

MEDIA RELEASE

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TOYOTA 2000GT - THE FINAL CHAPTER

During the 1960's it was believed that Japanese cars did not offer the same level of quality and reliability as their western counterparts. However, this was far from the truth as Japanese cars were becoming increasingly popular globally and were proving to be more reliable than many offerings from the United States and Europe. Japanese manufacturers had models that competed in almost every segment from, family hatchbacks to sedans and rugged off-roaders but what they were missing was a sporty high-performance car.

During the 1960s, Europe offered the world cars like the Jaguar E-Type and the Ferrari 250 GTO amongst others. America had the Corvette and other race-tuned models but Japan was lacking in this department. That was until the Toyota 2000GT turned up at the 1965 Tokyo Motor Show. The model would go on to change the face of Japanese motoring and become the first Japanese car to break through the million-dollar mark at private auction.

This is the story of the 2000GT

Following the Second World War, Japan underwent significant changes, the country had to rebuild and many manufacturers shifted their focus to building economical cars and utility vehicles. It wasn't until the first Japanese Grand Prix in 1963, that drivers in the country became interested in performance. Just one year later, Toyota began working on high-performance model that would showcase the company's technology and engineering abilities.

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The project was headed up by Shoichi Saito, a major contributor to the development of Toyota as a manufacturer. His brief was simple - 'do whatever is necessary to not only produce the 2000GT but make it one of the – or perhaps even the – greatest car in the world.' The 2000GT would need to be practical yet enjoyable to drive, the engine was to be at the front and driving the rear wheels, finally, it would need to embody a design that would rival those of the more expensive European models.

As a stroke of luck, Yamaha had approached Toyota at roughly the same time with a prototype they had designed. This prototype was originally developed for Nissan, but the rival company rejected the offer for reasons unknown.

Toyota, however, approved the design Yamaha submitted and used it to good advantage in buoying up its somewhat conservative brand image. Toyota's designers Jiro Kawano and Satoru Nozaki took the A55X prototype and further developed it into what we know today as the 280 A1 prototype vehicle which was unveiled at the 1965 Tokyo Motor Show. The debut remarkably took place only a year after Shoichi Saito commissioned the project. The 280 A1 was met with great excitement and intrigue, however, buyers would have to wait until 1967 to get their hands on the production version of this new sportscar.

The Production Model

The production version of the 2000GT offers a smooth flowing body which was crafted out of aluminium. It was also the first Japanese car to be fitted with a limited-slip differential and all-round power-assisted disk brakes in standard specification. The 2.0-litre straight-six engine (with its DOHC aluminium head) was developed by Toyota, but subtly fettled by Yamaha.

The result transcribed to 110 kW and 175 Nm, enough to get the grand tourer from 0-100km/h in 10 seconds and a top speed of 215km/h. Although the performance of the 2000GT was impressive considering its power output, the Toyota struggled to compete with the likes of the Jaguar E-Type and American Corvettes. However, it didn't fail to impress media the world over.

Road & Track magazine stated that the 2000GT was one of the most exciting cars that they had ever driven and even compared it to the then Porsche 911. The 2000GT also achieved success on the racetrack as it won the 1967 Fuji 24-hour race. It also managed to set several FIA world records for speed and endurance in a 72-hour endurance test.

In the United States, Carol Shelby himself entered a pair of modified 2000GT vehicles into the 1968 SCCA production car series. Despite these achievements, the 2000GT's most famous moment came when it appeared in the 1967 James Bond movie 'You only live twice'. Due to Sean Connery's size and the relatively small cabin, two convertible versions of the 2000GT were specially commissioned for the film. Toyota simply chopped off the roof and replaced it with a soft top unit.

The 2000GT's main rival, the Nissan 240Z, only arrived in 1969. Incorporating somewhat similar styling to the Toyota, Nissan's 240Z focused more on outright performance while sacrificing luxury. After three short years of production, the last 2000GT left the factory in 1970 which completed the total build cycle of just 351 cars.

The 2000GT changed how the world viewed Japanese cars and it went on to influence the design of some of Toyota's iconic sports cars such as the Supra, the GT86 and even the Lexus LFA. Produced in such limited numbers, the 2000GT is widely considered to be the ultimate Japanese classic - which is reflected in auctions around the world. Pristine examples are fetching anywhere between R20- and R40-million Rand at these prestigious events.

The Three

Out of all the 351 examples of the 2000GT models produced, only three were designated for South Africa. Chassis number MF10-10131 and MF10-10206 in Pegasus White and MF10 10207 finished in Thunder Silver. The three vehicles arrived on South African shores between 1967 and 1968.

