



# Rot-box To Racer - Part I

by Geoffrey Laycock

**M**y personal love affair with the Jaguar E-type started more-or-less as the car was launched. At the age of 10, I was already showing signs of being obsessed with all things mechanical and cars were, to me, the ultimate expression of that. Living in Bradford in the early 1960s, very few people ever seemed to have a new car. The only recollection I have of anyone we knew buying not one, but a succession of new vehicles, was the family doctor. My dad drove a Rover 16, lovingly hand-painted black by my mother using Valspar coach enamel, followed by a Morris 8.

I cannot recall exactly when or where I saw my first E-type but it had a life-changing effect on a small schoolboy who had never seen such a dramatic, moving, work of art. Remember that in the early 1960s, most cars were boxy, tall, drab and, to put it politely, uninspiring. There were exceptions and from my own area we spawned the Jowett Javelin but such delights of automotive design were pretty rare.

Over the years, I ached for an E-type but I was never going to be able to buy one. Even second-hand, they always seemed so out of reach that I could still only dream. My father had to suffer along with me and over many years I persuaded him he needed a Triumph TR6, a Ford Escort RS2000, several sporty Fiats and also to

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help me buy an ex-race Series 2 Lotus Seven with a Holbay engine and wobbly web wheels. I loved that car but eventually the start of a career meant it had to go and a succession of cars followed.

Wind forward to 1993 and I have been self-employed for three years and convince myself I can afford an E-type as a company car! A long-suffering friend lent me the money, which the bank wouldn't, and after a trip to a certain large E-type specialist, I bought my love. Back then, £15,000 seemed a huge amount but I finally had what I wanted. I was now the beaming owner of KKB 777D, a 4.2 FHC in Carmen Red. Then I drove home!

First off, the dealer had put no petrol in the car at all, so I had to stop urgently just down the road. A little while later, I found out that a leaking fuel tank sump pot was to blame for rather higher-than-expected fuel consumption. On the homeward journey, the alternator stopped alternating and my friend, who was following, asked why I had

been doing 120 mph on the M40? I didn't think I had but, with a speedometer that wasn't working correctly, I thought I'd been bravely doing 80 mph. Oh and none of the door keys fitted the locks and the header-tank leaked.

The 'specialist' (I use the word very loosely even though their advertising made all sorts of impressive-sounding claims), from whom I bought the car, relented and sent me a header-tank, an alternator and also a set of lock barrels. My troubles were only just starting though. Trying to remove the leaking header-tank revealed that it had been welded to the top of the frame! Having finally removed it, I discovered I had no mounting frame or forward stabilising arms and so began my long and distinguished relationship with a few now-wealthier suppliers. I only drove the car a little as it frequently steamed nicely and eventually took it to a local restoration specialist for a service and 'a few little jobs'. The people at *Southern Classics* (92) *Limited* of Chertsey in Surrey (now made famous by their E-type roadster restoration on Sky TV) were friendly and rather bluntly honest. They didn't say directly that I had bought a pile of rubbish but I understood and finally admitted to myself what I had known subconsciously all along. I had been well and truly conned.

Anyway, one cheap E-type service turned into several thousands of pounds of



work and I had an MOT for a year. I still had the overheating problem, identified as a crack in the cylinder head by *Southern Classics*. So I hardly drove the car and when I did I added problems to the list. It would have been easy to have decided *Southern Classics* were simply trying to generate work by giving me lists of things wrong with the car but I know, from many years of dealing with them, that they do not work like that.

Several more years of ownership, I still hardly drive the car and it is back with *Southern* for another service and MOT. This time it's serious. They think that the rear suspension trailing arm mounting points in the floor-pans are beyond repair. Or as Lee, their mechanical expert, explained, "When something so bad (the floors) have been repaired so badly already, we haven't anything left to work on!" Under the car on the vehicle lift, I could see exactly what he meant. In addition to the state of the floors, we looked at other parts of the dark and dirty undersides of a car which had suffered much major abuse during its tortured life. It was not a pretty sight. The decision was made; new floors as well as inner and outer sills, including the bits between.

