



# Personal touch

**James Page** drives a unique E-type and talks to the man behind its creation

Photos by Runnymede Motor Company and James Page

**T**here's a plaque in the engine bay of this unique Series 3 that reads as follows: 'Passionately engineered by the craftsmen at Southern Classics to fulfil one man's dream of the ultimate E-type'.

And it doesn't matter whether you're admiring it at standstill or enjoying it on the road, it's impossible not to appreciate the dedication and attention to detail that have gone into achieving that goal.

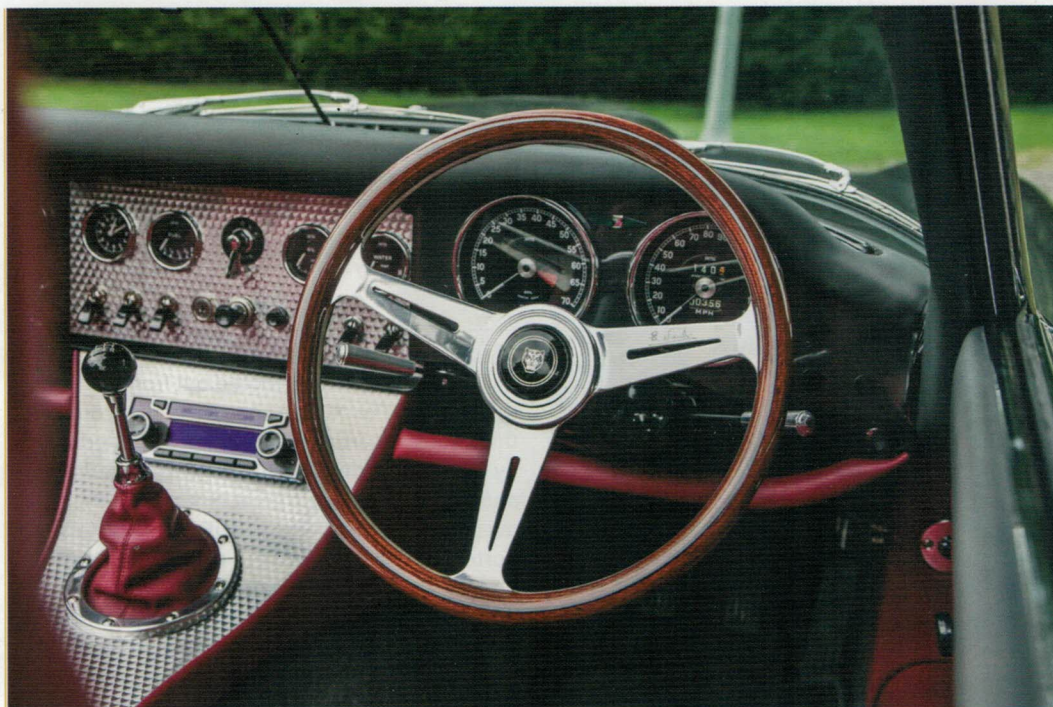
The man whose dream it was is Bob Kemp, and the project came about due to an unfortunate set of circumstances that led him to Steve Berry at Southern Classics: "In my little garage at the boatyard that I run, I had a Lightweight-spec E-type and an Alfa 8C that I'd been to Italy to pick up and driven back across Europe – it still had only those miles on it. I had this chap working for me called Bill. He used to keep the cars cleaned up and dusted off, and one day he called to say, 'Bob, I've had an accident. I've driven the Alfa into the back of the Lightweight.'

"I got my PA to go and have a look and she said, 'You don't want to know what he's done.' He was cleaning the car in Welly boots, got into the 8C and got his boot stuck with the throttle on the floor, hit the back of the E-type and put that through the concrete wall of the garage..."



- Top: the much-modified E-type looks superb in a McLaren shade of Palladian Silver grey
- Above: Brembo brakes hide behind 72-spoke Turrino wheels. Stainless-steel valve is just about in shot in the bottom-left corner





- Left: interior features a wood-rimmed Nardi wheel. Note Series I-style toggle switches and the leather-covered dashboard
- Below: seats are bespoke and there was even a debate about the number of pleats that would look best. Button for electric handbrake is located on the front face of the central arm rest



