

Return of The Saint

Kevin Price's problems were only just beginning when he finally tracked down the **Volvo P1800** used in *The Saint*

WORDS KEITH MOODY
PHOTOS LAURENS PARSON

BEFORE

Ruined by years rotting in the rain, the car awaits its restoration.



AFTER



The restorer

Retired teacher and engineer Kevin Price, 57, founded the Volvo Enthusiasts' Club. He bought his first 1800 (a wreck) through *Exchange & Mart*. 'The seller told me it was built by Jensen at West Bromwich – and so my love for Jensen-built P1800s began.'

It's January 1991 and the phone is ringing at the home of Kevin Price, founder of the Volvo Enthusiasts' Club. Kevin answers and is sceptical when the caller tells him he has the Volvo P1800 that was used in *The Saint* television series in the 1960s. The voice on the line is adamant that this is the one.

'I'd heard it all before,' says Kevin. 'Everyone with a white 1800 coupé thinks it's "the one". I'd had so many calls and followed so many leads that I was tired. Exhausted, in fact. But there was just something about this one.'

Something about this car kept nagging at Kevin. A few months later, he made the trip from his then home in Cornwall to the Welsh hill farm where the car was decomposing. ➔



Reader's Restoration

'It was a total and utter wreck. It had no right to be saved - it wasn't even good enough for scrap'



1962 Volvo P1800

ENGINE 1986cc/4-cy/OHV
POWER 100bhp@5500rpm
TORQUE 108lb ft@4000rpm
GEARBOX 4-spd manual + O/D
TOP SPEED 108mph
0-60MPH 13.8sec
FUEL ECONOMY 30mpg
PRICE WHEN NEW £1836 12s 9d

Buried under thick brambles and nettles, and heavily disguised in rattle-can red, it was derelict, rotten and rusting. After hacking back the undergrowth, Kevin was finally able to read the numberplate. The black and silver letters 71 DXC confirmed that it was the original car used in the very first episode of the series.

READER'S RESTO TIP

'Always take lots of photos before you start, because they'll prove invaluable when you put the car back together.'

It had been a long time since Simon Templar (aka Roger Moore) had slid into

those seats, chasing hoodlums and righting wrongs. Every external panel was rusty. The engine was dumped on the back seat. The tyres had collapsed and the rims were dug into the earth. 'It was a total and utter wreck,' said Kevin. 'It had no right to be saved - it wasn't even good enough for scrap.'

Nevertheless, Kevin knew that this was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. But it took him six years to persuade the farmer to sell the car.

Eventually, it was gingerly moved on to a trailer and



towed back to his parents' Midlands home behind the Volvo 244DL owned by Kevin's late father Fred.

'I felt great towing it home,' he says. 'My ambition to own the ultimate, the first, *Saint* car had been realised. But little did I know what this restoration would entail.'

Strip and dip

With the car back at his workshop, to Kevin's great relief, the car was better than it looked. All the bolts, except for one on the back axle, came undone easily. And when the screens came out, there was no rot, just clean white paint. Throughout this painstaking process, Kevin took multiple pictures - something that proved invaluable when putting the car back together.

Progress was slow over the next few years. A bit here, a bit there. It wasn't until June 2008 that the first real steps were taken towards returning the car to the road.

With the running gear removed, the shell was sent to Surface Processing Limited to be dipped in acid - a process designed to remove filler, paint and rust.

SPL managing director Adrian McMurray had warned Kevin that there might not be much metal left after the treatment. And when Kevin went to collect the remains of the car in August, 2008, his eyes were



Now it's finished, Kevin plans to enjoy the car.



ABOVE: Interior was painstakingly remade from original. BELOW: Original dials were restored.



Here's how Kevin did it



July 2007 Bathtime
The shell survives SPL's acid... just. But the scale of the task is now clear.



2007-2011 Engine work
Engine has to be rebored to 2.0-litre. Mods include steel timing gears and a high-lift cam.



August 2007 Bodyshell repairs
Bodywork expert Dave Gate is entrusted to make the shell good. It took three months.



