

Vintage BMW took years and \$550,000 to restore

1930s racer gets new lease on life

Alyn Edwards



It is rather unusual for there to be a coming-out party for a car. But that's exactly what occurred earlier this year at Jellybean AutoCrafters in Surrey, B.C. And it is no small irony that the feted car wasn't the usual type of street rod or restomod that Jellybean works on.

In fact, this restoration was on one of the highest performing and best looking sports cars of the 1930s — an extremely rare and desirable piece of automotive history.

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

Jellybean AutoCrafters proprietors Kurt and Ewald Penner invited staff, friends and the car's Seattle owner for the unveiling. The newly restored 1938 BMW 327/28 sports cabriolet is spectacular. A staggering 5,000 hours had been spent bringing the car back to better-than-new condition over a two-and-a-half-year period.

This low-slung, lightweight sports convertible built by German manufacturer BMW between 1937 and 1941 had many futuristic features for its time, including an advanced chassis and a two-litre, in-line six-cylinder engine with hemispherical combustion chambers and triple carburetors. Power was driven through a four-speed transmission.

With a body partially made of aluminum, the car weighed very little and was an immediate hit with well-heeled enthusiasts, including leaders of the German Third Reich.

The car was brought to Jellybean AutoCrafters by the retired former owner of BMW Seattle. Steve Norman had used the car to compete in West Coast rallies for 13 years, driving the car up to 8,000 kilometres a



PHOTOS: SUPPLIED, ALYN EDWARDS

A party was held at Jellybean AutoCrafters in Surrey, B.C., to unveil this restored 1938 BMW 327/28 sports cabriolet.



Kurt, left, and Ewald Penner's Jellybean AutoCrafters restoration business attracts vehicles from all over Western Canada and northwestern U.S.

year. He finally took the car off the road when the wooden door pillars began to rot, causing the doors to sag.

"The door hinges on this car are bolted to the wood framing for the cowl, and it was getting really bad," Norman says.

When the car arrived at the shop for the complete restoration, it was basically a pile of parts.

Norman wanted a completely restored car that he could drive with confidence and enter in vintage road rallies. So the crew at Jellybean pro-



The interior of the 1938 BMW cabriolet has been restored using an exact copy of the upholstery material originally used

posed a restoration keeping the pedigree and integrity of the car while adding significant improvements that would basically be invisible.

So out came all the wood and the "metal meisters" did their magic, replacing all the wooden structural parts with steel, remanufacturing much of the car. This included fabricating the fenders and running boards and handforming a new aluminum hood.

The car has been given significant

safety and performance improvements, most of which are not apparent.

"We even used modern gauges and made them look like the originals," Jellybean's Kurt Penner says.

A Volvo four-speed transmission with electric overdrive has been installed, all electrics have been changed from six to 12 volts and modern headlights have been added. The original Bakelite dash knobs have been reproduced in aluminum.



The BMW 327/28 cabriolet is a low-slung, lightweight convertible built between 1937 and 1941.



The 1938 BMW cabriolet body as the restoration progressed at Jellybean AutoCrafters

The total cost of the restoration was \$550,000.

"I can't say enough about the owner of this car. He's a top-notch client," says Ewald Penner.

"This car wasn't nearly as good as he had hoped, and the restoration was much more extensive than anticipated and cost almost three times more than anyone thought. But he was very patient and understanding throughout the process and let us make this restoration the best it can be."

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