

A Labour of Love - The Saga of 22-303



Day 1 - the XK150 arrives for restoration

Editor- The following story by Onslow Billinghamurst appeared in Classic Marque in 1985. It is such a good story that we felt it deserved another run. Enjoy!

The Urge for A Restoration Project.

My brother-in-law, Slim, in his younger days had owned TC's and 100/4's, and in later life, beneath that blasé exterior, you could tell he regretted having exchanged these for a wife and two charming daughters. Imagine his joy and excitement, when on his travels around the Glenelg area he spotted a chance to regain some of the joys of his lost youth. There, underneath an almond tree in somebody's side garden was an obviously derelict B.R.G. XK150 FHC.

It even had grass growing through its floor boards. Like a shot, he was at the front door, offering cold cash to the lady of the house to remove the rubbish from her yard! She was most apologetic, but added that the 'rubbish' belonged to her son in Darwin, and there had been countless people before making similar offers so, she must refuse. Nevertheless, Slim was not to be put off, and he continued to drop in. Eventually, he

found the owner home and in dire need of cash and so, a deal was made. I understand to the dismay of several other Jaguar enthusiasts at having been beaten to the 'gun'.

He called me around to help survey his acquisition, and develop a plan of action. Of course, I was green with envy, and

offered to go into partnership, which he naturally, but politely, refused.

Gun Toting Bill Hambly-Clark

After some research this is what Slim had bought. The car, an early 1958 3.4 litre FHC with wire wheels, but without overdrive, was purchased by prominent



The interior was at best very sad.

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South Australian gunsmith, Bill Hambly Clark, who had raced and rallied XK's since the early 1950's.

Hambly-Clark had apparently found it in Singapore in the early sixties, and shipped it to Adelaide. Interestingly enough, the S.A. registration No. 22-303 (names of rifles) was originally on a Renault which Bill rallied in a Redex Round Australia Trial. After some time, Bill handed the '150 onto his son, who in turn sold it to this fellow in Glenelg.

Bush Mechanic Takes Ownership

This fellow obviously enjoyed driving it, and to increase his enjoyment decided to exchange the twin carburettor 3.4 litre motor for a 3.8 with triple 2-inch SU's.

It was said that he drove the car to a wrecker's one day, lifted out the 3.4 and tried to drop in the 3.8 from an early Mk 10. Trouble was, it wouldn't fit! Those 3 SU's fouled the inside of the engine compartment so, he solved that by taking three desperate, and separate measures; throw away the air cleaners; pack the engine mountings to offset the motor as far as possible to the left; and, as that didn't work, hack away the offending pieces of bodywork! He finally got it to fit.

Apparently it wasn't stopping too well and the rear brakes were causing trouble. So, off came both rear calipers which were disposed of. Who needs rear brakes anyway - it's the front ones that do all the work isn't it?



Every picture tells a story

At last, he had a 'goer' and a stopper.

Enjoyment was complete until disaster struck. Driving through the hills one day, it backfired through the naked SU's which promptly set the engine bay alight, destroying the wiring, plumbing and a few other things as well. The '150 was taken home, put in the side garden, and forgotten. The car had also had a few 'dings', but nothing had been done about those, as dents in the bodywork don't affect performance!

The Task Begins.

That was 1971, and the once-proud XK150 lay there until Slim rescued it

in 1976, after which he stored it in his workshop, and eagerly awaited the day it would be back on the road.

Very steadily (Slim is a busy man), he started to work on it, and that is when the real adventure begins. The first thing to do was pump up the tyres, but one wouldn't stay up; to fix this the wheel must come off, but it was firmly rusted onto the spline. There was no question about it, the wheel had to come off, and eventually Slim managed it. Unfortunately, it wasn't much good afterwards.

Slowly, but surely, the realisation dawned that what he had was, to put it mildly, a wreck, and to get it going again would take more time than he could afford.

I, of course, made no attempt to persuade him otherwise, and when he decided he should sell it, I was the lucky person to buy the wreckage from him!