CRISIS POINT!
Not much metal left

2008 Paint Fail
First attempt at painting goes horribly wrong. Project stalls.



October 2012 Interior
The interior is unique to Jensen-built cars so spares are ultra-rare. Most components had to be painstakingly remade by a specialist.



November 2012 Showtime
Malcolm Christopher from the production crew of *The Saint* TV series unveils the car at the NEC Classic Motor Show in 2012.

drawn to the jagged holes where the sidelights had once been. The nose cone and rear valance were also damaged beyond repair. But there was hope.

'The tub was in good condition,' says Kevin. Volvo's sturdy box section had resisted rust, while the chassis rails had also survived. The floorpan would need minor repairs, but the structure was sound. The restoration of 71 DXC was on.

Bodywork and engine

Kevin knew that reviving a car as bad as this was beyond his capabilities. To make things trickier, the Jensen-built Volvos had unique panels. Over the years, he'd managed to collect quite a few of the bits and pieces needed for the project, but what he didn't have would need to be fabricated. So he turned to Dave Gate at Phoenix Motor Bodies in Wyburnbury, Cheshire for help.

Dave worked full time on the car over the next three months. He replaced the front and rear wings, nose cone and rear valance, as well as the inner and outer sills, while dealing with hundreds of small areas of corrosion. Front and rear outriggers were shot, and Dave also had to repair a section of the driver's side floor.

While the body was being worked on, Kevin sent the engine to the Cornwall Engine Company in Redruth. For once, there



The 1.8-litre twin-carb engine – rebuilt and lightly modified.

was no hassle involved in getting it out of the car – the engine was already in pieces, sprawled across the back seat. That was when Kevin discovered that one of the piston circlips had come loose and scored the bore, allowing it to burn oil.

'You can actually see the smoky exhaust when Roger Moore gives the car some beans in the first series,' says Kevin. 'It's also probably the reason why Volvo supplied a replacement car for the second season.'

Mechanically, there was still work to do. It was time to sort the gearbox and the rear axle, which was sent to Universal Transmission Services in Birmingham, while the overdrive was reconditioned by OD Spares in Rugby. Both units proved to be in good condition and their hardly-worn internals confirmed the car's 40,000 miles.

They were rebuilt just in time to be reunited with the body. Now structurally

sound, the bodyshell was shipped back to SPL for electrophoretic (anti-rust) coating.

False finish

The final coat of paint was applied in December 2008, but when Kevin went to collect the Jensen White shell, he realised that something had gone badly wrong. 'The roof, bonnet and bootlid were dotted with fish eyes,' says Kevin.

The problem? Silicone contamination. Kevin was hugely disappointed. He trailed the car home and the project stalled. 'I just thought "Oh no, what have I done?". I sat there. It sat there. I was so fed up, I just couldn't get moving on it. But I knew it had to be done. This was a very special car and it had to be preserved for the future.'

It took Kevin two years to get over the bad respray and regain his momentum. He

Kevin's classic CV

Founder car of Volvo Enthusiasts' Club (formed 1989).

1962 Volvo P1800

Purchased in 1985 used daily until accident. Car was rebuilt. Has covered 700,000 miles on original engine and 'box.



1952 Volvo PV445

Convertible by Valbo – one of only six surviving. Coachbuilt for Volvo using PV445 chassis.



Volvo PV831-1953

Ex-Swedish Royal Family, believed to be King Gustaf V's car. See it at the next NEC Classic Show.



made a plan to get the project back on track and set himself a deadline of getting it finished in 2013. Slowly, but surely, the rest of the pieces began to congregate at Kevin's lock-up as he sourced bits from clubs, autojumbles, friends and specialists.

The engine had been rebuilt and bored out to two litres. It was fitted with hardened valve seats and a high-lift camshaft. The crankshaft, flywheel and clutch were balanced, while the head was polished and ported to maximise performance.

'I really wanted to create a car that I could use,' says Kevin.

