



Council of Heritage Motor Clubs, NSW Bulletin January 2020



HISTORIC VEHICLES AND ANTIQUE MACHINERY DESTROYED OR DAMAGED BY FIRE

Please pass this on to anyone you know who has lost homes, sheds, vehicles in the bushfires.

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Media reports of property damage across multiple firegrounds in NSW and Victoria include the images of burned out historic vehicles, there are owners whose houses were saved but whose garages or sheds were lost, others sadly have lost everything. All motoring enthusiasts will be saddened that the devastating fires have impacted on severely on so many historic vehicles.

CHMC has gathered below some suggestions that may assist enthusiasts who have fire affected rare or historic vehicles and related collections.

First responses

- The ferocity of fires suggests little if anything can be salvaged **BUT** you may be able to recover something. As vehicle or antique machinery restorers you know that amazing things can sometimes be done with or replicated from severely damaged items.
- **Look past the mess, the charring and the ashes** to see what can be recovered. This isn't easy to do as you see "what once was" now destroyed, but you need to be very rational and realistic at this stage.
- **Pause for a second thought** before disposing, consider can you resurrect the vehicle, or parts?
- The overwhelming first responses to disasters is to ASAP tidy up and throw away. Sadly, later some realise that there were recovery alternatives for "things" they disposed of.

Safety first:

- Assess hazards in vehicles including broken glass, oil that may have leaked out, etc.
- Assess chemical hazards. Burnt out cars and sheds may contain harmful chemicals, wear butyl or nitrile gloves under strong work gloves. Fluor elastomers used in wiring looms, gaskets and seals decomposes in high temperature to produce hydrofluoric acid. Batteries that have been damaged can leak acid.
- When inspecting, handling and moving items wear protective clothing, footwear, goggles, gloves and masks. Heat makes some items dangerously brittle

Whole vehicles may be unsalvageable BUT items off those vehicles may be later usable.

Depending on the heat and location some engines and mechanical components may be salvageable, body panels may be recoverable or used as templates for rebuilding.

- **Spare parts, tools and such** may also be recoverable.
- **Manuals, photos, etc.** that have survived need to be quickly and appropriately stabilized (from soot and moisture) and stored out of the weather.

The Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Materials has some useful recovery resources for paper, metal, glass etc. <https://aiccm.org.au/disaster/fire>

Retain items that are recognisable, it just may be possible to restore or use as patterns.

- As best as you can -
 - store smaller items in solid containers out of the weather
 - cover vehicles protecting against raintill you are better placed to assess them all critically or get them to a more permanent storage or to a restorer.

Is my vehicle restorable?

It pretty much depends on how hot the fire was and the vehicle's condition after the fire. Fires often are the final fate for historic cars, motor cycles, trucks and antique engines and



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machinery. Even if the structure remains after the fire, metals can be seriously weakened and many components destroyed making restoration extremely difficult and, unfortunately for some vehicles and machinery, impossible.

You should consider

- Effects of the intensity of the fire on the vehicle
- Availability of critical replacement parts – chassis, engine, running gear
- How much you can afford to spend, including the insurance payout
- Rarity and/or desirability of the vehicle
- Your personal attachment and other emotional and/or community or wider ties (local, hobby or heritage significance) that the vehicle has.

Restoring a burned-out vehicle

1. Ensure you're aware of any legal matters that might affect whether or not the vehicle can be salvaged and repaired.
2. Ensure that the vehicle or its components that will be used will really be safe and operable once repaired/restored.
3. Ensure that if it has been written-off you can register the vehicle once it is thoroughly restored.
<https://www.rms.nsw.gov.au/roads/registration/get-nsw-registration/written-off.html>
<https://www.vicroads.vic.gov.au/registration/vehicle-modifications-and-defects/written-off-vehicles/repairing-a-written-off-vehicle>

Practical considerations:

- Fire affected chassis are often brittle, alloys fittings melted. You may need to have the chassis fully tested, assessed and certified by an engineer if you re-use it, or you may have to source another chassis.
- Fire affected sheet metal will probably be warped and likely not reusable, but it may provide a template.
- Panels that appear not too badly affected will likely be micro affected – many report problems with paint adherence to properly prepared but previously fire affected panels.
- Surfaces where plating, galvanizing etc. has burned off will rust quickly and need stabilizing.
- Wiring harness and hundreds of fasteners, clips and brackets will need to be replaced.
- Consider obtaining a donor car for major and minor parts.

Finally, a reminder for us all:

- keep your vehicle etc. insurance policies up to date and take good photos of your vehicles, machinery etc. and keep copies offsite - digital and/or hard copy.

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<http://www.heritagemotoringcouncil.org.au/>