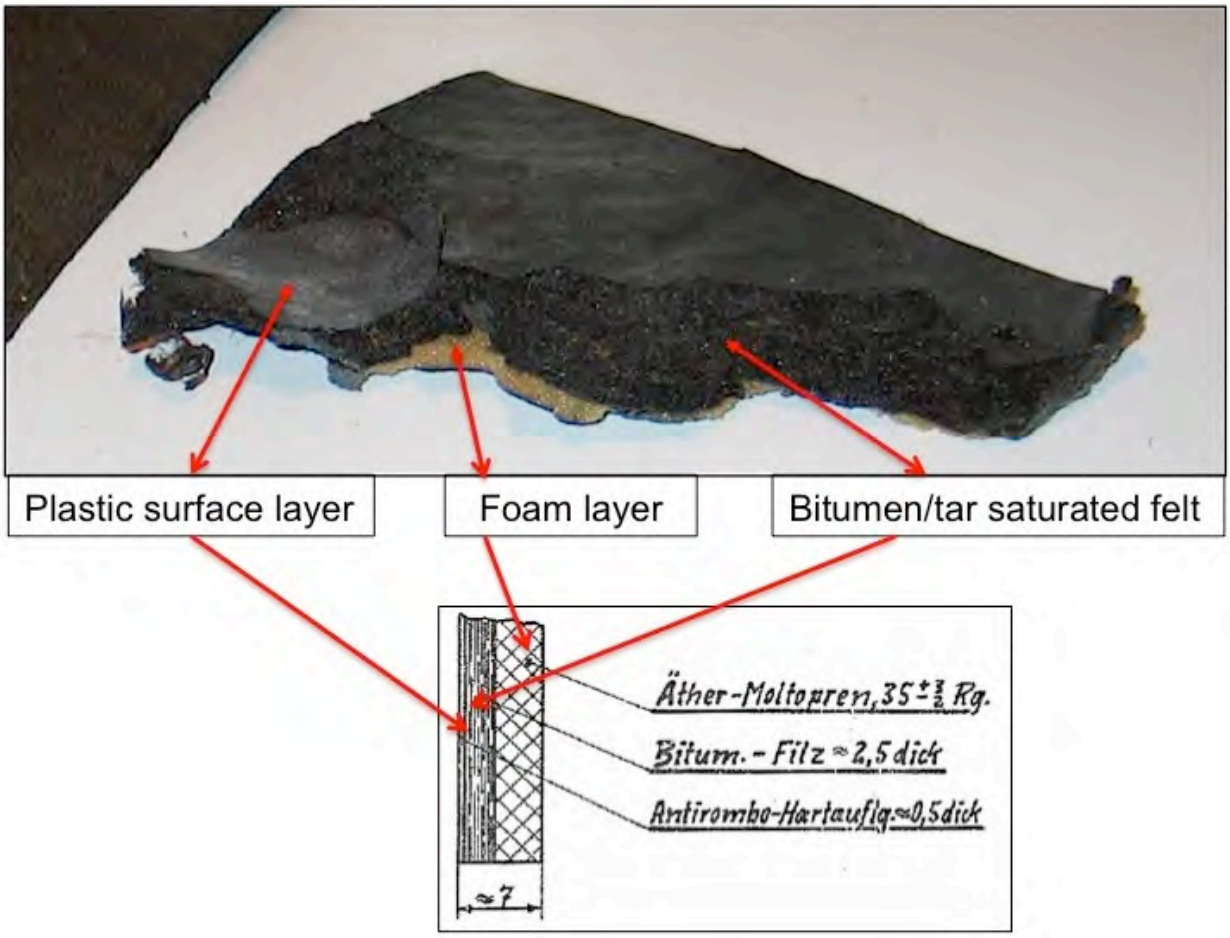
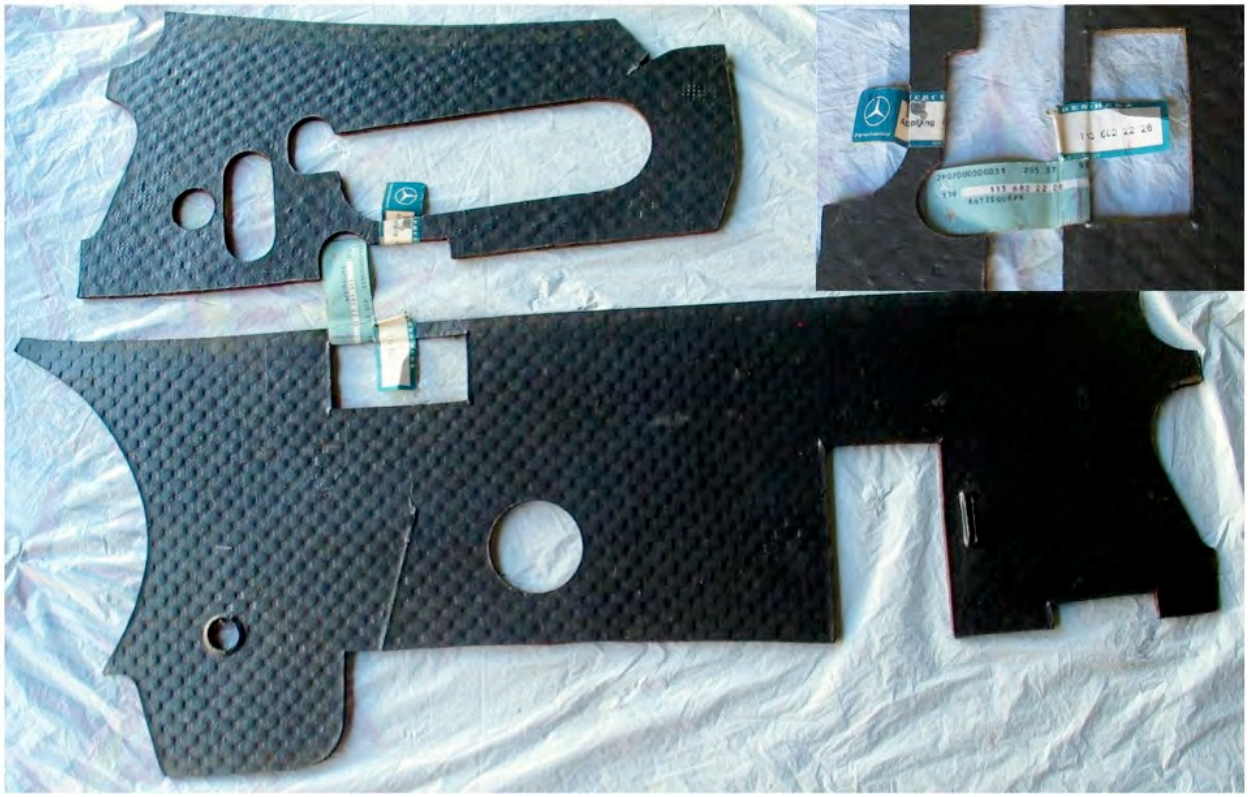
About 4 months ago Andy "*Drewtee*" posted: "I was wondering if there was enough interest on this forum to source a company to manufacture a near replica of the original firewall pad?" and the response was very much positive. Since then a few of us – Garry Marks, Tom Colitt (from Classic Autos LA), Dave Gallon (Gallon Restorations) and I - took up the challenge and here is our summary of this effort.

