

Cold Paws by Steve Weeks

Editor - The following edited article has been reprinted from the 2015 October/November editions of Classic Marque. There is some repetition with the preceding Q&A, but includes additional anecdotes.

The Marriage

When I met my wife (Val) I had the 2.4 litre Mark 2, and when we were married, we took that car on our Honeymoon. In retrospect it was a bit of a mistake, but it certainly introduced Val into the world of Jaguars.

One comical moment at our wedding reception (1970) was that my best man Gordon Brown, had a 2.4 Mark 1, which was exactly the same colour as my car, so I was a bit bemused when I wandered outside of the reception venue to comments of "you must be an idiot bringing your car to the reception" only to observe the Mark 1 covered in shaving cream, toilet paper, lipstick and many other unmentionables.

The Mark 2 was around the corner. But we were followed and they got the poor Mark 2 that night.

The Honeymoon

But back to the Honeymoon and the start of "Cold Paws"

On our honeymoon Val and I travelled through Renmark to Wagga Wagga and on to Canberra. This was part of our "planned" trip. After this we just followed our nose and wound up in the new (relocated) Snowy mountains town of Jindabyne. From there we went on to Thredbo and got our first introduction to the snow. We stayed at the Alpine Hotel in Thredbo and I will always remember that although it was about minus 5 degrees centigrade the staff were swimming in the pool outside our room.

Knock Sensor

It was as we were driving into Thredbo that I was aware of a slight "ticking" sound, which I dismissed as "better look for some oil tomorrow".

The next day was one of exploration so we drove through the Alpine Way and tried to find Olsen's Lookout. We could not find it and had to do a 3 point turn on a dirt track with a cliff at one end.

At that stage it was just a dirt track to Khancoban, 100 km of nothing, no houses, service stations, nothing, but we got through. The noise was becoming more of a "knock" (must look for some oil!!!!!!!!!!!!)



Traditional 1970's - trash the wedding car!

We eventually got back to Cooma and decided to travel on to Canberra, it was night time. The little 2.4 was on about 5000rpm when the knock became a bang (valve through piston, con rod through sump). It was at this point that I thought that "this could be serious". The oil trail was also a bit of a giveaway.

The Tow Truck

So, this meant stopping a car that was travelling to Cooma (no mobile phones back then), so that our distress could be conveyed to the local RACV. The tow truck that arrived was a lowered Ford F100, metallic yellow with a chrome crane driven by a youth who did not look old enough to shave, let alone drive a car, and he only had a 3-metre towing chain.

I tried to explain to him that no engine in a Mark 2 meant no brakes but he proceeded to tow us into Cooma at about 120 kmph and when he hit the 60 kmph sign, he slammed on the brakes to slow down quickly but we didn't (bang).

Thought - must look for a new front bumper when we get back.

We were towed into the local Ford agency, the comment being "we don't see many of these things in Cooma" as they tried to sell me the latest Ford XW Fairmont.

But the local Ford agency was great.

Faulty Towers

They looked after the car, arranged for transport back to Adelaide and booked us into a hotel, which I think was run by the person that Basil Faulty must have been based upon; he really let us know that it was very inconvenient for us to be there and except for the cupboard in the room falling on Val and the toilet door knocking the sink off the wall, it was a great night, but I found that THE HONEYMOON WAS OVER!!!

The next day we were given a choice, fly to Melbourne in a single engine Cessna or take a taxi to Canberra (100km). Given that it was explained that due to weather conditions the plane would "have to hug the valleys and it might be a bit bumpy and you need strong nerves", we took the taxi and arranged to hire a Cortina at Canberra Airport.

Dad To The Rescue

But the car had to be paid for up front, so I phoned my dear Dad and arranged for him to drive into Adelaide and pay for the car.

After waiting for some 4 hours (remember no mobile phones) we realised that the John Martins Christmas Pageant was on that day. In those days the city was cordoned off so Dad had to park at Keswick and walk into the city, a task that was brought up for many years to come!

After returning home from our honeymoon, the next task was to find the Mark 2 as it had not arrived back in Adelaide from Cooma. This took many frantic phone calls over several days until it was found in a freight depot in Sydney. It was meant to have been sent to Melbourne.

Eventually the car was returned to us in Adelaide minus its radio and bonnet leaper. It had also acquired some additional holes through the sills courtesy of a forklift slightly missing its mark. Never mind we had our girl back. Looking on the bright side, I was able to use the fork lift holes to check for rust in the sills!!!!

Engine Rebuild \$\$\$\$\$\$

I will never forget the look on Val's face when we went into Bryson Industries to order some minor things such as 6 pistons and con rods, 12 valves, main, big end and camshaft bearings along with the gasket sets. By now the recent vows of "for better or for worse" were beginning to have a meaning to Val, especially if you had also taken a Jaguar as part of the marriage package.

Needless to say, we did not travel back to the Snowys in 1971 due to a rather acute shortage of funds.

Try Again

We did go back in 1972 and this began our regular trips to this part of Australia.

We again travelled through the "back way" being the Alpine Way and stayed in Cooma at the same time as Mercedes were launching a new range of cars in Berridale at the Berridale Country Club.

We passed them twice a day as we travelled from Cooma to Thredbo and returned, to a point where we would wave to each other every time that we passed. But this came to an abrupt end when some of the Mercs got stuck in the snow and I was only too happy to pull them out with the Mark 2. A feat that was not appreciated by the Mercedes people, especially when I started taking photos.

