



Jaguar World - February 1999

SLEEPING BEAUTY AWAKENED by Jim Patten

Jim Patten visits Lynx Motors International to see this amazing 2,663 mile lightweight revived.

The tension was almost unbearable. Bidding was fierce and determined. At each call, a bid sent the dollar totally soaring. Shouts of encouragement sounded around the room as excitement reached new levels. Eventually, after a nail-biting interregnum as the auctioneers sought to spur the bidding to new heights, John Mayston-Taylor took his first breath. He had secured possibly the most incredible lightweight E-type in the world on behalf of a client who was determined the car should return to the UK.

Even before the funds had cleared - Lynx's stock was good in the eyes of auctioneers RM Classic Cars - arrangements were made to air-freight the car, and its cargo of new factory parts, back to its country of origin. Everyone at Lynx was keyed up with anticipation, awaiting its arrival. Finally, its journey was over and the

container was opened in deepest Sussex, and an initial assessment carried out.



The new spares (still in the factory wrappings) were listed and put to one side. After more photography and a close visual examination, the car itself was given its first wash for years. The original paint had held up extremely well, damaged only where the owner distressed the car by roughly sanding some areas back to aluminium - partly a de-seaming exercise, but also rumoured to be because a costly divorce was looming and Howard Gidovlenko didn't want the E-type to look too valuable! Some paint on the bonnet was experimentally polished, with remarkable results - it looked almost like new. The general feeling was that the paint could be matched, avoiding a complete refinish.



With trepidation and a feeling of great responsibility, Lynx's technicians began stripping the car to the tub. Bonnet and hard top were removed first, along with the seats. Engine and gearbox came next and as with all lightweights, the front picture frame has to be removed first. Front and rear suspension followed. Every stage was captured on film.



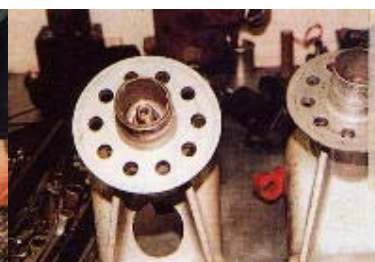
Clearly the previous owner intended to make the car seriously competitive. With his aircraft industry background, ex-WW2 fighter pilot Howard Gidovlenko, who bought it from the original owners British Motors of San Francisco in 1963 (see JW Vol 10 no 6), had begun to reinforce certain key areas of the shell with aero-grade aluminium. The centre chassis rails where the front frames sit, for instance, were strengthened. More aluminium was added inside the trunk and around the box members which take the rear suspension, all to provide greater rigidity or prevent fracture. Even though its racing life had been brief, Sebring's punishing concrete surface had, during the 12 hour race in 1963, produced a few cracks in the aluminium. These, it was found, had in true engineering fashion been drilled at their ends to prevent them spreading.





I had a look at the vast file of correspondence between Gidovlenko and the factory. A serious assault at the famous Daytona 24 Hours had been planned for 1964. A long range oil tank had been delivered. Letters asked Jaguar about the work needed to accommodate larger section wheel rims. The five-speed ZF gearbox produced more correspondence as did the Lucas fuel injection, all patiently answered by Chris Leaver in Jaguar's service division at Coventry and Les Bottril, then general service manager for Jaguar Cars Inc. in New York.

But the car was never fielded and one detects a strange lack of urgency in some of the later letters, which peter out during the summer of 1964. Perhaps Howard realised that the future of GT racing lay in either the finesse of the mid-engined cars or the brute force of the Cobras. Or, maybe he preferred to concentrate on developing performance parts for Jaguars to sell through his car shop, Auto Dyne - possibly from knowledge gained with the lightweight.



Whatever the reason, it means that what we have today is a race car frozen in history, on the way to being prepared for the 1964 season then simply left in Howard's suburban garage at his house on the outskirts of LA until, that is, the former test pilot and WW2 veteran died.

John Mayston-Taylor tells us that its originality will be preserved. Nothing on the car will be modified or altered. Only work required for safe re-commissioning will be undertaken. We are indeed fortunate that this car found the appreciative home that it did. Whispers around the sale room were that other bidders planned a full nut and bolt Pebble Beach restoration which would most certainly have robbed future generations of a truly authentic motor car.

It will return to the track again too, on its next visit to the US, for Sebring's historic races in March and then at Monterey in August. Then back home, it will also be driven by John Mayston-Taylor in selected 60s GT events.