

Christmas Dinner in the Garage..... new exhaust manifold for the 15-Six!

Right from the beginning a dark cloud hung over my head. The exhaust manifold on my 15-Six, bought a couple of years ago, was still one of the original type. It showed unmistakable traces of age but was still in one piece. "Optimists" (they call themselves friends...) assured me the thing would be short lived, estimates varying between a couple of hundreds to no more than 4 or 5000 km. I must admit that I have seen more broken original manifolds on Sixes, than intact ones and old dealers –speaking from experience- explained to me why in the old days they had to keep a stock of 15/6 exhaust manifolds just in case... It is highly unlikely, therefore, that the manifold on my car was the one fitted in the factory back in 1952. A quick glance at the CTA catalogue made me shiver!



Earlier this year, shortly before the technical inspection for my license registration, I took the manifolds off, cleaned the surfaces and put them back on with new gaskets and a lot of exhaust kit. As (air)tight as Fort Knox... fortunately the technical inspector agreed with me. In the course of the summer though, the exhaust started to produce the blobbing noise under the bonnet that betrays something is leaking. I knew I was living on spare time. Just before one of the club gatherings early October, I did one more patch-up and discovered hairline cracks in the cast iron all over the place. This was definitely "end-of-story". Back home

from the club event I sent my fax order to CTA the same evening. The next day we had brief phone contact and they strongly recommended to replace all the studs and nuts as well. Of course this made sense, but I was even more conscious that this was going to chew up the best part of my Christmas allowance. No turkey, no presents this year...



Only after I had taken everything apart it became apparent how bad the situation was. One arm of the W-shaped manifold had broken off completely and the other half was about to go as well. My order for replacement hadn't gone out a moment too soon!



The new part is slightly different in a number of details, looks more robust and comes with a 5-year warranty. Looking at the price, they'd better! Of course I am aware of the fact that such parts are made only in very small series and cost a lot.

On the Traction Avant, the intake and exhaust manifolds –one aluminum and the other cast iron- are intertwined and bolted one onto the other at what is commonly called the "hot-spot". This serves to feed the intake manifold with some heat directly from the exhaust and was the best the engineers of that time could think of to prevent the carburetor from freezing

up under the constant air vacuum. On a 15-Six this caters for a rather complicated spaghetti of tubes and pipes, necessary to feed and relieve the thirsty cylinders at the proper moment. From a fellow Six owner in Switzerland I had learned how important it is to make absolutely sure the surfaces of the exhaust and intake manifolds are perfectly plane and parallel before fitting them onto the car. He had the unfortunate experience of breaking off a piece of his intake manifold, probably as a result of poor alignment and undue tensions in the material when tightening the nuts. So I took great care to check the parts on a plane surface before fitting them onto the engine. If necessary I might have had to machine the surfaces to a match, but in my case everything appeared to be perfect. A true compliment to the person who de-burred and machined the new cast iron manifold.



Now the new parts are in place, using only new gaskets and no kit at all. Careful mounting and tightening of the various nuts -there are 13 on the cylinder head alone!- appears to have saved me from a lot of trouble. The exhaust is completely airtight and the fitting of both manifolds against the cylinder head is perfect. The absence of even the tiniest false air leaks makes the engine run smoother than it did already. After I adjusted the valves it is now hard to notice the engine running while waiting at a traffic light. What remains is the deep growl of the exhaust when the engine is put to work, but that is part of the "15-Six music" and reminds people of the fact that this is not just an "ordinary" Traction passing by.

At Christmas, I will occasionally peek around the garage door and say: "old lady, all our X-mas presents are bolted to your cylinder head, I hope you appreciate this..."

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