Onslow Takes on The Job

The first thing for me was to extend the shed to make room. Then, when it arrived home, my wife and children ceremoniously said goodbye to me for the next few years, and the fun began.

The vehicle was stripped of all easily removable items, doors, seats, trim, etc., making adequate (?) notes all the time, so it could be reassembled again in the not so distant (?) future. Then, the first problem became evident, where was I going to store all this stuff?



Almost down to the essentials.

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There is only one way from here - up!

It's surprising how much room seats, battery boxes, doors, lids, windows, mudguards, dashboards, floors, a gear box, bumper bars, a radiator, etc., take.

Fortunately, I had access to some friends with empty sheds, and soon had pieces stored all over the southern suburbs of Adelaide. Apart from this, little trouble was experienced in stripping the car to the stage of bare body shell sitting on a chassis.

Body Off Restoration

I asked a friend who is experienced in car restoration for advice as to whom I should take the car to get the dents and rust fixed. He looked at me and said, 'You haven't finished yet - take the body off. You'll always regret having gone this far and not doing the job properly'. I reluctantly had to agree, and it was a surprisingly easy job. Undo about a dozen bolts, call in quite a few friends, and lift it off. But where do I put it?

The car now took up twice as much room as before! I solved this problem by suspending the body from the rafters in the shed, which in turn, left just enough room to work on the chassis underneath. This enabled the car to be completely dismantled, and then the far more satisfying task of repair, restoration and re-assembly began.

The chassis was grit blasted, painted, and the inside of the members soaked with fish oil. Now I had a good solid foundation on which to build.

The Fun Begins

The front end was completely shot. How the previous owner managed to drive the car I'll never know. The lower ball joint bearing material had worn completely through and the ball was resting on the cap itself.

However, reconditioning on this was relatively simple. New ball joints, wheel

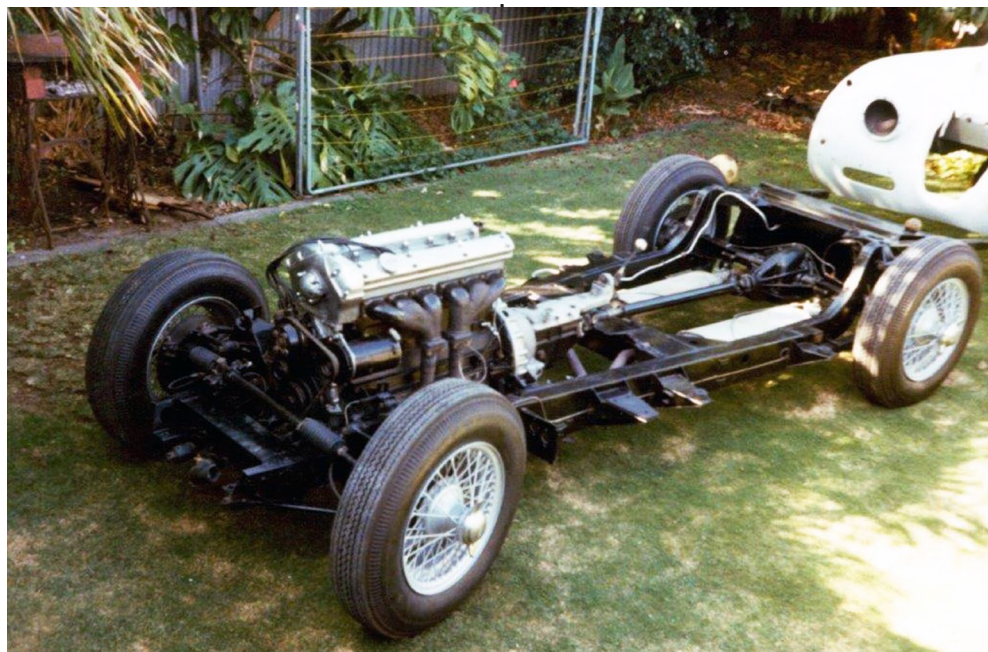
bearings and bushes in the steering rack, etc. being quite easy to fit.

