

# Fuel Tank Fix

Don't throw that rusted gas tank away, Renu it!

BY JIM DONNELLY HEMMINGS MAGAZINE

If that old car you found in a field has a gas tank that looks like moths from Mars were chewing on it for most of the past century, in nearly all cases that tank can be repaired. While it may be easier and sometimes cheaper to buy a reproduction gas tank, not all cars are being catered to by the repro market. It is times like these that you need a specialist.

One such gas tank specialist is Glenn Looper, who can really set things right. His job is plugging holes, specifically those that perforate the fuel tanks of vintage vehicles, either as they lie neglected for decades or finally pay the price for slogging through salt-crusted winters.

His family-owned garage, Looper's Servicecenter, in Rockville, Maryland, has been in business for more than 70 years, and Glenn has been patching and renewing fuel tanks for at least 40 of them. Most people involved in a serious

restoration project involving a badly deteriorated vehicle will likely avail themselves of his services, or a similar specialist's, at some point. An old gas tank is more than a metal container with some fuel and rust

sloshing around inside it. The vessel is a potential bomb, and renewing it is one of the most hazardous aspects of any restoration project.

Gasoline vapors wafting from the tank are insidious, extremely flammable and very difficult to get rid of. Even repeated flushings of the tank with hot water won't eliminate them entirely. The thinnest haze of gasoline bonded to the tank's inner walls still contains enough hydrocarbons to produce the deadly vapors. "A lot of people try to do this themselves. They get about halfway through it and then realize they're in way over their heads," Glenn said.

Glenn is one of more than 65 gas tank



Rusty gas tanks are stored outside until all vapors are gone.



Even a gas tank this badly corroded can be repaired.

restoration specialists in the U.S., Canada and other countries who are licensed Gas Tank Renu dealers ([www.gas-tankrenu.com](http://www.gas-tankrenu.com)). That represents a marked improvement over the previous state of the tank 2renewal service. In those days, the drill was, essentially, "strip it and patch it."

"Until I got into this, I was never really comfortable with restoring tanks because it was basically just a patch job," Glenn said. "You could put a copper patch on, or just solder something up, but you could never assure the customer that it was going to hold up for any long period of time."

The Gas Tank Renu method goes well beyond that. But first, it's worthwhile to discuss who needs to have an original tank patched, as opposed to buying a replacement tank from a parts supplier. The answer is, just about everyone who owns a car more than 20 years old, unless it's a muscle car, or a 1955-57 Chevrolet, for which reproduction tanks are available. For most anything else, it's either fix your own or go junkyard prowling.

"The kind of people I get in here don't

have that option [of a reproduction tank]," Glenn said. "I had calls from a guy who owns a 1932 Model B Ford, a 1941 Ford Army staff car and a 1937 Ford tractor, and that's just in one day."

Glenn's clientele ranges well beyond the immediate Washington, D.C., area, and accounts for a lot more than old Fords. His shop is widely known for tank repairs among owners of Jaguars, British sports cars and Porsches and Volvos. One day's outgoing shipments included renewed tanks for a 1964 Buick Riviera from Atlanta and a 1967 Chevrolet Impala from Connecticut.

Before the restoration process can start, however, you first have to get the tank out of the vehicle, something that should never be taken lightly. The first step is critical: Disconnect the battery, because a stray spark could easily ignite any fumes. When removing the tank, make sure the vehicle is in a well-ventilated area to dissipate any buildup of fumes. Pour the gasoline into a sealed container and dispose of it in compliance with environmental laws.

At that point, once the tank is safely out, customers either personally deliver the tanks or ship them in for repairs and the Gas Tank Renu process. It begins with a thorough cleansing with a liquid de-fuming agent, steam and pressurized hot water to completely eliminate hydrocarbons before the tank is even carried inside his shop. The cleansed or "dead" tank is then inspected to evaluate the amount of work that's needed. Then the customer is given a price quote and turnaround time to get approval for the work but, infrequently, if the customer declines, he pays the shipping charge to send it back.

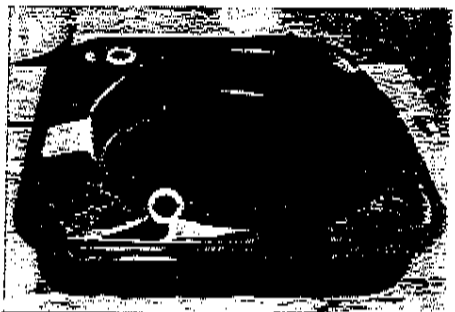
"We get everything in here from surface rust to holes you can stick your finger through," Glenn said. "Most of them are structurally sound, but rusted and dirty from just sitting around."

The tank is blasted with aluminum oxide, inside and out, to remove any rust or old paint. The blasting medium is much finer than conventional metal or glass beads, which could easily rip through the tank's thin-gauge metal like

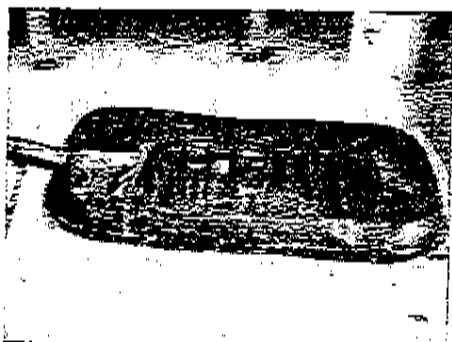
**A** N OLD GAS  
TANK IS  
MORE THAN A  
METAL CONTAINER  
WITH SOME FUEL  
INSIDE IT.



Tanks are polymer-coated both inside and out.



Datsun pickup truck tank looks brand new again.



Finished tank will go back into '41 Studebaker.

automatic weapons fire. Holes are patched using 20- to 14-gauge sheet metal, MIG-welded with the welds ground flat. Any deteriorated bolts, filler neck components or other fittings are replaced with new ones.

Next, it's on to the "Renu." The Gas Tank Renu process was patented in 1981 by a GM engineer. It involves coating the tank with two liquid polyvinyl coatings that resist rust, inside and out. One is poured inside the tank and the excess removed. The other, formulated differently for corrosion resistance, is sprayed on the exterior of the tank. The coated tank is then baked for 10 minutes at 360-degrees in an electric convection oven. It is then shipped back to its owner with a lifetime warranty. Glenn repairs between 40 to 70 gas tanks each month, at prices that generally average \$225 to \$375 each, depending on the amount of work needed to repair the tank.

"We're just using your old tank as a skeleton," Glenn said. "With the warranty, what you're getting is a gas tank that's better than new." ±



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