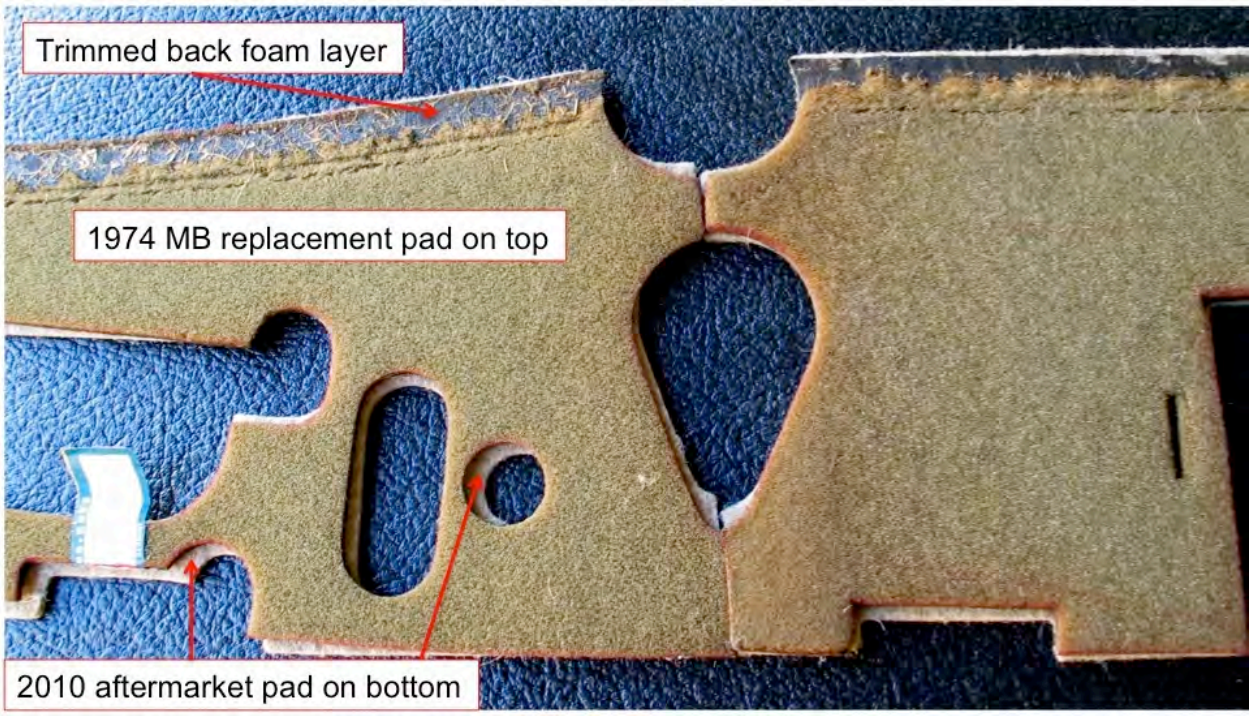
In order to reproduce a part like a firewall pad one needs to know not only what the original looks like but also what it is made off. Fortunately, *Claudia*, a customer of Tom Colitt's and SL113 group member, was able to obtain the original factory specification drawing for the firewall pad from the Classic Center that provided the details, and the details match what many of us have had in our hands - crumbling pieces of the material.



