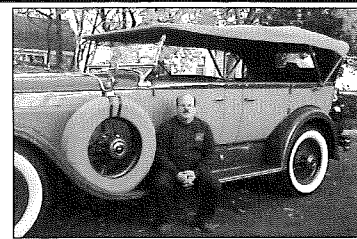


Instrument Face Plates

By Chris Wantuck



During the restoration of our collector automobiles, we sometimes come upon a situation where a certain part is purchased and upon receiving it, is not quite as it was advertised. Sound familiar? This example of a Seth Thomas electric clock is one of those cases. This particular model clock was used only for eighteen months between 1929 and 1930 and is somewhat rare. When one becomes available on the market, the logical response is to purchase it, regardless of its imperfections.

The clock's mechanism was found to be mostly working and the local clock repair shop will be able to clean and calibrate it to once again be a reliable timepiece, but the dial face plate has some light damage. There was evidence of smearing of the numbers as well as irregular shades of the background black color (Photo 1). There were also some minor paint chips, probably the result of the original black paint applied to the brass face plate without any primer. You know in your heart that all the time spent under an illuminated magnifier using hair size touch-up brushes won't easily bring back this face plate the way it was when new. Perhaps the black chips could be color matched and a couple layers of paint might fill them in, but correcting the smearing of the white numbers would be torturous. Rather than fogging up the glass with one's face pressed against the magnifier and trying to use a color palette and a steady hand, the solu-

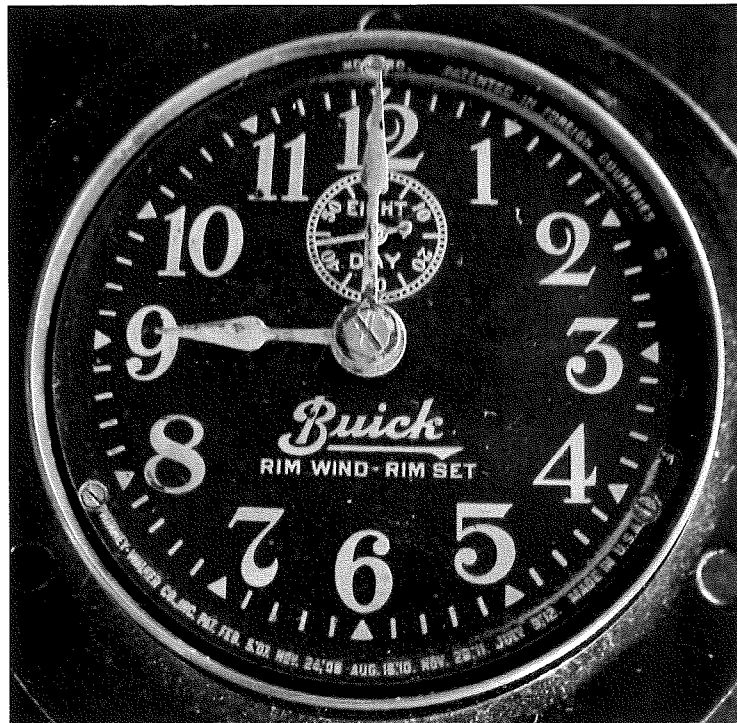


Photo 2—Another example of a clock face plate. This Pinhey-Walker clock faceplate includes details such as the Buick logo, the words RIM WIND—RIM SET and seconds inset dial face with the words EIGHT DAY on it. Recreating this faceplate would be virtually impossible without the aid of a good graphics program.

