

The best thing to determine early on is where you want to go with this project. If you have yet to buy a car, this is a great time to get that figured out. What direction will help you determine what kind of a car you'll want to buy.

Say you're looking for something to do some simple bodywork and paint to but still be able to drive the car regularly. If that's the case, you'd probably want to find a already running, fairly reliable car that needs some body TLC. On the other hand, you might be looking for a car to do a complete nut and bolt restoration on. Then you would probably still want a good base to start from, but you may look more towards a rare car than one that was solid and complete.

Nut and Bolt Restoration- This will be the most extensive and expensive one of them all. Going this route is probably not the smartest first project for the novice and definitely not for the faint of heart. Full restorations have been known to wreck both marriages and bank accounts. Full restorations done the right way will require the entire car to be disassembled and sometimes media blasted. It may mean the need for panel replacements or patches, which can bring more cost factors in addition to part availability factors. It will require a large amount of space to work on it as well as a substantial amount of time. And most of all, and I can't stress this enough, it will take A LOT of money. If you are going thru numbers in your head and you think you MIGHT be able to afford it, then you probably can't. This would be the sort of car you would only take to shows or drive very minimally. It would be something to think of more as art or an investment than a car.

Good, thorough body makeover- This is probably much more attainable for the beginner. This is something that could be done with somewhat regular ability to drive the car during the project. Of course, The longer you can afford to have the car off the road, the better job you can do. A nice makeover will probably require a fair chunk of change, but not enough to be out of most people's range. You'll also need a good place to work and a fairly extensive tool supply. You'll need to be able to take lots of stuff apart to get a good job done. This would probably spend most of its life after the project going to shows or being a weekend or special occasion driver.

Quick, nice, cheap job- This is something you can do fairly easily with minimal tools and decent cheaper paints. You'd probably be starting with a fairly straight car with minor dings and minimal rust. You may also want to consider this on a car that will be driven during the project, or at least on that will be mostly a daily driver after you're done.

Scuff and shoot- Even your hootie/beater car can look nice for next to nothing.

Maybe you already have the car. That in itself may determine how far you go with your project. You might have a 85.5 or Baltic Blue 89 Starion. If that were the case you may lean towards a full on restoration. You may also be considering saving a car that normally would see parts car status. Maybe you have a red 87 TSI. Then the sky's the limit. The condition of the car may determine a lot too. If it's rusty and banged up but not rare you might decide to look for a better platform and save yours for parts. Or you may take your rough car and restore it due to sentimental value.

You can take just about any car in any condition and with money, patience and sheer testicular fortitude turn a hunk of shit into a show car. You can also take a very straight car that looks ho-hum and make it look a million times better with minimal money and time. You may even have a car that overall is fairly good but the paint is showing age. A good paint revitalization might give you satisfactory results when you're thinking a repaint is the only way out.

Most times, determining your project's outcome is a matter of finding the happy medium between what you start out with, what you can spend, and how hard you want to work.

No matter what outcome you want to achieve, there are some negative things to look for when determining the outcome of your project.

Visible signs of previous work- This can speak volumes for what a car's been through. If the whole car has been repainted, you'll want to check the typical SQ rust spots to see if there is filler there- a refrigerator magnet will help you determine that. If you have a car with some of the panels repainted can tell you a bunch too. Say your front clip, drivers door and drivers have been repainted- this could be a sign the front driver's side took a good hit and you'll want to check for unibody frame damage underneath and behind those panels. Previous work done properly is fine. Previous work not done correctly- not so much. Poor previous work will equal more money and time fixing other people's screw-ups. You may have something like this- Obvious signs of previous work, rust, the whole 9 yards:



Rust- SQs rust in similar places. Mostly it's in the panels and rocker areas where it seems to start first. The frame rails are also pretty common to rot out due to poor AC draining. Of course, rust spreads and I've seen SQs with holes in the floors, rear fender wells, front fenders and even the firewall. You'll want to check all those typical SQ rust locations and know that rust repair will substantially increase the time and money spent to get your project top-notch. Look for something like this:



Frame Damage- This will of course add more time and money to the project, but shouldn't be considered a deal breaker. If you're stripping the car down already and spending money on parts and supplies, a few hundred bucks in towing and paying a frame shop to straighten everything perfect is really only a drop in the bucket. The more you disassemble the car before it goes to the frame shop, the less they tend to charge you.

Having a plan for your outcome is the best way to start a project, but that doesn't mean you're going to adhere to it 100%. You may have a plan for a nice, cheap spruce-up but no car and during your search for that car find a rare one that is in need of minor rust repair and extensive work. That right there can change your plan dramatically. Of course, there will probably be many minor changes to your plan over the course of the project. Other things may pop up during the project that you hadn't planned for and may require a change of the plan too. None of these are bad things and are common during the course of a project of this nature. Once you start digging into your project, you'll begin to see what revisions need to be made to your master plan.

No matter what, never do anything that you feel you cannot do safely or is above what you feel comfortable, skill-wise. You always have the option of contracting some of the work out. You may want to pay a body shop to weld on a new after you have done most of the disassembly, then get the car back to finish it yourself.

Again, it will be a matter of balancing what you have, what you can afford, and what you wish to achieve.