READER'S RESTO TIP

'Always choose the car you wish to restore wisely. Remember that some parts are impossible to find, so look for a car that is complete.'



P1800 designer Pelle Petterson and The Saint's production manager, Malcolm J Christopher signed the boot.



Bullet-style door mirrors deleted – just like when it was on TV.



SEE THE SAINT

The P1800 featured here will be on the Volvo Enthusiasts' Club Stand in Hall 7 (7-435) at this year's Classic Motor Show at the NEC, November 15-17.

'It's fought me all the way, but I'm really happy with the results'



standard finish and repainting it in Jensen White. 'Without them, the car would never have been finished,' says Kevin. 'I'm indebted to those engineers.'

When it came to sorting the interior, Kevin knew it would be another difficult task. Almost everything had been ruined during the car's time on the Welsh hill farm. Any item that couldn't be easily replicated had to be not-so-easily repaired, so carpets, seat covers, door cards and headlining had to be remade, using the original as patterns.

It was a job Kevin entrusted to Richard Felton at The Specialist Upholstery Company in Doncaster. Weeks spent there yielded the results Kevin wanted, until finally the day came when he could fit the rechromed brightwork. 'That was the moment when it all came together and started to look like a proper car,' says Kevin.

So how does it feel now it's all finished? 'I only got it MoT'd five days ago (on September 12) and, until today, I'd only covered 12 miles in it. In fact, driving around doing the photoshoot for this feature in Practical Classics (on September 17) is the most miles I've done in it!'

'I don't want this to be mothballed or spend its entire life on a trailer – I want to be out there driving it, enjoying it.'

But before he could do that, Kevin had the unenviable task of putting the car back together. Brake pipes were remade and refitted. A new loom was chased around the car and two new wheels had to be sourced. Thankfully, some original parts remained intact, such as the dashboard top, speedo, rev counter and other dials.

Finally it was time to put the paintjob right. A call to Exeter-based Flybe Engineering, an aircraft maintenance firm, confirmed that its specialists could do the job. The team set about rectifying the sub-

You could be forgiven for thinking that Kevin's had enough of restoring cars, but you'd be wrong. His next project is already under way – another P1800 that he previously used as his daily driver.

'I won't do it to quite this standard, though,' he laughs. 'This one had no right to be restored. And it's fought me all the way to getting it back on the road, but I'm really happy with the results.' So you should be, Kevin. Saving 71 DXC from the scrapper was a noble, nay *Saintly*, endeavour. ■

Useful contacts

- Brookhouse Volvo www.classicvolvoparts.co.uk
- CJ Autos www.cjautos.org.uk
- Cornwall Engine Services www.cornwallengine.co.uk
- Double S Exhausts www.stainlesssteel exhausts.com
- FlyBe Engineering www.flybeas.com
- OD Spares www.odspares.com
- Phoenix Motor Bodies www.phoenixmotorbodies.co.uk
- Quickfit SBS www.quickfitsbs.com
- Redditch Shotblasting & Powdercoating www.redditchshotblasting.co.uk
- Rustbuster www.rust.co.uk
- S&T www.stchrome.co.uk
- Specialist Upholstery Company www.specialist-upholstery.com
- SPL www.surfaceprocessing.co.uk
- Universal Transmission Services 01562 861561

What's it like to drive?

Keith Moody gets behind the wheel

With just 12 miles on the clock since its rebuild, Kevin was understandably concerned that I was gentle with his car. And given what it could be worth, so was I.

On the day of our road test and photoshoot, the rain was hammering down. 'Good on Kevin for letting me take it out in this weather,' I think. Then I spin the wheels doing a hill-start out of his road and wonder if he's thinking the same thing.

You sit low down in this coupé, but you've still got great visibility of the road and the edge of the car. The interior is a lovely place to be, with fresh red leather



seats and thick light green carpets. The ride is sporting, but not overly firm, and the engine is keen to pull, although it isn't as free-revving as it should due to the fact that it's barely run in. But it doesn't detract from a wonderful car. It's a real honour to drive one this good.

Have you restored a classic car? Then send us your story today

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