



Rot-box To Racer - Part 3

by Geoffrey Laycock

The security of the car has to be a priority, and some of the race modifications help in this respect. The door and rear quarterlight glass has all been replaced by Lexan 400 plastic. It's the same thickness as the original glass, so fitting is easy, but at a fraction of the weight. The other advantage is that it is seriously strong and almost unbreakable. The tailgate glass was also to be replaced with Lexan, but the double curvature caused problems trying to fit this into the rubber seal. White Ellerton Products (who supplied the headlamp covers) moulded an acrylic screen, using the original glass as a mould, in four days. It is almost as strong as Lexan, it is the correct shape and hardly weighs anything. Having fitted high security lock barrels to the doors, gaining entry would not be a quick affair for a would-be thief. Inside, there is an Armtech battery isolator and an SPA plumbed-in fire extinguisher system. Both are electrically operated, and a supplementary control panel for these devices sits where the radio panel normally resides. Trimmed in matching vinyl, it looks as if it always belonged to the other three dash panels. A Motolita leather-covered 13in steering wheel finishes off the 'office' rather nicely.

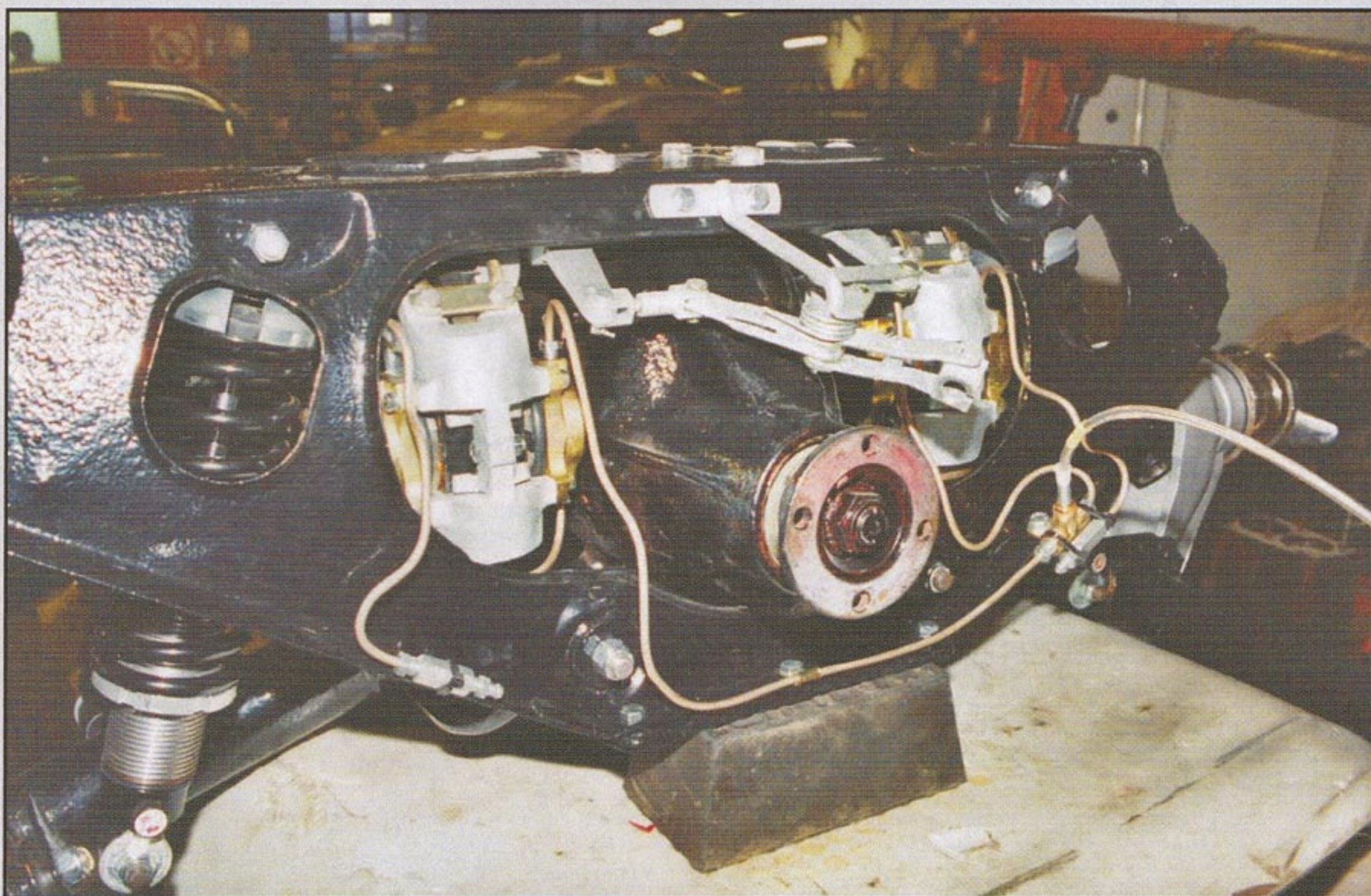
One more major component to be rebuilt was the rear axle. As a significant piece of work, this was a rather expensive exercise but well worthwhile to avoid problems in future. The cage was grit-blasted and powder-coated. The differential was rebuilt by a specialist who also fitted a lower ratio crown-wheel and pinion.