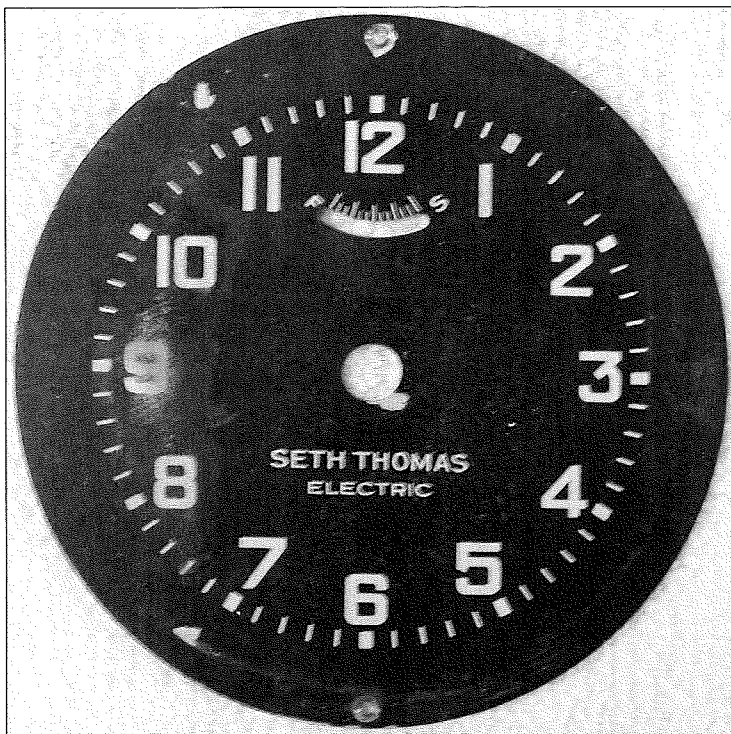


Photo 1—The Seth Thomas clock face plate as it was received from the seller. Note the water damage to the left side, particularly around the number 9.

tion that made the most sense was to create a new face plate using the computer with a high grade graphics capability. After all, isn't this dial face plate just another graphics problem?

The brass face plate was removed from the clock mechanism and carefully applied to some white card stock being attentive to keep the vertical and horizontal alignments perfect. The face plate was then scanned into the computer using the highest density (pixels per inch) setting. The high density setting is important as to ensure that changes made do not appear as jagged or squiggly lines. This would be especially true if the face plate were a more detailed specimen like the Pinhey-Walker dial shown at Photo 2. Notice the Buick logo with the swirl in it and the seconds inset dial face with the words EIGHT DAY on it. Recreating these details would be impossible without a computer and a graphics program. In the case of this Seth Thomas dial face, the letters in the word ELECTRIC were set at 5-6 pixels while the name SETH THOMAS had its letters set at 8-9 pixels wide to be more bold or pronounced. As a comparison, the small lines for the Fast and Slow setting window on the upper portion were a mere 3-4 pixels wide.

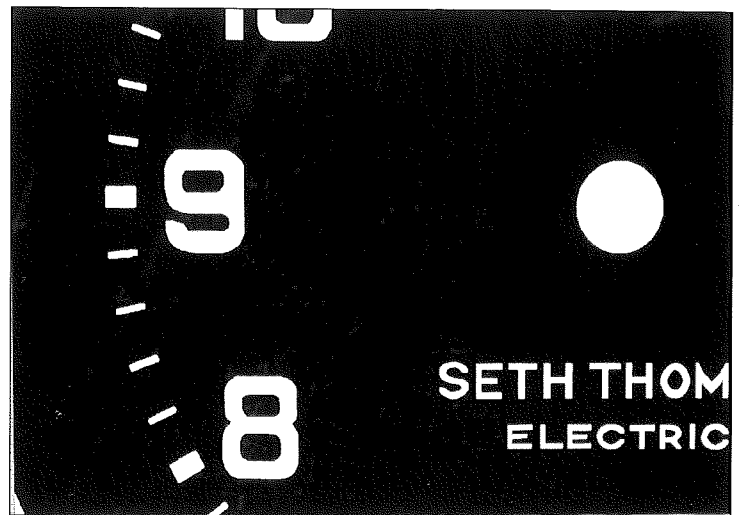
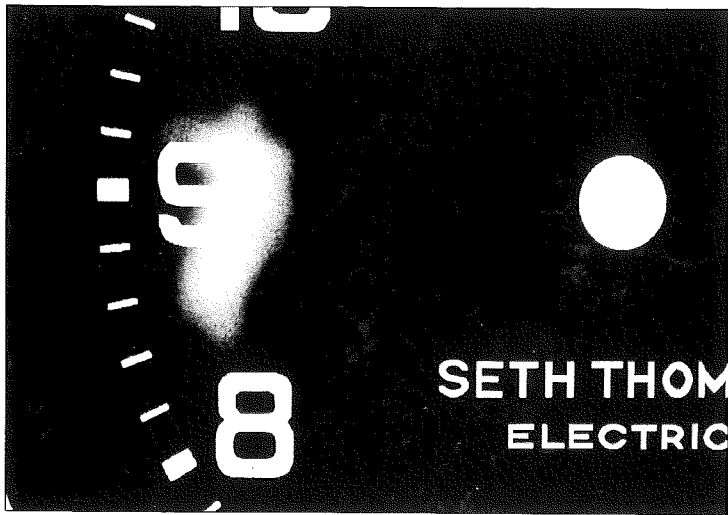


Photo 3—A side-by-side comparison of the program used to touch-up the Seth Thomas clock dial face plate. On the left is the face plate as it was scanned into the computer and the background color set to a dark shade of black. On the right is the view after all graphics have been corrected. Each pixel was corrected to be either a light color or dark color and in certain cases the edges between the two colors were set as half tones for blending.

