

Note fire extinguisher. Every garage should have one. Seriously



Chris Newbigging

1989 Suzuki RGV250

Modern tank battle

Thanks to ethanol and a wrongly applied sealing kit, Chris' RGV fuel tank was beyond home repair. Expert help was at hand, fortunately

Ian Potter at Tank Care Products had just received my fuel tank this time last month: in the intervening weeks, he's got right in to it. And it turns out I was right to hand it over to man with the equipment to fix the double issues of rust and a failed, flaking liner: it has taken more work than I'd be able to undertake to fix it for life this time.

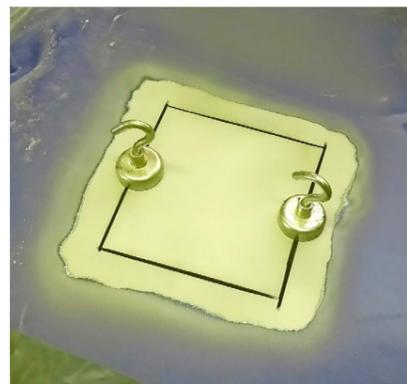
Most of the lining had already come loose – I'd shaken loose big handfuls myself, and Ian's preliminary fill of cleaning, liner-dissolving chemicals had seen off most of the liner and the rust that had crept in underneath. I used a POR 15 kit before – which in fairness, I've used without issue elsewhere – and it seems that at some point in the process of applying preparation treatment, cleaner and final lining (plus the drying process in between), I'd not been quite thorough enough – mostly likely

sealing in an acidic chemical or moisture to the metal. Not uncommon, according to Ian.

"I get tanks in from guys who've been advised to treat it with this chemical, or that vinegar, to clean the rust out before they apply a lining. The issue is if you don't clean it thoroughly, dry it out properly or the treatment doesn't get all the rust, you seal in moisture, acidic compounds or flash rust that can develop on the bare, unprotected metal that gets left behind.

"You can usually tell on the flakes of the failed liner – you can see what's happened to the metal underneath. You've got to get the prep absolutely right – I do it every day, and once in a while I'll have a tank that's tricky to prepare and treat, and I'll get flash rusting I need to go back and re-treat. In those cases, it's often better to cut a hole in the underside and ensure you can get every nook and cranny treated right."

My RGV's tank required a small square hole cut out – though mostly so a thick chunk of sealer rattling around that was too big for the filler hole, or to be dissolved by Ian's own chemical sealant dissolving solution, could be removed. Nonetheless, it gave Ian further access to use his array of special home-brewed blasting attachments to make sure every corner



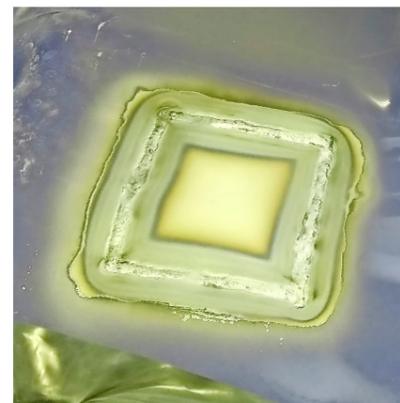
Magnets to hold new panel before it gets tacked



Blasting the insides right down to bare metal



Celotex box with heat lamps is the curing oven. And it works



No shortage of pretty colours in this business



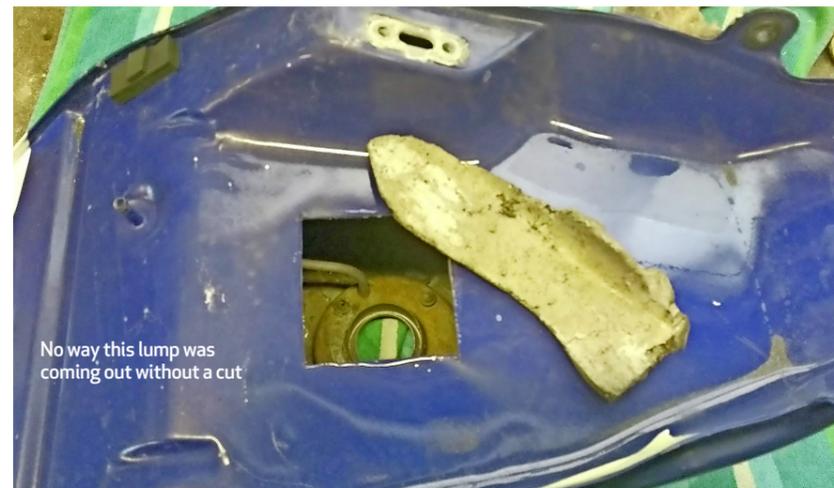
Chris fished the pound coin out later, naturally



You need a reasonably steady hand in this game



And a really good torch. And some patience



No way this lump was coming out without a cut

“IT'S NOT THE MOST EXCITING WAY TO SPEND A FEW HUNDRED NOTES ON THE RGV – BUT FINDING A REPLACEMENT TANK WITH NO RUST OR DAMAGE, AND WITH DECENT PAINT WOULD BE NO LESS COSTLY”

is free of rust and clean ready for the process. Ian then welded the hole back up, and applied his own lining. Not a difficult stage – though it's made easier for Ian, as the sealant works best if it (and the tank it's applied to) is heated to 40°C, and Ian's created a low-temperature oven specifically to pre-warm the tank and sealer.

You'll need to spend five minutes or so rotating the tank to ensure an even coating before draining off the excess: again, Ian's a little better prepared for this step, with a selection of bungs to seal the tank, and a rig akin to a padded cement mixer to mechanically rotate the tank, saving his arms from fatigue, and the tank from the risk of being dropped...

The tank spends six days on a shelf for the epoxy sealer to cure: final paintwork can then be carried out. As Ian protected and wrapped the visible surfaces of mine from the start, only the repair panel needed paint to match, though while he had the paint mixed and the gun filled, he repaired some chips on the mounting tabs and under the filler cap out of goodwill.

In total, that's seven hours of work – including the kit (£47.50-£67.50 depending on the size of the tank), it's a bill of £370.

Granted, it's not the most exciting way to spend a few hundred notes on the RGV – but finding a replacement tank with no rust or damage, and with decent paint would be a no less costly option. I'm not alone in facing the issues that ethanol fuel or simple neglect can cause for owners of project bikes or even bikes regularly in use either.

The range of tanks, in their varying conditions, lined up for work at the same time was wide – from a Norton tank with rotten holes, bad welds, crash damage and filler, to a TL1000S tank that looked OK on the outside, but with creeping rot threatening to breach the steel within. It's surprising what's fixable – even holed/damaged and previously bodged tanks aren't beyond salvaging, and if required, Ian can send them back with full paint and decals, ready to fit. I'm pretty confident the RGV won't need similar care again in its lifetime, though.

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