



The finished job.

# Electric power steering for a Ponton cabriolet

by Alan Cross

I've driven my Ponton cabriolet for the last seven years and became accustomed to the heavy steering when compared with the power system fitted to my Pagoda SL. On one of my visits to Techno-Classica in Essen I met Roger Reingoud from EZ Power Steering in Holland. This company specialises in fitting a bespoke electric power steering unit to a vast selection

of classic and more modern cars. The system fits neatly under the dashboard after modifications to the steering column and incorporates sophisticated electronic control. After several meetings with Roger over subsequent visits to Essen and testing the system on his stand cars I decided it was time to modify my car.

Roger obtained a complete Ponton

steering column from a parts supplier in Germany and attached his unit to the refurbished column. He checked with me to ensure this replacement column was an exact copy of mine. A price was agreed and a suitable date fixed for my journey to Leerdam, Holland for the exchange to be completed. It was estimated that the work would take two days and in the event this proved to be fairly accurate.

The first job on arrival at the modern premises was to take the car on a test drive to assess the original steering characteristics, which were considered normal, and then began the removal of the whole column. One technician is assigned to each car in the workshop and he has a dedicated work station and access to all the modern equipment. Both columns are then placed side by side and measurements taken off the shaft and gear change to ensure complete interchangeability. Any slight adjustments are made before attempting to fit the new unit. In my case he had to elongate the cut out in the outer column to allow the steering lock to function exactly as before.



The complete kit for electric power steering.



The Ponton cabriolet steering column loosened ready for extraction.



Roger Reingoud pulls the column out.



The steering column measured and compared.

As the whole steering column was out of the car I asked the technician if he would fit my replacement mph instrument cluster in place of the original kph unit. This had to be removed anyway because there is a speedometer head connection to be made to allow the electrical assistance to be varied according to the road speed.

Once all the connections are made and the replacement column is in place, final adjustments are completed to ensure evenness of assistance throughout the range of the steering from lock to lock and a test drive is taken to confirm all is correct. The whole process was completed within the original time scale and the difference in handling was remarkable, and just as Roger had predicted. Whilst my car was being adapted, along side it were two 300SL roadsters and a 170S cabriolet having the same modification. I was invited to test drive the 300SLs, one before assistance and the other one after fitting the power system. The difference was immediately obvious and it's no wonder that such a system is being fitted to an ever-increasing number of these iconic cars. One of the SLs had also been fitted with a replica smaller steering wheel which resulted in more leg-room between the seat and the wheel and gave a more comfortable driving position.

The morning of our departure was somewhat different as Roger had arranged for a photographer from the Dutch magazine *SL Mercedes Review* to visit his factory and photograph the various Mercedes on site. I took him for a run in the Ponton and he did several shots as I drove past him in the quiet roads around Leerdam. I'm now looking forward to seeing the results in print later in the year.

We used the P&O Hull-Rotterdam route and Leerdam was less than an hour's driving time from the port. The whole experience was very enjoyable. Roger Reingoud and his team made us very welcome and achieved a remarkable transformation of the handling characteristics of my Ponton. The conversion for my car cost around €3,700 including taxes but simpler versions without the column gear change would be cheaper. It's not a low price but in my view it makes the car so much easier to manoeuvre and park, and improves the slow speed cornering beyond all expectations. I have to agree with Roger's sentiments – I should have done it years ago.



The original and replacement units side by side.



The car with the old column out.



Roger Reingoud and his technician ???? outside their premises.



This very nice 170S cabriolet was also having the system fitted. EZ Power Steering's stock is stored on a mezzanine floor above the workshop.



Two 300SL roadsters awaiting modification.