Toyota Motors South Africa have been in possession of one of these examples for many years, the car in question being chassis number MF10-10207. The vehicle forms part of the company's private collection which comprises rare racing vehicles and other Toyota and Lexus models. In July of 2020, Toyota Gazoo Racing announced that it would be reproducing replacement parts for the Toyota 2000GT as part of the GR Heritage Parts Project, and sell them both domestically and overseas.

This initiative paved the way to a decision made by Toyota South Africa to do a full bumper-to-bumper restoration of its 2000GT. One of the biggest mysteries, however, is the colour. Various historical sources indicate that the car was originally finished in Thunder Silver, however, the earliest recollections of this vehicle are that it was painted white despite its current hue which is Solar Red.

Red

Those who were lucky enough to acquire the 2000 GT had the choice of six different colours to choose from. These included Atlantis Green, Bellatrix Yellow, Pegasus White, Twilight Turquoise, Solar Red and Thunder Silver. The latter being of importance to this story...

Trying to restore a rare classic car is a daunting task on its own, but trying to do that same restoration during a global pandemic brings a host of challenges. Thankfully, all those involved in this project have shown Incredible passion and dedication, despite the obstacles. The 2000GT was split (body from chassis) and both were prepped and sent to Dino's Auto Body for a complete refurbishment, which saw dents being fixed, panels re-aligned and finally, a new layer of paint applied.

Dino's Auto Body was founded in 2006, its founders having decades of combined industry experience. While the company specialises in a variety of repair work on many modern vehicles, it also has a classic vehicle and restorations department. Dino's Classic Restorations has refurbished a host of classic vehicles over the years, a walk around the workshop floor reaffirms their reputation. Ironically amongst the plethora of classic vehicles being restored, features a Jaguar E-Type which at the time was the 2000 GT's main European competitor on and off the track.

Despite Dino's experience on classic vehicles, like many involved in this project, they had never seen, let alone worked on a Toyota 2000GT before. The years had taken their toll on this particular example. The paint was clearly in need of work as many scratches, touch-ups and dents littered the body. The sump cover panel and lower valance had been somewhat deformed over the years of bumping into pavements or speed humps. Before any paint could be applied, the complete removal of all surface material was needed to establish what work needed to be done.

Once the paint had been stripped from the aluminium body, it was discovered that some repair work was needed in key areas. Lead needed to be heated and applied to the affected area, where it could be smoothed out after it had cooled and hardened. This specialist procedure was carried out by the team in various places on the 2000 GT.

Once the paint stripping and repair work was completed, the vehicle was ready for paint. However, the aforementioned question of colour reared its head at this point. According to records, this specific 2000 GT, chassis number MF10-10207 left the factory in Thunder Silver. As to exactly when it transitioned to Solar Red remains a mystery - that said, it was clearly a comprehensive respray back

in the day as crimson paint can be found behind the dashboard, under the carpets and under the headliner.

While many spray-painters will focus on areas that can be seen, very few focus on these hidden areas. This led the team to believe that the car was fully stripped of its original coat and at some point fully re-sprayed. However, with just over 30 000km on the odometer, the reason for this remains unanswered.

With the clock ticking and a decision needing to be made, Toyota South Africa's Senior Vice President of Sales and Marketing, Leon Theron made the call that this 2000GT will remain red. While some experts believe that the car should have gone back to its original colour to retain its ever-growing market value, the fact of the matter is that this 2000 GT has a local story, a uniquely South African one.

Dino's Classic Restorations was able to match the original Solar Red paint mixture (with some assistance from a US-based 2000GT expert, Maine Line Exotics), which was applied to some of the models back in 1967. The body of this 2000GT was prepped and the paint was applied with the utmost care. Applying a new coat of paint to a 2000GT can easily be considered as a once-in-a-lifetime occurrence for the restoration shop and its employees.

The paint has a perfect gloss to it, it's deep, rich and without blemish while the little louvered sump cover and lower valance look as good as new. A distinguishing feature of the Solar red models are the gunmetal mirror housings, whereas *this* 2000GT had chrome mirror caps to match its original silver paintwork. In order to preserve the authenticity of the *red car*, the team made the decision to apply the gunmetal paint effect - adding another unique attribute.

Doing it the Old School way

The team that headed up the project is father-and-son duo, Wynand Strydom Sr and Wynand Strydom Jr from Generation Old School Benoni. Their repertoire ranges from Concourse class-winning Beetles and Microbuses, to American muscle cars such as Mustangs and Chargers.