There are several advantages when using a graphics program such as this one from Paint Shop Pro. First is the ability to zoom in and enlarge an area to work on. Since the task involves changing the color of each pixel (and there are hundreds of thousands of them), working in an enlarged section provides ease between you, your eyes and the hand navigating the computer mouse. If you stray off course and a line of pixels gets colored wrong, “mousing over” them again is easy. Being able to zoom in and out provides a good perspective on whether the change just made was enough. The second advantage is being able to save the work done at a given moment and being able to come back to it at a later time. Working this graphics problem at the individual pixel level can be tedious and taking a break once in a while permits you to stay focused on quality by minimizing fatigue. Try doing that with a palette of enamels and a small brush! A third advantage of the graphics program is to perform something called global changes. In three to four mouse clicks, the color of the white numbers can be changed to reflect something aged and slightly discolored. In this example, after several attempts, an off white that had both grey and a light shade of yellow matched the colors of the numbers and letters of the other gauges in the instrument cluster. The result was the effect of aging and all of them appeared uniform. The same also occurred when performing the global change for the black background color, resulting in a nice uniform background. Even the numbers & letters seemed to stand out a little more. The final step was printing the dial face out on photographic quality material using a laser color printer. Adhering it to the brass face plate involved simple spray contact adhesive. Photo 4 shows the final clock dial face plate which turned out to be no thicker than the original enamel paint (the original paint was removed).

- Adding certain graphics to a face plate is now feasible. Packard and other Marques for example included logos to their instruments much like the Buick logo in Photo 2.
- Once a face plate is created for a specific Marque or car model, it can be shared with other collectors. 📷

SUMMARY

- Creating replacement face plates using the computer and graphics capability can resurrect many types of instrument face plates once thought to be too far gone to use for a show car restoration.

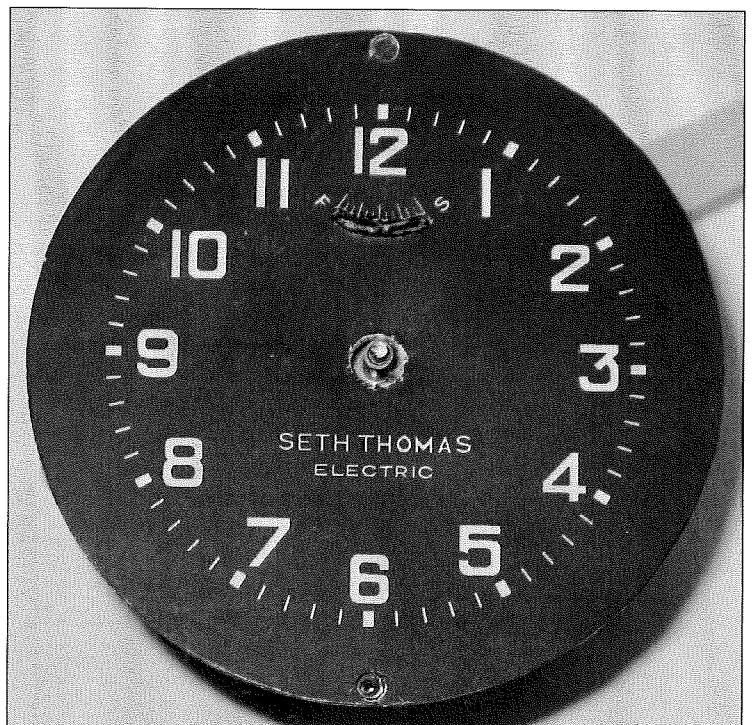


Photo 4—The completed clock dial face printed out on photo quality paper and applied to the clock’s original brass face plate. The background is a uniform black color and the numbers and letters were all set to a light grey and beige (off white) to match the slightly faded numbers and letters of the other face plates in the dash board instrument cluster.