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APRIL 2008

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Getting our Nova Project Ready for Paint

By Arvid Svendsen

Rust repair and metalwork completed, our project '66 L79 Nova enters the final phase of paint prep. Simply put, it is time to make this car straight. Panel alignment, skim coats of filler, repeated application of various primers and many hours of painstaking block sanding are now the order of the day. But with the finish line in sight, we will have witnessed a remarkable effort on the part of some talented craftsmen at Rt. 66 Motorsports in New Lenox, Illinois, to resurrect one beautiful automobile.

By way of reminder, the repairs done on this '66 Nova have been purposely performed with the typical home restorer in mind. The body repair on this formerly bent-up L79 was accomplished with basic hand tools, a MIG welder and some pneumatic tools that could easily be replaced with electric variations. Rust repair consisted of fabricated metal in order to retain as much of the OE integrity as possible. That mission was accomplished, as this rare 327/350-horse factory bullet retains its original quarter-panels, trunk pan and floorpans.

With the average enthusiast in mind, parts have been sourced from many of the same places that any other restorer could find them. For example, Rt. 66's Bill Jelinek found his rust-free, driverside door at a swap meet in Peotone, Illinois, and paid 50 bucks for it! Since Bill is a Nova guy, the fenders and front subassembly were already in his personal inventory of Nova parts. The hunt continues for a date-correct 12-bolt rear, the only missing component in the matching-numbers drivetrain. The relative ease, and even enjoyment, of parts scrounging makes a solid case for going to swap meets and lingering on eBay in order to snatch up bargains on parts. They will eventually find a home on someone's project—why not yours?

One thing the L79 journey has showed us is that product selection is a critical factor in a quality restoration. Jelinek has been working with NAPA Martin Senour Paints and has found them to be outstanding for restoration purposes. Plus, one need go no further than the local NAPA parts store to purchase all the supplies necessary for body prep, undercoat and topcoat application. Lee Monreal, the store manager at the NAPA store in New Lenox, proved especially helpful and knowledgeable in supplying all the needed materials. We're talking Aztec Bronze brilliance in next month's installment, so here's an overview of the work necessary to prepare for that end product.

1 With the metalwork completed, Bill Jelinek readied a skim coat of Evercoat Z-Grip Non-Clog Lightweight Filler for portions of the panels and body shell to level out high and low spots. Do not rush this step! Make sure the filler is thoroughly mixed before application.

2 Jelinek relied on 3M's Imperial Hookit II system for block sanding. Longboard grits of 36, 80 and 120 were used, while the 8-inch 40- and 80-grit discs were employed on the dual-action (DA) sander.
3 With the unibody shell still on the rotisserie, the doors were aligned with the quarters. Kevin Rock took extra time to perfect the lower edges of the car.

4 In order to separate the shell from the rotisserie, Nick Jelinek removed the rotisserie mounting brackets from the leaf spring mounting hole.

5 The shell was lifted for clearance, and the rotisserie was wheeled out from under it. With the body still in the air, a simple wooden body cart set up for the Nova was rolled under it.

6 Once the body was on the cart, the front subassembly was installed.

7 Next, the front sheetmetal was attached to achieve proper panel fitment and gaps.

8 Once the panels were aligned as closely as possible, the hood was removed and worked with the Evercoat Z-Grip filler, again to even out high and low spots in the metal.

9 The trunk received the same straightening effort with the Evercoat filler.

10 Nick Jelinek began the process of knocking down the filler with 40-grit longboard paper. Frequent diagonal strokes and patience allowed the 3M paper to do its job.

11 Portions of the body called for 8-inch 3M 40-grit discs on the DA sander.

12 Special care was taken around body lines and curves to remove only the unnecessary material. Note the specialized sanding block Nick used to follow the body's curves.

13 The next step called for block sanding with 80-grit longboard paper. Too much pressure on the board, even at this stage, can result in too much material being removed from the metal.
At this point, the Nova has been blocked and prepped and is ready for the paint booth. The downdraft booth at Rt. 66 Motorsports is state-of-the-art and well lit. Almost looks ready for time travel!

Bill Jelinek blew off residual dust or material with compressed air before applying any paint. This kind of debris can ruin a paint job.

Jelinek recommends using Martin Senour Kleanz-Easy II 6388 Low VOC Surface Cleaner for final contaminant removal.

Bill's paint gun of choice is the SATA Jet NR2000 HVLP paint gun with a 1.3 tip. The SATA gun was set at 10 psi at the cap (or nozzle), with material set at maximum. The trigger was pulled wide-open for primer. Long, even strokes with the nozzle about 6 to 12 inches from the metal brought about the best results.

This is the Martin Senour Tec/System used on the Nova. It's available at local NAPA auto parts stores, making it easy for the amateur restorer to buy.

The Martin Senour 3.5 Enamel Sealer provided good topcoat gloss holdout and corrosion resistance over the properly prepared surface. The product also filled minor surface scratches.
The 3.5 5225 Enamel Sealer took about 10 minutes to flash. At that time, three wet coats of the Martin Senour TP520 Primer Surfacer with complementing TH527 hardener were applied. Bill allowed approximately five minutes of flash time between coats. The TP520 dried to a high-gloss finish, which in turn can be used as a guidecoat for block sanding. Next month: Aztec Bronze. MCR

Sources
3M
www.3m.com
NAPA Martin Senour Paints
800/526-6704
www.martinsenourautopaint.com
NAPA New Lenox Auto Parts
815/485-4466
Rt. 66 Motorsports
815/462-0090
www.rt66motorsports.com
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www.sata.com/usa

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