



Q & A

Onslow Billingham

Life Member No. 130

Questions: Graham Franklin

Answers: Onslow Billingham

Hello Onslow - let's start - what was your first car?

I was a uni student and my first car was a 1938 Austin 7. It did a rear main bearing and I pulled the engine out with a rope over my shoulder. I didn't really know what to do but I managed to fix it and got it going.

I then bought an Austin A40 from my mother and then a 1959 Austin Healey Sprite.

I also bought two Austin 7s that I made into one. I stayed clear of 3-bearing engines in preference to 2, as the 3-bearing engine had a reputation for breaking their crankshafts due to poor alignment of the centre main bearing. I bought a book by L.M.(Bill) Williams "Austin 7 Specials - Building Maintenance and Tuning" and used that to help me rebuild the 750cc engine.



Rod Davis helping to load the third and last Austin 7



Second Austin 7 seen at Birdwood some years after we sold it. Wendy called it Myrtle

Interview - Onslow Billinghamurst (cont)

How did you become interested in Jaguars or classic cars?

They were always a dream. After I married Wendy, I bought an EH Holden and kept the Sprite. I was happy with the Sprite.

Can you recall your first encounters with a Jaguar?

A friend of the family had a lovely 2.4 Mark 1. We sold the EH Holden and owned the Mk 1 for 4 or 5 years. We sold it to the then Club Treasurer Chris Greaves.

At one stage I got a scholarship to work in the UK for 10 months, which was long enough to buy a car and bring it back to Australia. We started looking for a 420. A number that we looked at were rust effected and although we didn't want a dark car, the best we could find was a Black Daimler Sovereign. We brought it back to Australia, kept it for 40 years and sold it to an enthusiast in NSW.

The Jaguar cars you own or have owned?

I haven't owned many Jaguars. The one and only that we still own is the XK150.

The restoration of the XK150 has been well documented in "Classic Marque" and "Thoroughbred and Classic Cars". The condensed version is that it was owned by South Australian gunsmith, Bill Hambly Clark, and registered 22-303 (names of rifles).

After some time, Bill handed the XK150 onto his son, who in turn sold it to a fellow in Glenelg. This "bush mechanic" squeezed a 3.8 engine with three SU carburettors without air cleaners into the engine bays. The engine backfired and set the engine bay on fire, destroying the wiring, plumbing and a few other things as well.

The XK150 was taken home, put in the side garden, and forgotten until my brother-in-law rescued it in 1976. He stored it in his workshop, and eagerly awaited the day it would be back on the road. Eventually realisation dawned that to get it going again would take more time than he could afford and I bought the wreckage from him.

A nut and bolt restoration followed and we eventually had a very lovely XK150 that we still enjoy touring around in.



Onslow's restored last Austin 7 called Myrtle 2 by Wendy



UK purchased black Daimler Sovereign 420



Badly neglected XK150 saved and ready for a total rebuild.

Interview - Onslow Billinghurst (cont)

You have been a member of the club for 50 years. What do you remember in particular about those early days of the Club?

Although the Club primarily evolved out of friendship of XK owners, the XK Register didn't form until 1987. It evolved out of a run to Renmark organised by Dennis Crowhurst that included club members Ossie Petrucco, Michael Finnis, Peter Shurven, Murray Lindner and Rob Loffler in the fire Chiefs XK 120.

John Stewart was the first secretary, then Rob Smith for a couple of years, and then myself for the next 15.

I wrote a "Job Specification" for the position of Register Secretary after my 15 year stint, but nobody took any notice of it.

[That's ironical. The exec just signed off on a job spec to help new register secretaries].

In those early days of the club, SA and Vic clubs were very close and started regular interstate events that continue to this day. Do you recall some of those trips?

Yes, the first one was to Mt Gambier and I organised one to Echuca. Over time we went all over the place including Broken Hill, Halls Gap, Swan Hill, Portland, Nelson, Warrnambool, Penola, Ballarat, Bendigo, Apollo Bay and Kangaroo Island. Our longer trips were to Darwin twice, Tasmania and New Zealand.

Any special memories of Club events?

Probably the New Zealand trip. Richard and Carla Smith organised it. Bill & Julia Barker from Victoria joined us.



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



Onslow and Wendy's collection of historic cars. Photo taken prior to the sale of the 420.

Interview - Onslow Billinghamurst (cont)

We took the cars down to Outer Harbour with much trepidation as the wharries loaded the Jaguars onto a ship. We then all flew to Christchurch for the tour of N.Z.

The run to New Zealand was greatly helped by Richard Smith's friends who had my car waiting for me at the Motel in Christchurch when I arrived. How good is that.

We all agreed it was one of the best holidays ever with 30 Jaguars on the South Island.

The two trips to Darwin and Alice Springs were also very memorable, as was the journey to Tasmania.

Perhaps some funny or not so funny experiences?

On at least two occasions we borrowed a star picket from a nearby fence to enact repairs on our XK's. Once in N.Z. to act as a lever to tighten a loose fanbelt and the other on John Williams car to refit lost Welsh plugs.

Then there was the case of my burnt piston that resulted in a full engine rebuild with the thanks of Rob Loffler.

Of all the vehicles you have owned, and you could only have one returned, which car would you choose?

We still have the XK 150 so it would be the 1960 Sprite.

Your story brings back lots of memories. Anything else that comes to mind?

No, I think that's all.

Thank you very much Onslow.



XK150 progressively being reassembled with the engine now fitted correctly.



Completed XK150. Photo taken on the Register Run to New Zealand