled with labor and overhead. Since most of his raw material comes from otherwise unsaleable wrecks the scale can ordinarily be fairly low. However, in the case of imports it runs a bit higher in the natural course of things, since such wrecks are far more rare than those involving Detroitware. Not all operators are interested in imports but those that are will bid high for promising Jaguars, MGs, Volkswagens and the like, due to the constant demand for such material. The result is that prices are a bit higher than for similar Detroit-built parts. Even so, the prices asked are far below the as-new cost of an item that may even be impossible to purchase over the dealer's counter.

Both Jerry and Tony have been at the parts salvage business for many years and on the import parts bit for the past several. They're sure it has a future. It probably has—foreign cars have "arrived" judging from the interest in their bones.

*Most sought after parts in TD series seems to be miscellaneous bits of hardware such as doors, top bows, bumpers, etc.*



*If you should ever get to the point where a genuine tree-wood dash panel is mundane, you can always pick up a stock unit.*

