

# The 1923 5CV Citroën

Now in its twenty-first year, Canberra's annual Summernats car festival has become a tradition for many car enthusiasts around Australia. This January, coinciding with the three-day event, the National Museum of Australia unveiled a strong contender for the festival's 'show 'n shine' contest; a modified 1923 Citroën.

In 1925 Neville Westwood and G L Davies drove the 1923 5CV Citroën around Australia, making it the first car to complete the journey. The vintage vehicle was modified during the 1970s by Neville Westwood's son Ron and acquired by the National Museum for the National Historical Collection last year.

When Peter Bucke and Ian Cramer from the National Museum's Conservation team picked up the Citroën from Ron Westwood's home in Perth and supervised its safe packing onto a truck to be transported across the Nullarbor, they knew they would have a lot of work to do.

Ian said that from a conservation perspective it was really valuable to meet with the owner to find out first-hand what his intention had been for the vehicle; in this case it was to keep it in pristine condition.

Peter said that Ron Westwood was confident that the National Museum would be a good destination for the Citroën, 'he was very ill and wanted a good home for it,' he said.

'I think he was a bit worried that we'd restore the whole thing, but when he found out how we look after our cars he was stoked,' said Ian.

When Technology Conservator Ainslie Greiner arrived at the National Museum in November 2006 the Citroën was completely disassembled. 'We basically had to rebuild it from the chassis upwards; various components have been treated or replaced if absolutely necessary according to their condition,' he said.

The 1923 5CV Citroën. Photos: George Serras





From left: Col Ogilvie (Engineering Consultant), Ainslie Greiner (Technical Conservator), Peter Bucke (Conservation – Technical Objects) and Ian Cramer (Large Objects Conservation Technical Officer).

‘Components on the chassis and the body were badly corroded,’ said Ainslie. Both the engine and gearbox are believed to be original and required some serious attention – the gearbox has been reconditioned and the engine has been completely rebuilt.

Conservation techniques used on the Citroën, specifically in relation to the elements inside the engine, will enable it to remain in operating condition. Many of the large technical objects in the National Museum’s collection are treated in a way that steers away from the process known throughout the industry as ‘mothballing’. When an object is ‘mothballed’ it is treated for the purposes of display only without consideration for conserving its function.

As a social history museum, the National Museum of Australia is a place where visitors can not only see objects on display, but have a deeper connection with the stories behind them. One of the best ways to do this is to see the object in action. This is not to suggest that the Citroën will be doing laps around Canberra’s Acton Peninsula. ‘It would only run periodically as part of its maintenance cycle,’ said Ainslie, who explained that, while there are a couple of museums that run their vehicles as part of the conservation management strategy, it is not typical of practice throughout the world. Most museums either just leave the cars as they entered the museum, or mothball systematically or aim to have all vehicles operational.

‘Here we’re quite different in our approach; we’ve done some research into lubricants and various coolants – how they work and how they inhibit – and we’re developing our maintenance programs related to that research,’ said Ainslie. ‘We aim to conserve both form and function.’

Ainslie recently presented a paper on the inhibitor regime for the PS *Enterprise* at the Metals 07 Interim meeting of the ICOM-CC Metal Working Group in Amsterdam and said that international museum colleagues were enthusiastic about the National Museum’s approaches to Conservation.

The project is all but complete with final preparation being conducted for starting the engine and beginning the 5CV’s maintenance cycle into the future.

‘There’s no way that it would come together without a group effort,’ he said. Engineering Consultant Col Ogilvie was a great mentor throughout the project to the relative newcomer. Peter Bucke helped to consolidate the chassis, and repaint it and Ian Cramer helped with aspects of putting the body back together.

‘I guess it’s another example of the Conservation area getting together and pooling their resources for a successful outcome,’ said Ainslie. ‘We change roles all the time and there’s a great deal of respect in relation to the different skills people bring to the team.’

The Citroën is one of more than 200 objects from the National Museum’s collection that were recently filmed for the development of *Circa*.

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