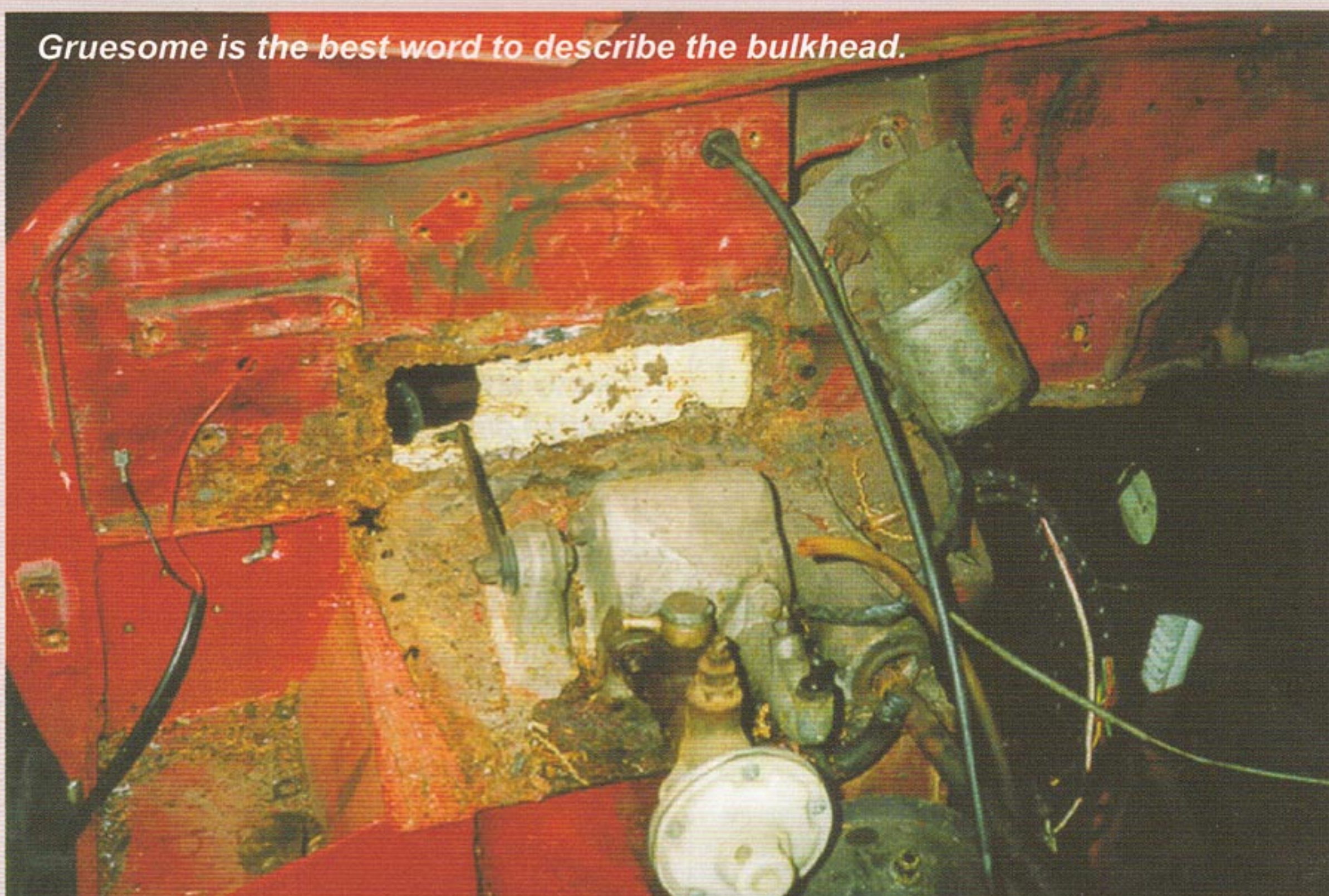
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Now Rory, a magician with a sheet of metal, set to work to remove and replace the offending, or should I say, offensive panels. At this point, *Southern* discover that I own a multi-storey E-type. It had three (yes three) floors. *Southern Classics* had never seen this before and getting out three layers of floor panels from both sides of the car was not easy, even for them. Rory is a nice man and I'm told he will soon be off the medication he started coincidentally with work on my car! With floors and sills finished and some new paintwork, the car looks fantastic and we have a new MOT. The engine still has a cracked head and still I hardly drive the car.

We roll forward to December 2001. Another customer of *Southern* has had an engine changed and they have available a 3.8 uprated engine with hardly any miles on it. I take too long to decide to buy it and it is sold before I can say, "Yes please". Now back to the good friend who helped me buy KKB in the first place. I cannot decide what to do with the car or in fact with my life but Jean is a qualified life coach and wants to practice her coaching skills on me. One major decision I manage, through Jean's help, is to go ahead and buy another engine, fit this to the car and then go historic sports car racing, probably what is called 'Appendix K' racing.

So, an uprated 4.2 engine is duly

*Gruesome is the best word to describe the bulkhead.*



*It just gets worse.*

ordered from Rob Beere Racing, a well-respected supplier of successful race engines, and work begins on preparing the car for it. We have had doubts about the offside area of the bulkhead for some time and having removed the old engine, there is now ample evidence that all is not well. A phone call from *Southern Classics* suggests that I might want to call into the workshop so I can be shown their concerns. It was not good news. As Steve, the owner, put it, "We have never seen a structural bulkhead repair before using builders foam and a tea towel". Big decision time and I decide there is no way an engine with almost 50% more power than standard can go into this car, it would rip it apart. So KKB is stripped of all her dignity, and all her add-on bits, and goes off for plastic chip paint-stripping. This type of stripping process takes off all the paint without damaging the panels whatsoever but at a significant price! We needn't have worried about potential damage as later all but the roof panel and the new floors which *Southern* fitted were replaced.

In the next issue, Geoffrey tells us about the next step in the slow process of rebuilding his car back to first-class condition.

*The first major job was to replace three storeys of rotten floor!*