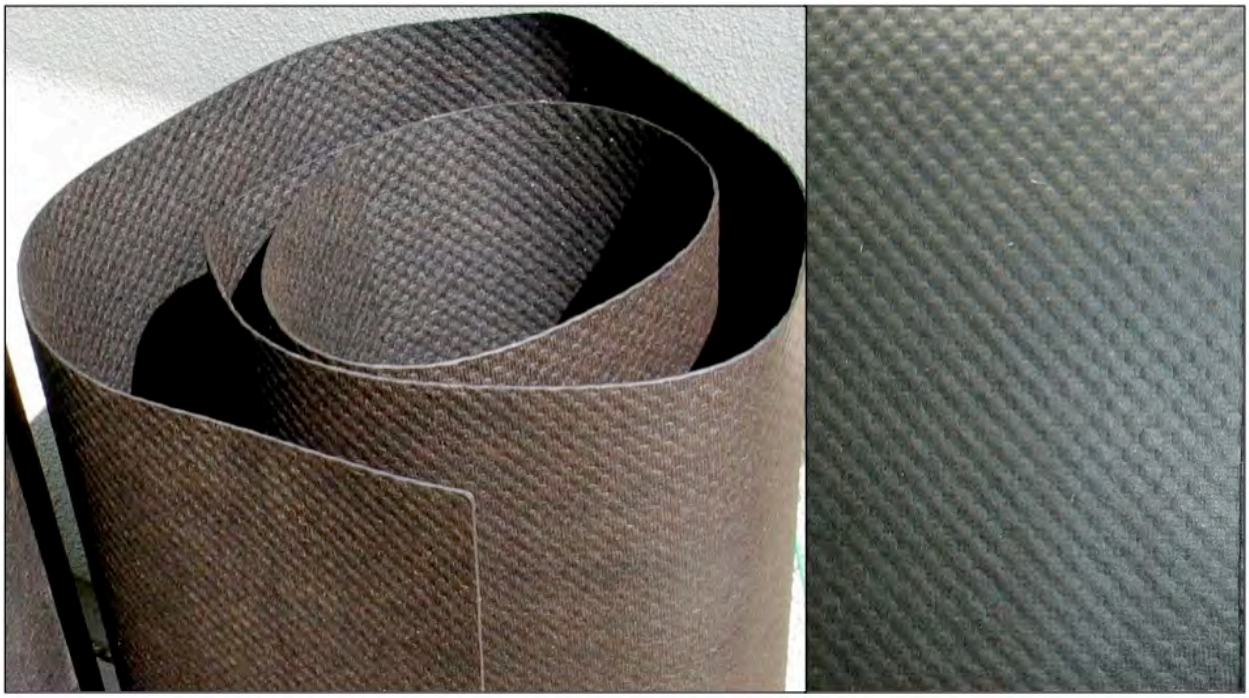
In addition to the foam-backed material, Mercedes also used another material with jute backing. Neither one proofed to be very durable and long-lasting.

