

Polishing Ali - One of many techniques...

Judging by the feedback Lowflying received, Rob Oldland's article in April's edition about techniques and products for cleaning Sevens was particularly well appreciated. However, one member added that although most of the points raised were relevant to all Seven owners, he was interested in any specific advice for polishing ali components and bodywork. **Elie Boone** is our guide on this subject, which is applicable whether looking to polish unpainted body panels, or even components such as ali bellhousings:



One of the difficulties in polishing alloy components is that the various materials differ widely, and the finish that is possible therefore also varies considerably. There are many sorts of alloy and in general, the softer they are, the less likely it is that you will be able to end up with a mirror finish.

The techniques used will also depend on your starting point... Polishing ali sidepanels, for example, where you should be starting from a fairly smooth point, will be different from polishing a bare casting (which we'll come onto later).

When polishing ali body panels, it is important to start by degreasing them thoroughly with a decent thinner such as cellulose thinner. No, white spirit is not good enough!

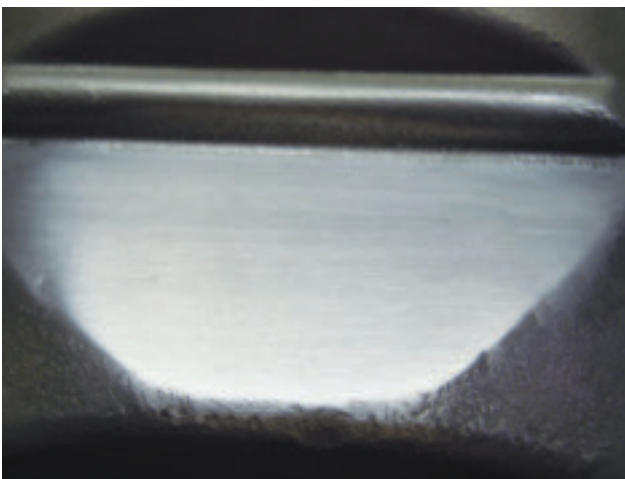
My polish of choice is Belgom Alu (which is widely available to purchase online). Belgom is a very fine metal polish that contains a wax additive that protects and seals the polished metal. The technique is simply to polish it on with a cloth until the alloy turns pitch black. To clean it off, I strongly recommend that you use workshop paper towels; if you try to use cloth, you will find that it takes a whole bedsheet to clean just one small area, and the results still won't be as good! If you find that you are not happy with the results yet, start again with degreasing the body panels before reapplying polish.

Because the body panels are so soft, getting a decent finish after you have used anything more abrasive than just polish is very difficult. Unless you are having to deal with severe gravel rash, I'd advise against ever using sand

paper or scotch bride on them. If you have to deal with a *really* rough side panel, using a very fine sandpaper (minimum P1000) with some WD40 may be appropriate, but it's very hard then to sand all the pitting away.

Polishing a rougher alloy surface means starting from a different point, although the latter stages will be the same. As an example, let's take my recent efforts to polish a horizontal panel on my alloy bellhousing. To get from a rough casting to a highly reflective finish took about 45 minutes. Not everyone will agree that it's time well spent, but I get a sense of satisfaction from achieving these results.

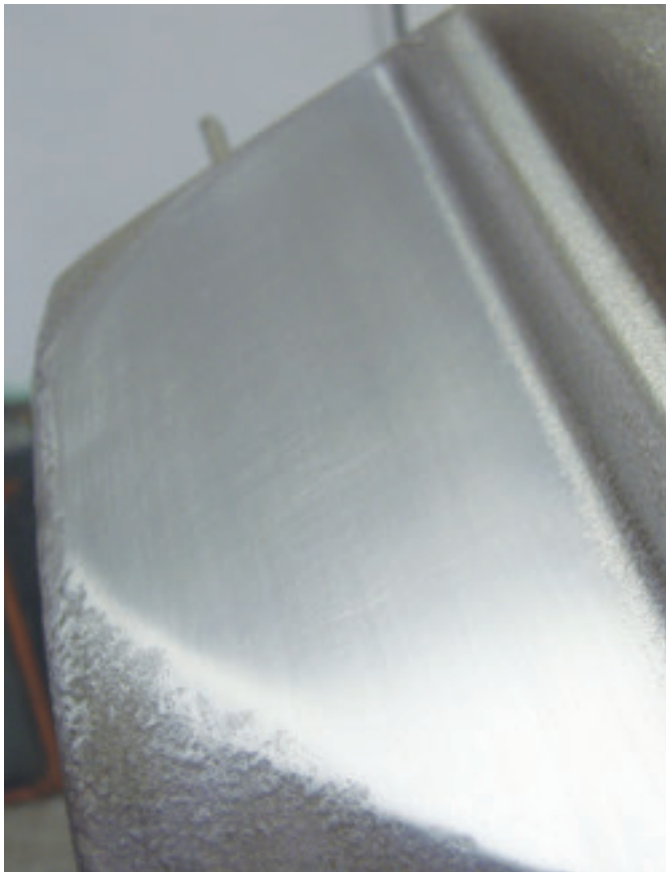
As you'd expect, polishing from such a rough starting point relies on using progressively finer and finer grade abrasives. My approach was therefore:



Step1: Sand with 150 grid paper



Step2: Sand with 500 grid paper. I tackled both of these steps with an oscillating sander to speed the process up. If you prefer, finer paper than 150 grit / 500 grit is OK at this stage, but may take longer! The idea is to obtain a finish that has very small or no sanding marks. When all of the coarser lines are gone, it's time to swap to a finer grade in the next step...



Step3: Now that we're getting closer to a smooth finish, I swapped to 1000 grid paper



Step4: To further improve the finish, I then moved to using 1000 grid paper but with WD40 as a lubricant (main pic). **Step 5:** As mentioned previously, it's vitally important to degrease thoroughly (inset)



Step 6 : Polish with Belgom ALU until the alloy looks pitch black.



Step7: Clean the black stuff away with paper, and hopefully a mirror finish will be revealed! *LF*