



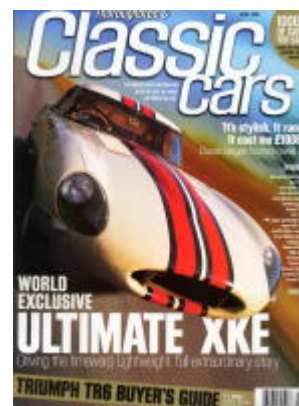
Classic Cars - April 1999

RESTORATION OF THE CENTURY - THE SECOND COMING by Martin Buckley

Many thought this historic E-type was lost forever. But not only is it back, it's ready to race. Classic Cars was there when it took to the track for the first time in 36 years.



February 8, 1999. It's wet and windy and the 'missing' Lightweight Jaguar E-type, one of only 12 built to take on the Ferrari in GT racing, finds itself on a race track for the first time in 36 years. The car seems tiny and spare, naked in a peculiar off-white that could almost have been undercoat. Yet its very originality, down to the fading Champion Spark Plug stickers on the bonnet, gives it a nobility no mere restored car could ever aspire to.



This is the most original, most unmolested Lightweight of them all, the one the history books assumed had been lost forever, ready to be driven in anger for the first time since 1963. The romance in the moment is unavoidable.

To say that leading Jaguar specialist Lynx has 'restored' this car, with only 2663 miles on the clock, seems almost crass. Lynx, which has worked on most of the other Lightweights (there are four in its Hastings workshops right now) has achieved something that is much more difficult. It has made this very special E-type a perfect retro-racer, retaining as much of the car's incredible time-warp character, originality - and parts - as possible.

I'd happily live in a caravan to own this car, ' says Lynx boss John Mayston-Taylor. Quite something coming from a man who spends his working life rubbing shoulders with C-types, D-types and the occasional GT40. This car is that special.

Since last summer, when the 'missing' Lightweight headed back for the UK after the Monterey Auction (where it sold for \$872,000), the car has been gently revived from hibernation. Lynx has disassembled it to the smallest detail and, in the name of ultimate authenticity, only replaced what was absolutely necessary. Even the paint is largely original - right down to the occasional scratches it acquired at Sebring and Laguna Seca in 1963, its only race outings. The red stripe down the middle is war paint, added to differentiate the car from the rival Briggs Cunningham Lightweights.



Racing at Sebring



We've chronicled the reawakening process in Classic Cars over the last three issues. The result is a Lightweight E-type that represents a new benchmark for other cars in terms of what they should have and how they would have driven new, out-of-the-box. Its sister Lightweights have been extensively modified, raced, crashed and rebuilt over the past four decades. Meanwhile this car - the third built - sat quietly under a pile of boxes in a garage in Los Angeles, untouched; just seven months old, remember, when its second owner, the reclusive Mr Gidovlenko, bought it. Lynx has managed to use almost all the original engine components - including con-rods, piston rings, cams and valves. It has replaced stretched head studs, the water pump impeller and the bearings, which weren't worn but were impregnated with oil. The suspension has been stripped and crack-detected - as have the front chassis frames, which were found to have fatigue cracks after just two races. The Lightweights weren't exactly substantial.

The hard-top and the boot lid didn't need any work, but the bonnet, doors and the rear of the car had to be repainted. The original cellulose colour had faded to several different tints, so a mixture midway between the original, and three tints either side were blended and blown-in the different areas of the car using crafty 'soft masking' techniques.

Lynx Fitted proper safety harnesses - which meant putting strengthening plates in the rear parcel shelf- plus a roll bar. 'The original driver's hoop was simply pop-riveted, so effectively it was just a visual thing,' says John. The seats are original but the original moquette covering in the rear of the cockpit has been replaced (Gidovlenko had taken it out). There are two additional instruments. One monitors the all-important 100psi fuel pressure - the engine could burn a valve if it drops below that and the mixture leans out. The other is an engine oil temperature gauge. This is crucial to the aluminium cylinder block, because it expands dramatically cold-to-hot compared to a steel block. A modern fuel cell is fitted inside the standard tank, again for safety reasons. There is a plumbed-in fire extinguisher too.



Three sets of Dunlop lightweight, pressed wheels came with the car. One set had the original tyres and will be left untouched, while the others were re-riveted during restoration because the original rivets had age-hardened.



Now road legal with an MoT, the car was ostensibly out for its first shakedown and systems checks before it sees real action at Sebring in March. But the significance of this cold February day had not been lost on the Lynx boss.

Not only had he booked Goodwood for the day but, to drive the car, he'd imported no less a talent than Andy Wallace - Le Mans winner with Tom Walkinshaw's XJR Jaguars in 1988, fresh from his Daytona Sportscar win. 'I've done Sebring nine times - two wins, four seconds and a



third. In a way that gives me a connection with the Lightweight,' says Andy. He's done a lot of the testing on the XJ220 and the McLaren F1; historic racers must seem almost therapeutic after the clinical speed of modern sports cars.

'The only old car I've ever raced was a Birdcage Maserati,' he says, 'although I've had a drive in a D-type.' Not a bad start.

'It's great to see what it was like then. The cars were actually good, and certainly fast, but they have oddities that you can't dial-out: if they want to weave down the straight, they weave down the straight, but when it comes to cornering they tell you what they are going to do well in advance.'