After the end of the W113 series and when the first cars needed replacement pads Mercedes sold them in a slightly but significantly changed version. We were fortunate to have a replacement part available that was sold in 1974 to a collector of Mercedes cars, which was never installed. This part has a much thicker bitumenized felt layer (about 2.3 mm thick) on top of a 4 mm foam layer. Notable is the fact that Mercedes sold this replacement part with the foam layer trimmed back on the top. The reason for this is most likely that the on original version the top layer would eventually peel back from the underlying foam/jute later since it was not glued directly to the metal.




Trimmed back foam layer
1974 MB replacement pad on top
2010 aftermarket pad on bottom

Garry's initial attempt was to find bitumenized material that could be imprinted with the correct waffle or diamond pattern that we are all familiar with. At the same time I was trying to locate the material that Tom LeClerc had found and installed in his prize-winning restoration: http://www.sl113.org/forums/index.php?topic=4192.msg25868#msg25868
He had sold some pads to other Pagoda owners and also to Tom Colitt, who has installed the material in his restorations. These cars garnered several ”Best in Class” trophies at some of the most prestigious shows in the country, indicating that the judges also agreed with the originality of the material. Unfortunately, Tom LeClerc has passed away and could not be asked for the source of his material. But "with luck and a prepared mind" as the saying goes, I came across a roll that looked suspiciously similar, bought it, and brought a sample to PUB 2011. Tom Colitt immediately recognized it and I was off to the races securing sufficient quantities for a production run. The material is as thick as the original Mercedes 1974 replacement pad and has the familiar waffle/diamond pattern but it is bare without any backing.