We used the Mark 2 right up to 1981 when it started to become a bit small with the twins rapidly growing. Back then we took our own luggage for a week plus 3 or 4 sets of skis, boots, ski clothing. Many a traveller was bemused in motel carparks when watching the morning ritual of stuffing everything into the



Not the roads you take on the way to a concours d'elegance

boot then having the kids sit on the boot as Val and I would rock the Mark 2 up and down until the boot would shut.

Mark 2 Upgrade - More \$\$\$\$

By now the club had started and we were mixing with many great members and there was an incredible range of cars and what developed was a bit of a "pecking order" in what you drove. Until then I had been happy with the little 2.4.

But now someone always had a Mark 2 that looked nicer or went faster than yours, especially in our early motorkhanas.

And so the little 2.4L acquired a set of chrome wire wheels, then a 3.54 limited slip diff (really economical with a 2.4) and finally a 3.8 triple carb engine with an all-synchromesh overdrive gearbox.

1977 - An Eventful year

It was in this car that we travelled to Thredbo in 1977. Now we all know that it rarely snows in June even though the skiing season starts then; but this year it dumped down.

As mentioned, many of the trips were quite uneventful, but 1977 was a trip that will live in my memory for some time because this year the National Rally was in Canberra during the Queen's Birthday weekend, which coincided with the official start of the skiing season. We decided to combine staying at Thredbo before travelling on to the rally.

We had been held up that day due to one of the carby's starving for fuel (even a 2.4 went better than a 4 cylinder 3.8), and so we were driving through the Alpine Way at night down a long hill to a place called Leather Barrel Creek and at the bottom

is a right hand turn with a one-way wooden bridge. Val woke up to observe a bow wave of dry white snow either side of the Mark 2, so she suggested that I should slow down, but my reply of "we are in reverse gear with the handbrake on" kept her quiet for some time (a case of, is the peace worth the stress).

We almost made the turn. When we arrived in Canberra there were comments at the rally that "I really should have fixed that big scratch before coming to a national rally".

Only I knew the truth but at least I had removed the remnants of the bridge!

While staying at the Thredbo Alpine hotel, there were some English journalist who really wanted everyone to know how important they were by talking in raised voices about how they were expecting their invitations to Charles and Diana's wedding soon and that they had arrived in Thredbo driving a new Rolls Royce!

Before we went to bed I went outside, lifted the bonnet of the Mark 2 and placed a rug over the engine. When I went inside, one of the journalists in his finest British accent, asked what I was doing? I explained that Jags did not like the cold weather so could be hard to start (especially with it snowing heavily), so he also decided to place a rather large rug over the Roll's engine.

The next morning, we were having breakfast but was attracted to a loud thumping sound outside, only to observe the Rolls leaping up and down in the carpark with vast amounts of rug coming from under the car, very closely followed by a lot of coolant. (Pays to leave a note on the dash like I did with

words along the lines on “remove rug”). Maybe I should have mentioned this to him. I stayed scarce for a while after this!!!!!!

Time for Snow Chains

It always pays to be aware of snow conditions. When in Jindabyne one year we were staying at the Lake Jindabyne Motel and heard that there was a lot of snow falling “up the hill”, so I decided to undertake a trial fitting of the snow chains onto the Mark 2 before driving up for a day’s skiing, when one of the other holiday makers thought that I was “overdoing it” (his words).

But that day we did need the chains to get back down, although some twit in a 4wd tried to pass us and came unstuck. He should have known better than to try and pass a Jag, even if it is up to its hubcaps in snow.

That night the guy staying at the motel caught up with me and told me how uncontrollable his car was with the chains fitted and he asked me if I would take his son with us the next day if the conditions were as bad, and they were.

So, he came up to me in the Smiggin Holes carpark the next day telling me how dangerous his car was and again asked me to take his son. I agreed but suggested that there must be something wrong with his chains, so I asked to look at his car.

What I found was a front wheel drive Alfa with the chains fitted to the rear wheels; he had copied exactly what I had done with the rear-wheel-drive Mark 2.



Snow chains fitted to the rear drive wheels

Of interest is that the Mark 2 was very sure footed with chains in the worst of conditions and except for having to remove the spats, the chains did not cause any damage to the inner guards.

Now over all the years that I have been going over there I have only lost 3 days skiing due to consuming too much alcohol, but that night he was so grateful that the following day was one of them.

50 Shades of Grey

I bet this has got your attention, but it’s not what you think. Our beautiful Mark 2 had suffered a variety of scratches and dents over the years. They were all duly repaired but no repair ever matched the original grey and although the Jag looked good from a distance, she was beginning to display many different shades of grey when inspected up close.

It was to be our last trip to the snow in the Mark 2 so I wanted it to look nice.

Val was quite aghast when she came home from work 3 days before we were due to leave to find the Mark 2 minus 4 doors, bonnet and boot and completely resprayed in one glorious light grey.

The problem was that the paint was the new lead-free acrylic and for some reason it would not dry. So, I had to respray the whole car again and we got it back together by about 2am of the day that we left (6am).

That first day of travel was one of many complaints about the smell, but I was thoughtful in supplying them all with buckets and they had something to keep themselves occupied by screwing the door trims back on.

Much of this might sound silly now, but I am trying to recreate how things were back then. Many of our long-standing members (like the Hollands and many more) will tell you that this is how it was back then; we were all young, not much money and did whatever we could to keep our cars on the road as cheaply as possible. When a new member would join the club with a new XJ6 Series 1 or E Type we were in awe.

Then upon our return from the snow in 1981 there was a phone call from a work mate to say “was I interested in what he described as an XJ6 Series 1 ½ for sale” (that had a few issues). I had never seen a Series 1 1/2 before so I went to have a look out of curiosity.

The XJ years to the snow were about to start.

Steve & Val Weeks.



One of the XJ6's in snow country