Although neither of them had ever seen a Toyota 2000GT in the metal before, much less have one in their shop, they were more than qualified to take on the job. Both are well versed in disassembling a vehicle and documenting each step - a key function in classic car restoration. Years of experience also

prepared them for the task of researching each and every component before commencing restoration.

The team behind the restoration, believes in the revival of parts, rather than just replacing them. This not only preserves the value of the vehicle but the originality as well. Thankfully, Toyota South Africa provided Generation Old School with detailed literature pertaining to the 2000GT, which is a rather large book detailing every single process to disassemble the car and every part number.

It wasn't long after the car arrived at Generation Old School that work began on dismantling the icon. Wynand Jr, who took the lead on the restoration, says that it has been a learning curve for everyone involved. Every nut and bolt had to be removed with care - as one might not be able to replace it.

The body was separated from the chassis, which in itself was a rather special moment. Now, nearly 53 years after the marriage of the body and chassis, the two were once again apart.

As for the chassis itself, Wynand Jr confirmed that the overall condition of key components was still in good condition, with only minimum renewal work needed. There were, however, other components that needed to be completely refurbished or replaced. Four such items were the magnesium alloy wheels - which needed special paint preparation and paint to restore them to their original colour.

The original wheel design also incorporates spindle 'knock-on' locks, which were badly beaten up from years of use. Here the Generation Old School team carefully refurbished the original items and created a special tool to assist with the removal and refitting of the wheels - without damaging any of the parts.

One of the last pieces of the puzzle was the windscreen, with international suppliers quoting astronomical figures with no assurance that the part would arrive in tact, the Generation Old School team sought out a local glass manufacturer who built a bespoke mould and proceeded with no less than six attempts in order to perfect the shape and fitment - the sixth and final one calling the 2000GT home.

On the interior front, the intricacies of the facia made it stressful to remove items in the hopes that none break. The wood trim for example (which covers the entire centre console), was brittle and

faded and is also extremely thin. The chrome detailing cannot be bent when being removed and many of the wires were crumbling at the slightest touch. The wooden steering wheel in particular had a sizeable 'splinter', which had to be carefully restored to maintain its structural Integrity.

The original stereo system was disassembled by a veteran radio repairman, who took on the task of rebuilding the '60's-vintage electronics and making them functional once more. An interesting fact uncovered during this process was that the Toyota engineers equipped the audio system with a sound- fade during the retractable antennae operation.

The fact that the car is incredibly compact makes it even more difficult to work on and Wynand Jr has reported numerous bumps on his head because of it. All the individual components were placed into small plastic bags, labelled and safely stored before it was refurbished

The Engine

Beneath the bonnet of the Toyota 2000 GT lurks a 2.0-litre, straight-six petrol with a double-overhead camshaft configuration. When new, this 3M, or in this particular case, 3M-10256 engine would have produced 110 kW and 175 Nm of torque. The engine is coupled to a 5-speed manual transmission and was claimed to be capable of reaching 217 km/h. To put this in context, a contemporary Corolla Sprinter merely produced 38 kW and 85 Nm.

Thus the 2000 GT was a great leap forward for the brand. But after years of storage and exposure to the elements, the 3M-10256 wasn't in a good shape. Most of the rubber components in the engine bay were cracking and would leak fluids with the majority of the coolant pathways around the engine being clogged with rust and build-up. As such the motor was completely stripped and a rebuild commenced. This process entailed matching up sizes and sourcing components from other engines, creating bespoke engineered bits and some 'old-school' mechanics to restore the original engine. This painstaking task was completed by Wessels Motors in Kempton Park; the smooth running engine providing testament to the time and effort invested by them.

For the rebuild, most of the original components were cleaned up and made it back into the motor. However, items such as sprockets and bearings were replaced to ensure optimal running and, of course, new gaskets were made for the reassembly. What's more, is that a brand new bracket was designed and fabricated for the age-appropriate, aftermarket air-conditioning compressor that is mounted to the side of the motor.

On the intake side of the engine, one very quickly notices the three 2-barrel Mikuni-Solex 40 PHH Type Q carburettors. These three carburettors were stripped down and cleaned, serviced with new seals and gaskets and finally retuned for the best performance.

Lastly, the valve cover was given a new coat of black paint and contrasting red ignition cables were fitted to give the engine that extra touch of character.

Completed

Now that the Toyota 2000 GT is complete, TSAM plans to have the local motoring media get up close and personal with the model to share its incredible journey. However, there are plans for the rare model to be on display for the public at some point in time as well as competing in the prestigious South African Concourse. More information regarding these public displays will be communicated in due time.

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