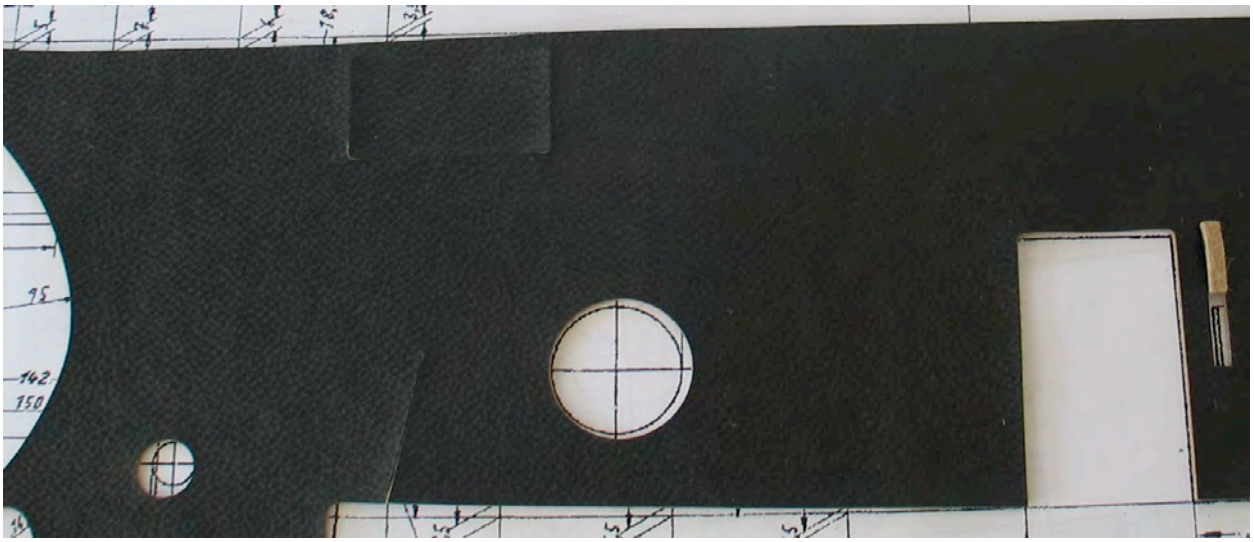
We discussed at length what kind of backing to select. A poll among group members indicated that most people favored jute over foam. However, it is virtually impossible to find 3-5 mm thick jute in the USA. One can still buy a product called Hardura sold for older Jaguar and Land Rover cars that is milled in England and which is a plastic covered jute, but is very pricey here. Furthermore, jute suffers from a low temperature resistance (about 180 °F) and absorbs moisture. We finally settled on industrial, needle punctured synthetic felt (polyfelt) that is currently used by the automotive industry. It has high temperature resistance (325 °F), does not absorb moisture, is resistant to oil and other automotive fluids and is manufactured according to stringent automotive specifications, including flame spread. Just like wool felt it is a good insulator against heat and absorbs sound.

The idea of gluing the polyfelt to the bitumenized material was discarded because of the manual labor and associated costs involved. Instead it was decided to buy the polyfelt with a pressure sensitive adhesive film (PSA) that can be peeled off. This felt material will be stamped out separately and then the two layers - bitumenized front and felt backing - need to be combined by the end user. Doing it this way we only need one die for the front layer, that is, one without the VIN plate cut out. The felt layer, however, will have the additional VIN plate cut out and when the pad needs to be installed in a 230SL or a European 280SL the rectangle is removed before the two layers are combined. It then easy to cut through the front layer with a scalpel, or X-acto knife, to create the opening for the VIN plate. Importantly, when installed in US version 280SL cars one will not see the demarcation for the VIN plate. Also, owners who prefer to use 4mm (or 1/8") foam backing can easily accomplish this themselves or possibly have it applied by one of the vendors that we have selected.

There are two types of PSA offered, a rubberized version and an acrylic one. We chose the latter

because it is initially less sticky after removal of the release paper and therefore can be slightly re-adjusted during the assembly of the two pieces. It will cure within 24 hours and then provide a stronger bond than the rubberized adhesive. This PSA layer also conforms to several automotive standards and it is rated to 325 °F.

After selling Mercedes and aftermarket pads for years David Gallon was aware of the fact that the recent aftermarket products do not fit quite as well as the original ones. Placing a currently sold aftermarket pad over the factory drawing one can see clear aberrations indicating that the templates used for the current production (and also the version sold by Mercedes a few years ago) were copied sloppily.



This fit problem will be carried forward in any future aftermarket products that do not use the original drawing or an original NOS replacement part from the seventies as a template. Obviously, because of the availability of the factory specification drawings and the NOS replacement part we decided to use those as a template for our dies.

Where are we at this point?
The old stock material has been delivered to the die maker and by the end of next week we should be able to provide detail photos of the four parts in a set, that is, the long and short front parts and the long and short felt backing parts.

What will a set cost?
It has always been our goal to provide a product for our members (but not for the general public) that would be in line with the prices that commercial vendors ask for the current jute-backed replacement pads and we are very hopeful that we can stay close to this target. However, we need to wait until the prototypes are finished and tested before we can announce the final price, but we do hope to ship out the first pre-paid sets in about 3 - 4 weeks.
In the meantime we welcome your comments, and please, feel free to ask questions.

We have not ignored the requests for pads in RHD cars, especially since it was an owner of a

RHD Pagoda who started this project, an also inquiries for the pads on the inside firewall in the foot wells. Once we have successfully satisfies members' requests for the LHD car pads we will start the next phase of this endeavor.