

Slippery Slope: A Cortina Conversion Story



MY CORTINA PROJECT CAR started innocently enough. The previous owner of this 1965 Ford Cortina GT made the switch to Fiat twin-cam power as an affordable way to simulate a Lotus twin-cam with the bonus of a 5-speed tranny. Once the car's oil consumption finally surpassed that of fuel, I began contemplating



Ford-based engine swaps. Then I saw a crashed Honda S2000 on eBay.

Two-hundred-forty horsepower, 9,000 rpm and a slick 6-speed sounded like a good idea to me. Measuring what I could on a friend's S2000 gave me confidence that the engine itself would fit in the engine bay, and since I've



seen Ford 289s stuffed in there, what could possibly go wrong? Bolstering my confidence, a longtime friend, fabricator Joe Casanova of San Jose, California offered to help. He assured me, "It's only metal, anything's possible." On that note, I immediately widened the scope of the project. I always wanted the Cortina to be

right-hand drive and the steering box was a bit worn anyway, so why not change it to rack-and-pinion steering at the same time?

While the new mill fit snugly into the Cortina's engine bay, the bell housing didn't. Casanova's plasma cutter took care of the interference problem, and in the process also took out some of the structural crossmembers across the middle of the Cortina's unibody. Within a day, the motor was essentially resting in position.

We then began the task of fixing all the stuff we screwed up. Joe created a new crossmember and motor mounts. We welded the chassis to a surface plate—a giant slab of steel—to straighten it up, and built a transmission tunnel, then proceeded to add a roll cage to further stiffen things up.

A monumental (and ongoing) project has been the wiring. I kept the entire harness from the Honda, and bought a factory wiring manual that allowed me to trace the entire system through the connectors. I unwrapped the loom and started eliminating wires that I wouldn't need. Along the way, I decided to eliminate the entire Cortina harness and go with the Honda loom alone—right down to turn signals, lights and all.

The project is well into its second year, and the fact that I've had four different Alfas on top of other projects during that time hasn't exactly sped up the process. That said, the list of tasks is getting shorter, and I can almost see the light. Once it runs, that will mark the beginning of the sorting phase, which will no doubt start a new list.—*Jeff Glenn*