

As The Wheel



This gorgeous
1975 Corniche
DRD-20718
belongs to
Dr. Jeff Daum
of Michigan.



Photos by Dr. Jeff Daum

More than one of my fellow RR owners have heard me lament over the fact that I REALLY wanted a proper wood steering wheel for my 1975 Corniche DHC. I had only seen one or two of the Nardi variety but not been able to locate one for my car (or spirit one off of a car at one of the meets).

Several years ago I contacted Rolls-Royce directly and they indicated that they had made arrangements through a local British vendor to supply a burl wood steering wheel to fit my car. I enthusiastically provided the appropriate deposit in pound sterling (the two words by themselves forewarn that the cost is not for the weak-hearted) and then waited through numerous delays RR was suffering at the hands of its vendor. Finally the wheel arrived and Dan Docherty and I attempted to fit it to no avail. Unfortunately RR had sent one for a different configuration even though they had my specific vin. My quest continued unsatiated until I found William Rau Restorations (via the web <http://www.rau-automod.com/>).

I conversed with William over a few months, learning more

Turns

Submitted by Dr. Jeff Daum

(or wouldn't you rather have wood?)

about his business and incredible work. Finally I commissioned (it IS a work of art) the building of the burl walnut wheel you see in the photo. William can do virtually anything you want, but I wanted “understated elegance” so opted to match the burl of my dash, have the RR logo on the horn button, and leather on the spokes. William suggested I go with the black leather matching my cowling versus magnolia matching my seats. His suggestion proved right on.

It took about six weeks to build. He used my actual original steering wheel (Dan lent me a spare. Driving through customs raised some eyebrows since the column

was exposed, but that is another story), and built it up to what you see. Actually if you go to his site you can see a morph of several steering wheels from start to finish. Along with my wheel, horn button, etc., I included a series of color prints of my dash and interior, and a gray scale (from my days running photo studio) shot at the same time to ensure the color would be correct. As you can see William did a fantastic job in matching the original burl. I was so impressed with his work I asked for some business cards and he sent those along with pictures of more of his products (then even on the web). I have put these in my car so next time you see

me if you would like to look at them please let me know.

When the wheel came I did not anticipate much problem reattaching it and there was none. I did think to check out the horn before securing everything and found that it did not work. In the process of finishing off the wheel, the grounding contact surface for the spring between the horn button and the hub had become coated. Once I sanded it clean, the horn worked and the attachment process was easily finished (and the wheel has yet to come off in my hands).



The new wooden steering wheel.