

Parts Is Parts, Or Is They?

Bruce Fullerton and Robert Mace

"Parts is parts!" says the chicken man, but that may not apply to Isettas or to restoration projects in general. Inevitably, there comes a time when tearing down and rebuilding that car that the original part just ain't gonna do. Maybe the rubber's gone to hell or there's rusty cancer on the body shell. How good are the replacement parts? We're afraid the news ain't good. It ain't bad either, but it could be better. Some replacement parts are beautiful. They look like the originals (or better) and fit wonderfully. Others aren't so good. Sometimes they look bad, but they fit (function over form). Some look good, but don't fit (form over function). And then there's the dreaded don't-look-good-and-don't-fit.

Most of the parts we've ordered for our cars are not perfect, some less so than others. It's important for you to know that ahead of time because you can count on having to aggie-engineer (as we like to say in Texas) a good fit. For example, take body panels. The good news is that we can get replacement body panels for our cars. The bad news is that they are not perfect. In our case, the curvature was not quite right on replacement panels. Either they were made that way or the UPS guy or gal was that gorilla in that old Samsonite suitcase commercial. Also, the bead work on replacement fenders may not be the same as on the original car. If you are into details, this may drive you nuts. Be sure your body man knows this about your panels when he works out an estimate for your car. Our body guy had to spend a bit more time fussing with our panels to get them to work. More time = more money. One option is to try and get a good panel cut out of a bad car. If we had to do it all over again, we would probably explore this possibility.

The panel problem is not particular to Isettas. Our body guy, Mike Shambarger of Classic Auto Works, says that there are more poor quality replacement panels than good. Good ones come from the original factory dies. If there is a large demand for a panel, someone will generally spend the bucks to make a good replacement die. If there is not a large demand, folks skimp on the die and imperfect panels result.

Note also that there are some subtle differences between 1957 and 1958 sliders. A part that works (and was probably made for) a 1958, may need some creative engineering to fit on the 1957. One example is those replacement front grills for those Isettas with air conditioning. The bolt holes seemed to line up on Robert's '58 Isetta but not on Bruce's '57. Out comes the drill. We imagine there may be more differences between sliders and bubble-windows.

Bruce's car came sans air cleaner (not to mention a few dozen other things) and a replacement unit was ordered. It was absolutely beautiful! Now, take it and mount it to the rear fender brace and, whoa there Chester! The threaded tabs were welded about a quarter inch to high and the rear intake tube hit the brace and the left bolt hole didn't line up. The new rubber muffler hangers were too short causing the rear of the muffler to rub against the left rear mud guard bracket. The replacement stainless steel license plate bracket holes were too close together and had to be modified. The small rubber handle for

the door air vent is the same diameter as the one for the fuel shutoff lever ... too big to fit lever. The repro turn signal bullets are about 3/16" of an inch less in diameter than the originals. The front and rear window rubber seals were too thick. Glass man say no way Jose! Had to go with stock window channel and chrome filler. Hub caps for the split rims were way too loose. Several iterations of suggestions and they are on nice and snug now. The originals were nice, thick aluminum and snapped right on, by the way. You solid rim folks won't have this problem.

As more and more Isettas are making it back on the road and information on restoration and parts comes available, consider the fact that many parts you will need are available locally or from specialty suppliers, many times at a savings to you. The front and rear window rubber seals and filler, bearings, frame webbing, various springs, grommets, electrical components like turn signal flashers, coils etc., brake lines and plastic trim for the window sills and sunroof opening are just a few examples. Your upholstery shop can make the beaded welting between you rear bumper and body not to mention a new sunroof. The list goes on just like our pile of receipts. If you're not sure, post it up on one of the bulletin boards. You'll be astounded at the gratis info that's out there to be had just for the asking.

We point out these imperfections not to point fingers at parts dealers and manufacturers, but just to let the beginner know not to expect perfection. We are lucky to have so many replacement parts available to us (try reproducing all those parts yourself and see how good they are!). We might also add that in all of our dealings with Isetta parts sources, we have had nothing but excellent service and lot's of good advice. We're proud to be associated with a great bunch of enthusiasts. We've never been stuck with a part that wasn't right, even the ones ordered by mistake. Nothing is perfect in this life, and we shouldn't expect perfection from replacement parts. As Vladimir Horowitz said: "Perfection itself is imperfection." In other words, the chicken man was wrong: parts is not parts.