Coopercraft brakes are fitted, with stainless flexible hoses. One headache often encountered with the rear brakes is the difficulty of getting to the bleed nipples. On this car, they are extended downwards for easy access, especially at a circuit. With a pressurised bleeding system this should work, but we will see once the car is driven in anger.

The suspension of the car is far from standard, but has not involved radical changes such as fully adjustable fabricated wishbones. The front and rear dampers are competition AVO units with adjustable spring seats on the rear four.

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Springs and torsion bars are all uprated, the bars being hollow, which also saves a little weight. The torsion-bar reaction plates are adjustable, courtesy of Rob Beere Racing, which means that front ride height adjustment is much easier than standard. The primary reason for fitting



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height-adjustable units all around was to allow easy corner-weight adjustment to optimise handling.

Fitting up a car can be frustrating, and mine was no exception. Badly made parts have already been mentioned, and there is definitely no substitute for experience. Southern Classics only uses one supplier for door seals, as they have found that all the others supply mouldings which are the wrong shape and/or are in a rubber compound, which is far too hard. Guess which I had already bought? New door catches were being fitted as the originals were not deemed worthy of re-plating and they took an absolute age to arrive, despite always being promised 'in the next few days' - same problem with the moulded plastic headlight covers. This happened on a number of occasions from this same supplier - happy to take the orders, even though they did not have the stock. They were eventually sourced from White Ellerton Products Ltd in Boreham Wood. George there was very helpful, and covers were with me less than a week after confirming the order.

A nice touch for my car was meeting the guy fitting the headlining. As we chatted, I discovered he had been responsible for building the trick roof for the James Bond DB6 in Goldfinger. No, I do not now have an ejector-seat but I am thinking of guns in the bonnet! Perhaps there is a connection as 4.2 XKE engines have probably powered more military vehicles than were ever fitted to E-types. I decided I had to fit polished cam covers. I had several, though not of the correct type, but then found a pair at the Jaguar Spares Day at Farnham. I am glad I did the polishing job myself rather than pay someone else, as this took a total of 20 hours! We had fun with the wheels and tyres for the car, fun being used in the ironic sense! Another customer's car was spotted with Minilite magnesium wheels and I discovered he wished to fit chrome wires. They were to be for sale, and very shortly after, a sum of money changed hands. The original plan was for the wheels to return to Minilite for stripping, examination, x-ray and re-finishing. How I wish we had done just that! In the event, they went off to a local wheel re-finisher who stripped them but then refused to powder coat them as they were magnesium. Southern Classics finally repainted them, having had a number of colour choices from me. We finally all agreed that a particular shade of gold would be nice and, although not likely to be correct, would be appropriate, as some competition wheels were painted in the period. All the spline adapters were re-chromed, but on reassembly it was found that several wheels were loose on the

splines. We now knew why: several had thin spacers sandwiched between adapter and wheel. As the existing spacers were of varying thickness, four new ones were made.

Tyres also caused considerable debate. This car has a lower final drive ratio fitted but also has a much more powerful engine, with a higher rev limit. The result should be a fairly easy, genuine 150mph, as compared with Jaguar's original optimistic quotes. I also wanted tyres that had more grip and, as 80% profile tyres are rare and not likely to be V or Z rated, the size needed to be 205 with 70% profile. In theory, getting a 205/70x15 tyre with V rating should not be difficult, but add the requirement for a high grip compound and it most definitely is! The final decision was

for Avon CR6ZZ tyres, which are intended for historic road rally use. They are apparently not brilliant in the wet (no experience at this time) but are becoming popular for historic cars doing track days, as the compound is resistant to overheating. They are not particularly expensive but that trades off against not having a very deep tread - so expected mileage is unknown at present.