Sliding over the chunky sills, Andy installs himself into the E-type's stark interior, stripped of all but the most essential items in the name of weight loss. Once Andy is comfortable (he needs a couple of bits of foam to reach the pedals) and buckled up, he's off up the pit lane and accelerating through the gears towards Madgwick. A few minutes later he's back for the mechanics to check a small oil leak.



'Everything is so light - the gear change, the steering and all the pedals except for the brakes - but everything seems to happen in slow motion. I wasn't sure if I was actually sliding or not at first 'cos there's not much grip available with the new tyres. It doesn't break-away from you, it doesn't snap, it tells you what it's doing all the time.'

If anything, Andy finds the steering too light. 'Normally you feel grip because the wheel's gone heavy. The Riley & Scott I drove a few weeks ago had power steering - and that was heavier than this.'



The gearbox is a ZF five-speed supplied by Jaguar as an option but never used. 'The gate is widely spaced so it's obvious which gear you are going into. It's very nicely sprung, especially third-to-fourth, and there is no vibration coming through the lever. The clutch, like the other controls, is smooth and easy to control and just a bit heavier than the road car's'.

The brakes, among the few all-new components, were emerging as a bit of a weak point, especially in the wind-swept sleet which was lashing the circuit. 'When you press, you're not sure if you are going to lock-up the wheels or not because of the small amount of lateral grip you have. You keep thinking if you just touch them they are going to lock-up. They don't, but you can't feel how close you are to locking up. It doesn't dive, especially not in the wet like this.'

The dry-sumped, Lucas-injected 315bhp engine delivers impressive punch in this flab-free E-type. If you push the accelerator halfway down not a lot happens, but then I realised it has a very long travel and you have to push it all the way down. Then it really goes.



It's quite torquey low down from about two and a half but I'm only taking it to 4500rpm on the tacho, which we aren't sure is accurate. It's increasing power all the way and could probably go a bit more but it gets, well, not rattly but quite noisy towards the redline. I didn't notice what speed I was getting up to on the straight. Maybe 120?

It's my turn to take a ride in the passenger seat and find out. Andy accelerates gently out of the pit lane towards Madgwick, then lets it wind-out in second and third before short-shifting into fourth past a green metal box on the side of the track: a noise meter connected to a computer in the local council offices. But this isn't merely noise, it's music, a deep-chested bark that's rich and exiting from twin tail pipes with a high-decibel crack.

I watch Andy's black driving boot do a little heel-and-toe dance on the brake and throttle, then see his fist click the gearlever forward into third as he begins to set the car up for St Mary's. In one fluid action the car shifts bodily to the right, the revs rise as the rear wheels begin to spin and I can only feel humbled by Andy's inspirational car control.



He flicks the wooden wheel hither and yon in a series of sharp, wristy twitches - letting it drift just a little before he eases off the throttle and flicks straight once more. Soon after Lavant we're doing 120mph, at which speed the car is completely within itself - it should be good for 170mph with this gearing - and very stable. I feel quite happy too, although there is a fair bit of water coming in (the car has never been driven in the rain before) and I can't see where I'm going: only the driver gets a windscreen wiper on the Lightweight.

Blip-click fourth. Blip-click third. He's setting the Jag up for Woodcote, which he takes in a more restrained fashion before letting it all hang out again for the chicane: the revs rise as the tail, side-walled Dunlop L-section racing tyres succumb to lateral forces, followed by a flourish of second gear power oversteer. Straighten-up and into third as we flash past the pits at 70 or 80, accelerating hard.

We do the whole thing again three times before returning to the pits for some more checks.

'I'm still a bit wary of driving something so valuable,' says Andy as we warm ourselves over coffee, 'but you have to have a little go at sliding it. I just wonder how the real boys used to drive these things. I probably just drove it like an old lady.' Hmm. Don't know about that.



'It's reasonably hard to hold the car into a gentle slide, ' he continues, 'because as you correct, it wants to come back again because it's quite soft. You'd have to go out in the dry to be certain but if I was given the job of making this car go around this circuit as fast as I could I'd do quite a lot of stiffening.'

The brakes are still causing a little consternation. 'When I get anywhere near a corner I'm pressing quite hard but we're not slowing down. I'm braking quite early too because, on the corners where you can put some lock on as you turn in, it understeers quite a lot. Immediately you go to the power you can change that but the initial turn is not very direct.'

The Lightweight also suffers from 'jacking effect' according to Andy. 'As you turn in you are feeding the lock on and it's understeering but you feel the whole car jack weight diagonally across. It doesn't turn flat. I'm not talking about roll - although it's doing that too - but it's the geometry. I suppose the answer is "they all do that sir"!



If there were anything Andy would change about the car it would be the steering. 'As you initially turn in it understeers, then it oversteers as soon as you jump off the throttle. For me it feels like it needs a whole load more castor. That will give it more bite and front grip.

Although having said that all you have to do when it is understeering is just tap the brake and it actually loads the front quite well and it comes in again. It's not a terminal thing.'

Just as well, the car makes its racing debut on March 5, 6 and 7 at Sebring in a 20 minute sprint race and a one hour race, with John Mayston-Taylor driving.

'It's more than a high speed demonstration but it's less than an out-and-out race,' says John, 'and it's good that the car will go back to Sebring and give a lot of people a lot of pleasure.'

Looking back on the last six months, he reflects, 'What we have tried to do is think what if the former owner Howard Gidovlenko were alive today and he said that he'd like to get the Lightweight running. What would he have done? Of course the new owner could have decided to just leave the car as it was and put it in a museum. But somehow, for a racing car, that wouldn't have been very dignified, would it?'