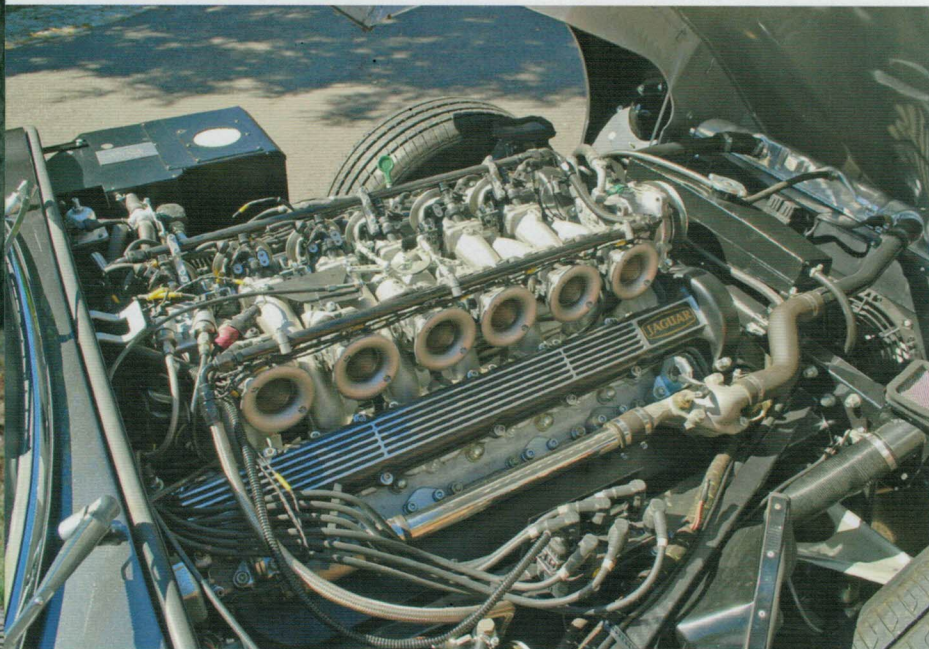
It was Steve Berry who set about rebuilding the Jaguar, and while that was going on Bob would often admire a Series 3 that was being restored at the Twickenham premises at the same time. When the owner of that car decided to sell the part-finished project, Steve knew exactly who'd take it on.

"The ethos was not just to rebuild it," remembers Bob. "I looked at every part and said to myself, what could we do to improve it? To make it better and more user-friendly."

He readily admits that he was hugely influenced by the "masterpieces" that Eagle builds and also describes Terry Disdale – owner of a beautiful XK 120 – as a "mentor and a role model for me to try to emulate". Even so, this is very much his baby, and along with Southern Classics he worked tirelessly to get it right.

The basis was a matching-numbers 1974 Series 3 that was stripped to bare metal. The rear arches were flared by 30mm to accommodate the 16 x 7.5in 72-spoke Turrino wheels, which are shod with Pirelli rubber; there are even specially made stainless-steel tyre valves. The grille was restyled and the headlight recesses were modified to allow Series I-style enclosed surrounds to be fitted. The front bumpers were reworked and shaped to fit without over-riders, and the rear bumpers were modified and welded to become a single-piece item, again without over-riders.





- Left and bottom: the V12 is now 6 litres, and puts out 450bhp on Jenvey throttle bodies
- Below centre: Becker Mexico radio features built-in sat-nav. The strip above it denoting switch function is lit from within by LEDs



The engine has been bored out from 5.3 litres to 6 litres and features a spec sheet that could fill the rest of this article. The work was carried out by Classic & Modern Engine Services in Berkshire and includes, among a great many other things, oversized cylinder liners and JE forged pistons, ported and polished heads – replacement HE items because the originals were heavily corroded and unusable – Piper BP270 camshafts, a modified distributor housing for ECU timing and modified block to accept a crank angle timing sensor, Jenvey throttle bodies, a custom fuel rail crossover pipe, and a custom wiring loom. There's also an uprated aluminium radiator, a Mocal oil cooler, high-flow submersible fuel pumps and a bespoke Hayward and Scott stainless-steel exhaust system that exits via two hefty pipes at the rear.

Once the engine had been installed, the car was taken to Northampton Motor Sport so that it could be set up on a rolling road. Without its trumpet meshes fitted, it was recorded as producing 450bhp and 460 lb ft of torque. It transmits all of that via a Tremec T5 five-speed gearbox and a high-performance clutch.

Given the increase in power, it's no surprise to learn that the braking, suspension and steering have also received their fair share of attention. Brembo vented and drilled brake discs are gripped at the front by four-pot Brembo calipers – the rear calipers are standard Series 3 – and EBC Greenstuff pads are used all round. A handling kit from Rob Beere Racing comprises a 30mm front anti-roll bar, AVO dampers, uprated rear springs and Polybushes. There's an adjustable power-steering system, too.

There are bespoke touches everywhere you look, but particularly in the interior. Bob explains that all of the companies who were involved bought in to the car's ethos – as well as his own insistence that everything was the best it could possibly be.

