



Patrick Ryan sits in his dad's Swallow Doretti at the Amelia Island Concours d'Elegance.

## Rebuilding Vintage Cars Is All in the Family

WHILE THE PRIMARY FOCUS of our business is the highest-quality collision repair, our love of vintage cars inspires us to prepare one or two complete restoration projects a year. The most recent project we completed was the rebuilding of a 1955 Swallow Doretti for North Barrington resident Mike Ryan. The Swallow Doretti was made in England by the Swallow Sidecar and Coachbuilding Company during 1954 and 1955. Swallow's box-section tube chassis design included a Triumph driveline.

When Mike approached me about the project I was skeptical, as there were only 276 Doretis produced. The well-used car had resided in the desert around Riverside, California, and this kept the rust issues associated with vintage English cars at bay.

The restoration was arduous. We received the car in pieces and began the process of welding up cracks and holes and straightening the body panels. The majority of the body skin is aluminum; the tube frame is steel. Proper coating of the parts is essential as to avoid galvanic corrosion—and every nut, bolt, and rivet was addressed.


The whole process took four years to complete, and there was much research involved. The only non-original part that we put on the car is a fabricated competition windscreen that was created in-house and that matches the correct period racing screens.

As we neared completion, Mike was fortunate enough to bump into Amelia Island Concours d'Elegance Chairman Bill Warner at a show in Milwaukee. After sharing pictures of the car, Mike was

invited to show the Swallow Doretti at the 21st annual Concours that takes place at the Ritz-Carlton's golf club in Amelia Island, Florida.

After carefully loading the Doretti in a covered trailer, we took it to the island. Mike was able to enjoy a road rally the day before the event and received a lot of attention. While mid-March is usually warm in Northern Florida, we were also faced with the threat of rain—an unwelcomed guest at a Concours d'Elegance! But the expected showers showed up well after the cars were spirited away.

Our current restoration projects include a 1961 Ford Thunderbird and a 1958 Alfa Romeo Giulietta Spyder Veloce. The Alfa is just getting into the paint shop after spending a year on the rotisserie as we re-manufactured a majority of its lower structure that was severely rust damaged.

We have never wanted to be a "corporate shop" that is dictated policy by a third-party insurance provider. Our goal is simple—repair cars correctly and with attention to detail that we would use repairing our own vehicles. We are proud of the repairs that we complete. We are car guys with a weakness for vintage cars. 



Steve Belknap and son, John Belknap.

Steve Belknap, a Barrington High School graduate and 36-year Barrington resident, has worked in the car repair business for more than 40 years. He has held National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) Certification since 1976 and has worked as a mechanic, race crew chief, and collision repair technician. His son, John Belknap, is also a BHS graduate and has been in the business for 10 years. He graduated from the Motorcycle Mechanics Institute in 2003 with Manufacturer's Certification from Harley-Davidson and Suzuki, and is I-CAR certified. He lives in Fox River Grove with his wife, Amber, and their two children. Belknap Auto Body, founded in 1994, is located at 27W982 Commercial Avenue in Lake Barrington. Call 847-382-9433 or email [info@belknapautobody-inc.com](mailto:info@belknapautobody-inc.com) for more information.



The Swallow Doretti frame pieces and reconstructed body.