

## THE RESTORATION OF RENAULT CARAVELLE KGT901D

In 1960, as a very impecunious RAF Flight Lieutenant, I was living and working in Paris, attached to the British Embassy, and took advantage of an Embassy arranged visit to one of the Renault factories to see their cars being built. There for the very first time I encountered the new Floride and the die was cast; I had to have one. It was another year before I was able to take advantage of the French export scheme rules to buy one for around £600, on my way to my next posting with the British Military Mission in Berlin. The Floride was actually designed for the USA woman's market as a rival to the VW Karmann Ghia and the MG. There it was named Caravelle, while the European market retained the 'Floride' designation.



The classic beauty of the Frua design was an instant success, brushing away the design caution and pessimism of the early and grim post war years and introducing sweeping curves and sharply defined angles to produce a truly classical beauty. But sadly the car, being based on the running train of the Dauphine, was underpowered with their existing 850cc engine. It was actually in its element in the 'City', where its nippiness made it fun to drive, but on the open road it was greatly outperformed by its up-and-coming home grown American rivals, the Mustang and the VW Karmann Ghia. The Caravelle's top speed left a lot to be desired, and sales began to dwindle. Changes were urgently required and the car was re-designed largely retaining the existing bodywork but now based on the R8, and later the R10, trains with an engine upgrade to 1108cc, improved suspension, and all-round disk brakes – being the first factory production sports car to be fitted with these. Available options were Fixed Head with larger rear seating and more headroom, or removable Hardtop, with or without additional Soft Top. At the same time, the name 'Floride' was dropped and all models became 'Caravelles'. Ahead of its time, with a top speed of around 86mph, it just pipped its main European rivals the Triumph Spitfire and the Austin Healey Sprite, but the Mustang could not be matched. It was done too late to save the design and the last of the 117500 models were sold early in 1968.

So what became of mine? Well, being in a City, Berlin, it was fun to drive but not so much for its passengers who by this time included my wife, her mother, and my new-born son in his carry cot plus an Alsatian and an Afghan Hound. Herself made it clear that something must go - I made feeble noises about the need for her mother, but that was a loser all the way and so, sadly, it went.

Many years later, around 2012, I was driving through France on the motorway when I spotted two Caravelles nose to tail passing on the other lane. My interest was aroused by their survival and when I got home I Googled the name and found that a great many had survived and that the car had become a popular true classic all over the World. Inevitably, the Die was cast once more and I bought KGT901D which had been restored some 9 years previously but since then had languished in a garage with a mere 50 miles to its credit, with a two tone respray that visually destroyed the pure

lines of the car, making it look stubby (OK, only my personal opinion) and the hardtop had seen very much better days.



I took the car to a local garage with an excellent reputation and a professional re-spray facility. First thoughts were to repair the Hardtop and then to re-spray the rear wings to match the front using the Renault 300 Kilimanjoro paint it had allegedly been re-sprayed with. No such luck – none of the three paint suppliers we asked for samples of '300' matched the existing paint, whether this was due to weathering or whatever. So we sent the engine cover to the main paint supplier and asked him to match it - with no better result - but the 'Old English' colour they sent back suited the car and I decided to do a complete re-spray with it.

At this point it became clear to me that I was going to have to offer to take my jacket off and join in the work before the costs made it impossible to finance. Andrew (the owner) stripped the parts, I cleaned them and repaired them or sent them to specialist firms eg. Gearbox and Carburettor for re-build. I sourced and bought any new parts (many) and one of us (or a specialist firm ) fitted them. I did most of the rubbing down and 4 or 5 undercoats 'flattening'. A classic restoration specialist made and fitted the front floor panels, another moved the driver's seat 3" rearwards to accommodate my long legs and twisted osteo-arthritic spine. It seemed to go on forever. Then the great day arrived, over a year later, and my partner-in-crime, Andrew, as he had now become re-sprayed it all. And then we started all over again putting it back together, adding in newly chromed accessories and polished stainless steel bumpers and replacing rubber seals and missing or obscure parts that I persuaded someone who had one spare to part with it or sometimes one who actually machined us a part.



In the end, despite the modest initial agenda, no expense was spared and over £20,000 was spent on the project, not including the initial purchase price. I lost count of how many people had a hand in the restoration directly or indirectly, or who offered free specialist advice . Probably as many as 60

or more and I thank them all profusely. It could not have been achieved without them. I hope you like the result; it is not perfect (there is always something else one can find to do), but it is as near as I can get and I hope the buyer has as much fun with it as I did.

A full list of the restoration costs is attached, for which original receipts will be provided, as will photos of all the restoration stages, including those done before I bought the car.

