

## A Restoration - Frustration Story, or How I am Slowly Becoming a Convertible Top Expert

By Jeff Kinzler,

When I got my '64 Fleetwood Eldorado project car three years ago, I gathered the nerve one day to try to put the convertible top down. I unlatched the front hooks and lifted it off the windshield header. Then I chickened out and latched it down again. However, this stopped the top from rattling over bumps. So far, so good. A few days later I really got my courage up and tried out the electric top mechanism. The top went up a bit, stalled, and then a few minutes later, went up further, then stalled, and so on, until I got it completely up in the air. Then it just fell down into a somewhat retracted position. Not really all the way down, but more down than up. "Hey," I said to myself, "looks pretty good with the top down - it looks like a convertible!" I tried to raise the top later, and the same behavior occurred. An inch or two, then stall, wait, try again then a few more inches. Eventually, I asked my two strapping teen-age sons, Matt and Josh to stand by on each side and "help" the top to go back up. When it finally

stretched all the way forward and dropped down on the windshield header, I felt a great sense of relief, like I had been standing on the window ledge of a skyscraper and finally stepped back inside. Whew!

After registering the car, and driving a few miles, the top decided to take revenge upon me for waking it from its apparently long period of rest, by tearing itself to shreds where it was attached to the rear quarter trim sticks. These are metal rails that are screwed into receptacles just below the rear deck on convertibles and which clamp the back of the top and rear window curtain to the body. With the rear flanks flapping in the wind, I felt sort of like Lawrence of Arabia crossing the desert.



"Lawrence of Arabia"

The Eldorado then went into a local shop for a metal stripping, rust removal and repainting exercise, so I was not too concerned about the top at that time.

For the next two years I concentrated on getting the car in road worthy condition, replacing fuel, cooling system, electrical, exhaust, brake and suspension

parts, while trying to drive her around and have some fun along the way. Last summer the car was ready for local parkway driving and made it to the spring show at Sears. I also managed to find and put new frames on the side window glass and restore the vent window rubber seals in anticipation of reassembly of the body. Unfortunately I also scraped one of my fenders pulling into the garage and I still have to address this before putting the body trim back on, but I decided in the mean time to revisit an important area, the old convertible top. My plans to restore the interior, of course first require a new top on the car.

So in another fit of bravery or tomfoolery depending on who you ask, I disconnected the convertible top pump and motor from the hydraulic and electric lines and purchased a seal kit to restore it with. A wonderful friend, Arthur Miller who happens to be a dentist, helped me to remove the pump seals and clean out the internal passages.- just like doing a root canal.



Pump with cover plate removed

We put the pump and motor together and connected the hydraulic system - all cleaned and flushed out with new fluid.



a "transfusion" of fresh hydraulic fluid to the pump cylinders

Then the moment of truth...I pushed the switch, the pump motor spun around, the top started to move up off the windshield header and .... it stalled again.

Now I suspect that I am about to learn all about the hydraulic rams that raise and lower the top and maybe about motor brushes, windings and bearings and internal corrosion on parts that have been sitting around unused for many years. I am sure it will be a fascinating, enlightening and somewhat costly journey. Wish me luck!

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