"The engine-turned aluminium for the centre console was done by a Bentley company in the wilds of Surrey. I tracked them down, and it was a case of deciding what size we'd like the twirly bits! We had to get samples made to get it right. Then we realised that it would scratch quite easily so the console is wrapped in the same [3M] film that the front of the car is wrapped in."

The seats were made specially and covered in a shade of Connolly leather that was inspired by a friend's Ferrari California. More leather – this time matching the exterior paint – covers the top of the dashboard. There's an ingenious sat-nav system hidden in the glove compartment, the strip





- Right: front end was carefully reworked, with the bumpers being among the modified items. The panel gaps are perfect throughout
- Below: headlight recesses were reworked to allow the fitment of enclosed SI-style surrounds from a German company



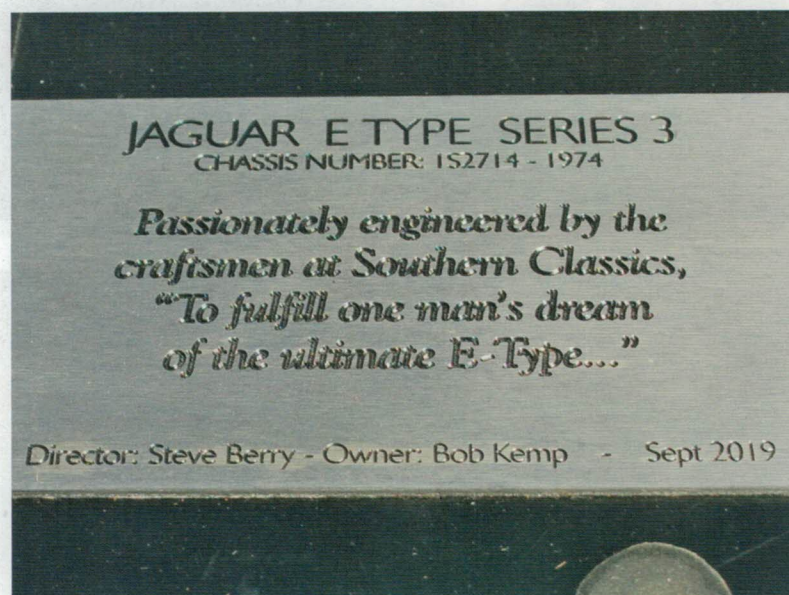
beneath the toggle switches lights up with LEDs so you can read their functions at night, and controls for the air-conditioning and heated seats are housed in the central armrest. On the front of that armrest is a button for the electric handbrake.

"On the Series 3," says Bob, "those handbrakes are like a piece of scaffold tube. So we had the idea to do an electric one, and again this company got interested and said that they'd never done an E-type, so they came and did the bespoke thing for Steve. That's why the car got so expensive – there's nothing 'off the shelf', really.

"We built the car over five or six years. I did hundreds of doodles and drawings and sketches, every time I saw something on a car that I liked – such as the rear bumper, for example. I saw a Ferrari with a one-piece rear bumper and thought it looked really good. I asked Steve if we could do that and it tidied up that rear end beautifully."

The car was finished in September 2019, Bob then embarking on a series of fine-tuning shakedown until everything was 'just so'. The finished article certainly makes quite an impression. One of the drawbacks of the printed word is that it doesn't convey sound. Even at idle, the V12 has a menacing growl, which is transformed into a fabulously crisp bark on the road. Despite its specification and output, it's a very tractable and well-behaved engine, perfectly happy to bumble along at 1,500rpm in fourth gear. It's unlikely that the gearbox will see a huge amount of use because you can then push the throttle





without changing down and it pulls immediately, with no hesitation or coughing. It keeps pulling, too, and in no time at all it's covering ground exceedingly quickly.

But while the performance is undeniably impressive, the greatest impression you get from behind the wheel is of how well screwed together the car is, and how well sorted it is. It rides and handles superbly, with not a squeak or rattle or knock to be heard – a great tribute to Steve and the team at Southern Classics.

“I always wanted the car to be the one that Jaguar would have come up with if it was to revisit the design of the Series 3 with money being no object,” says Bob. He modestly reflects on his achievement by joking that, “I may not have built an Eagle, but it's not far off – an Osprey, perhaps...”

I've only driven one Eagle, and it was a part of a group test in which it

stood head and shoulders above the other cars present. Having now driven Bob's car as well, the 'Osprey' can stand proudly alongside any Eagle, and I can think of no finer praise than that.

Thanks to Martin Brewer at Runnymede Motor Company, which is offering the E-type for sale: [runnymedemotorcompany.co.uk](http://runnymedemotorcompany.co.uk); 01753 644599

• Clockwise from top: rear bumper is now a single piece; gearlever shows that the 'box has gained an extra ratio; the plaque marking Steve and Bob's hard work