### **Technical Details**

Upgraded 1189cc (ex R12TS). No one knows when, why, or by whom. Even DVLA and the previous owner were unaware, 123 Electronic Distributor, High Performance Coil with Spitfire leads, 300 Clutch for rebuilt Gearbox, fitted with new tyres and chromed wheel trim, rebuilt brake system, and a new chromed tailpipe and a new silencer have been added. The final result has been to recreate the original 'Joie de Vivre' that the car originally enjoyed and that the name Caravelle implies. In its present condition it has been assessed as 'Condition 1', has a current full MOT, and is valued for insurance purposes for a Guaranteed sum of £15000. It is thought that this particular car may have been used originally by the Oscar winning film star Eva Marie Saint whose enscribed name remains untouched on the dashboard. It was first sold in May 1966 by Performance Cars Ltd, an exclusive London Renault Dealership.

Bob Stark Porthtowan 01/04/2022

# Restoration of 1966 Renault Caravelle KGT901D

## Master List of New Restored and Repaired Parts

### Prior to October 2015 (by Previous Owner)

New Mohair Soft Top  
New Soft Top Window Seals  
New Door Cards  
New Radiator  
New Petrol Pump  
New Tonneau Cover  
New Carpets  
New Battery  
Undersealed

### December 2016 to March 2017

Hardtop Repaired and Re-Sprayed  
New Hardtop Window Seals  
New Hardtop Body Seals  
New Grommets  
Hardtop Liner Cleaned and Restored  
All Chromium Parts removed, cleaned and re-fitted with New Stainless Steel Bolts  
Replaced Hardtop Re-Chromed Fixing Hooks and Lever Catches

### March 2017 to January 2018

Complete Strip, Preparation and Body Re-Spray (matching Hardtop)  
New Stainless Steel Bumpers, and Bumper Seals  
New Headlamp Bodies  
New Headlamp Connectors  
New Headlamp Seals  
New Chrome Washer Jet  
New Windscreen Wipers and 12" Blades  
New Washer Pump  
New Washer and Heater Dash Switch Toggles  
New Boot Trim Seals  
Chromed Wheel Trims  
New Chromed Hubcap Bolts  
Hubcaps Restored  
5 x Restored Early R8 (the correct) Wheels  
New Correct Size 135 R15 Tyres  
New Chrome Tailpipe  
New Soft Top Rivets  
New Engine Bay Soundproofing

New Coil (moved from Sump to cooler Rear Inner Wing)  
New Multi-Spark HT Coil Lead  
New HT Leads  
New Spark Plugs  
New Air Intake Duct  
New Indicator Seals and Lenses (Side, and Front and Back)  
New Indicator Bulbs  
New Tail Light Lenses  
New Silvered Number Plate  
New Horn  
New Door Windows  
New Door Window Seals (Inner and Outer)  
New Chromed Door Handles and Seals  
Replaced Chromed Door Caps  
New Door Lock Barrels and New Door Gatches  
New Door Chestons  
New Engine Cover Lock Barrel  
Replaced Engine Cover Latch  
New Chromed Engine Cover Handle  
New Front Brake Disks  
New Front & Rear Brake Pads  
New Front & Rear Brake Hoses  
Front and Rear Calipers Stripped and Cleaned  
Front and Rear Calipers fitted with New Seals  
New Rubber Caliper Cushions  
New Brake Master Cylinder  
New Vacuum Brake Servo Installed  
New Handbrake Springs

### **February 2018 to November 2019**

New Door Seals  
Brake System Readjusted  
Engine Tuned and Steam Cleaned  
New Trafficator Relay  
New Sun Visors  
Wheels Balanced  
Trafficator Buzzer Relay  
Flashing Hazard Relay  
Hardtop Fasteners Rechromed  
Gearbox Rebuilt with New Seals and Synchro Rings  
New Clutch  
Improved Storage Security (Grade 9 Lock) and Dehumidifier  
New 1-2-3 Electronic Distributor  
Weber 32 DIR 4 Carburetor Rebuilt  
Advance/Retard Vacuum Hose Replaced  
Inlet/Exhaust Manifold Steam Cleaned  
New Silencer

New Seat Belts  
Chassis Welding/Sub Frame Repairs  
Chassis Re-Undersealed  
New Front Floor Panel  
New Boot Floor Panel  
Driver's Seat Rails Moved Back 5" with Additional Floor Mounting  
Underside Panels Re-sealed  
Starting Handle Added  
New Heater Ducting  
New Front N/S Suspension Mount  
Used Body Chrome Trim (Baguettes)  
New Chrome Trim Clips  
New Chrome Trim Side Strips  
New Radiator Top Hose  
New Tie Rods

**November 2019 to April 2022**

New Front and Rear Springs  
New Front and Rear Shock Absorbers  
New Roll Bar Bushes and Clips  
New Wishbone Bumpers  
New Rear Suspension Bumpers  
New Rear Axle Straps  
New Stainless Steel Seat Back Levers  
New Hubcaps  
Spare Ignition Keys  
Reconditioned Starter  
Indicator Buzzer  
Dash Clock  
Reconditioned Dynamo  
Replacement Brake Master Cylinder  
Brake Rear Light Hydraulic Switch  
Flashing Warning Lights