The rear end was far more interesting. The differential was quite good, but needed new wheel bearings, and the brake discs needed machining. To take the wheel bearings and brake discs off, you must remove the hubs from the half shafts, but they would not budge - no way could I get them off, so took them to a machine shop for their help. A 10-ton press made no impression, and I was worried something (like the discs) would break; so, they told me to go away and come back later. Next day I was happy to find the job done, with no real damage other than mangled threads on the end of the half shafts. They had 'to just keep on hitting the half shafts with a 71b. sledge hammer until eventually they came off the hubs', then said, 'Oh, by the way, did you know that both half shafts are badly bent?'. Now it became clear why the previous owner had trouble with the brakes, the consequent run out in the discs caused all the problems.

After the half shafts were straightened, and new threads cut, the rear end went together very nicely. The original brake cylinders (on the front only, I never found the rear ones) were frozen solid, and were the outdated, round pad variety anyway. So square, quick-change pads, calipers and cylinders from a Mk II were fitted, and after building up and machining the splines on the hubs, I had a chassis on wheels.



The project begins!



Mechanical's rebuilt - now time to start the body.

Engine & Gearbox Rebuild

The engine was simple; a straight forward reconditioning job. On stripping the gearbox though I discovered a tooth had broken off bottom gear, and replacement lay gears were unobtainable. The only thing to do was have a new tooth built up.

When this was done, and the gearbox and tail-shaft fitted, all that was needed to get a mobile chassis was fuel, water and electricity.

The fuel tank had petrol in it when the car was stripped, so I was hopeful it would be sound. No such luck! After I cleaned off all the old paint, rust holes were revealed everywhere, and a new one had to be made. We managed to salvage the original sides to the tank, and similarly, the radiator needed a new core, and the fuel pump refused to operate. A reconditioned one brought me to the stage where I could start the motor.

Now, I've put engines together before, and started them; but just to make sure this time. I went by the book. Slavishly I followed the instructions: Bring No.1 cylinder to Top Dead Centre on the compression stroke, set ignition timing, etc., etc. ... at last I connected the battery and was ready to go. The fuel pump clicked away and filled the carburetor bowls, the automatic choke clicked on, and the starter motor turned over nicely, but it would not start; not even a solitary

kick or a cough. I checked for spark at the plugs, fuel at the carbies, went back through the workshop manual and checked the timing - all without success.

I persisted until the battery got tired of it all, so left it for the day: but took the workshop manual inside with me to read it in front of the telly! Idly glancing through the pages, a diagram caught my eye - there was the answer. I didn't dream that the rear cylinder was No.1!! Next day, after recharging the battery, and re-timing the ignition, it started without any trouble.

In order to test the clutch, gearbox, brakes. etc., I jacked up the rear axle so

both wheels were clear of the ground, started the engine and operated the drive train. All went well, except the noise in bottom and reverse gears from that built up gear tooth was deafening - bang, bang, bang, bang, so, out came the gearbox, and it went straight back to the man who had 'fixed it up'. He said it should have been alright, but would look at it anyway. When it came back, he said he'd lapped the tooth as well as he possibly could, and it should be satisfactory now. On test it was a lot better but still noisy.

Next Up - The Body

Now it was time to start on the body. At 8.00am I took a Jaguar body to the grit blaster, and at 4.00pm brought a colander home! I will concede some parts of the car were still complete and in reasonable condition the roof, boot lid and aluminium bonnet!

This was one job I felt I couldn't properly do myself. All I had to do was to have plenty of patience and money, and with a friend working on evenings and weekends, took about 18 months, including a few interruptions, to complete.

When the day came that the body was finished, and only required the final coat, I got everything ready and called all my friends in again to lift it onto the chassis.

Everything lined up with the exception of some body modifications I had made to fit the triple SU's.



Work begins on restoring the body!

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Almost there - Just the doors, bonnet, grille, glass, interior, woodwork, rear guards. Yikes!

After some minor reshaping, the carbies went back on, and with the radiator fitted, fuel connected, steering column installed and some primitive wiring, I had to have a drive around the back yard!

