

Rims & Spokes

Wheels are one area where even the bravest home mechanics usually don't tread. It's true, there's a lot to learn and know about wheel lacing. However, there is no amount of polishing that can make an old set of wheels stand out like new rims and spokes. And nothing complements a great restoration paint job quite like a new set of wheels. So whether you plan to get your wheels built for you or attempt them yourself, here's some of the information I've learned about wheel building.

For a complete restoration, nothing fills the bill like chrome plated steel rims. Many original rims remain straight and useable, but simply have poor plating. There are really very few sources for chrome steel rims other than the Central Wheel Components (CWC) of England [www.central-wheel.co.uk/]. Their products are good, but not great. Over the last 24 months, 2 of the 8 CWC rims I've laced were not straight enough to use. And too, CWC often alters the spoke patterns making it hard to cover spots where the original spokes rubbed an alloy hub. For about the same price a far better solution is to simply have your original Jones or Dunlop rims re-plated. Almost any plating shop will be able to un-plate the old rim, polish out the pitting and re-plate with new chrome. This should result in 30 more years of enjoyment.

A great looking alternative are the chrome or stainless steel rims from Devon Rim of England [www.devonrimcompany.com/]. Their chrome rims are supposedly exact copies of the Dunlop rims and reasonably priced. Their stainless steel rims are a bit more expensive, but without the future rust and chrome issues. Devon Rim has won many followers in Britain for their vintage rim copies and currently builds all the wheels for the Hinckley Triumphs. You can order directly from Devon, or in the US from British Cycle Supply and Buchanan's.

If new rims are mandatory, a great looking performance alternative is aluminum rims. The original Borrani rims are no longer available, but several modern look-alikes are. The best deal on these is Sun permanently polished alloy rims, which are comparable in price to steel rims. There are other brands of standard alloy rims available, but it's simply not worth the \$20 difference in price when the aesthetic and maintenance aspects are considered.

Stainless steel spokes are the new standard because they always look their best. There are 2 sources: Buchanan [www.buchananspokes.com/] and Baxter Cycle [www.baxtercycle.com/]. Buchanan spokes are better in my opinion, but they don't send any spares. In an admittedly rare occurrence, on one job it took 3 phone calls, 2 emails, physically mailing the bad spoke back to California AND 45 days to get a single replacement spoke. In short, Buchanan's customer service is a big zero. On the other hand, the Baxter spoke sets always include 1 or 2 spares. For concours restoration work, Buchanan's can bead blast their stainless spokes to give them a matte finish that accurately mimics the British plated steel spoke. They also offer your choice of stainless or chrome nipples.

Some where in all this information is a better-looking set of wheels for you!

Hope this helps!
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