Perilous Test Drive

I threw a heap of newspapers on the floor to sit on, slid the steering wheel on the end of the column, and away we went.

All was fine except that tooth on bottom gear was still very noisy. I hoped it might wear in a bit, so drove the car back and forth across the yard, braking, of course, at the end of each run. Now Newton, or somebody, said, 'Action and reaction are equal and opposite', and in this case, the action of my foot pressing on the brake pedal could not be taken by the back of the seat - there was none - not the seat of my pants, as newspapers are reasonably slippery. So, my posie was provided by hanging on to the steering wheel.

This worked for a while; until one run, when I was scorching up to the side fence, applied the brakes, and off came the steering wheel! I was flat on my back, holding the wheel in the air, and scrambling for the pedals with my feet. Yes. I did manage to stop the car in time, but it was close.

In parallel with all this activity, I was having my four wheels reconditioned, and obtaining a fifth. I could write a book on this activity alone, but I won't because I might be sued for defamation of character over some of the incidents

involved. Suffice it to say, that eventually I obtained five good 16-inch wire wheels, nicely finished in silver baked enamel and shod with Dunlop RS5s.

Nearing Completion

The car then got its final coat of paint. That's the easy part. It's all the rubbing down afterwards to remove the odd run and the slight orange peel that takes the time, and is hard work. A new wiring loom had to be made, which is not difficult if you have the old one as a model.

At this stage, my wife, Wendy, decided that my finishing this car during her lifetime was becoming a distinct possibility, and she started to take an

interest in proceedings. This was most fortunate, as she - and her sewing machine - were a great help in the trimming, which with the exception of the seats, we did ourselves.

Then it was time to put in the windscreens, which had been very carefully stored, but the gremlins had been at work again. The front screen had cracked right through one of the laminations, and I was most surprised to find a replacement available 'off the shelf', so long as I was prepared to part with the necessary. Ah well, it's only money.

Wendy and I decided we would put the screens in ourselves, and practice first on the rear one. All you had to do was put the rubber in the surround, and then gently ease in the screen; at least that was my opinion after reading the workshop manual. So, after dinner one evening, we decided to start. After -an hour or so, Wendy said there must be another way, as what we were trying wasn't working. Another hour passed and she said, 'Try putting the glass in the rubber first and then fit it into the surround'. I told her not to be so stupid as everybody knew that was not the way to fit windscreens. At 10.00pm she said she was going to bed, and at about 11.30pm.

I followed; still without a rear window in the car. She kept on the next day about her idea of putting the glass in the rubber first, so I thought the only way to settle this argument was to show her



Triple SU's and all tidy

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it wouldn't work. Fifteen minutes later the screen was in the car. I only partly recovered my self-respect by putting the front screen back in the normal manner.

At last, the car was ready for its first road test. What a disappointment. The gearbox was so noisy in bottom gear I was ashamed to engage it.

A few weeks later, I saw something that greatly aroused my interest. It looked exactly like my gearbox. I was told it was out of an early 3.8 E-Type, and in good condition. Overjoyed I rang Steve Weeks, our local guru, just to make sure it would fit the '150. Within a week it was in, and beautiful.

The car is now a joy to drive, and I obviously am very proud of it, otherwise I would not have entered it into a few concours, nor put pen to paper.

An XK150 cannot compete with modern cars in many respects, but once you appreciate that the design of the XK was conceived more than 70 years ago and the car is itself 63 years old, driving 'her' is a very satisfying experience.

It took countless hours over a period of four years to restore, and I decided fairly early in the exercise not to record the



The red leather and carpets look fabulous.

monetary expense. In fact, I suppose the job is never complete. I'm still looking for a proper heater tap cowling for the radiator fan, and I'm not really satisfied with the fit of the doors.

I tell my family, and myself, that it was a great experience restoring a classic Jaguar, but one which I'll never take on again.

I've learnt so much on this car that, if there was to be a next time, I'd be able to do it so much better and more easily.

What was that? Did I hear someone whisper they know where there is an old '120 covered with dust in somebody's garage?

Onslow and Wendy



All finished and proud of it too.