

A detailed photograph of the interior of a classic Jaguar MkII. The view is from the driver's side, looking towards the passenger seat. The dashboard is made of dark wood and features a speedometer with a needle pointing to approximately 100 mph. Below the dashboard, the gear shift and handbrake are visible. The seats are upholstered in a light-colored, possibly leather, material. In the background, through the windshield, another classic car is visible at night, illuminated by city lights.

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**N**ice car the MkII Jag. Fast, lovely looker; more leather than a Soho bondage club in that evocative cabin. But what makes sane men spend £60,000 or more on this most beautiful and enigmatic of '60s sports saloons?

"What you've got to understand about the people that buy our cars," says Nick Goldthorp, founder of Vicarage Jaguar, now of Classic Motor Cars, "is that they aren't buying them instead of a DB7 or an S-class Mercedes or whatever but as well as: if it was a straight contest between our MkII and a modern luxury car we couldn't compete. Our customers want the car as an expensive toy they know they could use every day if they had to."

Some toy: the Classic Motor Cars MkII isn't merely a restored MkII but a recreated MkII. Fuel injection, air conditioning and improved suspension and steering are the principal improvements over the standard car that make it a far more palatable modern drive.

Of course the sums still don't add up when a nice original 3.8 manual overdrive Jaguar MkII is struggling to make £15,000 in the UK. But money clearly isn't an issue with Goldthorp's customers - or any of the other people who buy the big-buck uprated MkIIs currently on offer from four companies. They want what they want and it has to be right: they aren't accustomed to temperamental old

hardware that breaks down.

"Most of our customers are foreign - European and Far Eastern - because on the continent the MkII is a very special car, held in higher esteem than it is here. They aren't necessarily even Jaguar enthusiasts who buy them, just rich people who love the shape of the MkII and want it to be as close to a '90s car to drive as possible."

All comparisons, then, with a good original MkII should be superfluous - buyers of Goldthorp's cars would never consider one - but we thought it would instructive to drive new and old together anyway. Has all vestige of character - good and bad - been massaged out of the Classic Motor Cars MkII in the name of '90s drivability? Are you better off with an original car? Or does the answer lie somewhere in between?

Our 'original' MkII came courtesy of Simon Waller of Barnsbury Classics, a 1961 manual overdrive 3.8. It was restored in pearlescent mid-blue with a fine grey leather interior in Scotland between 1988 and '91 and is now nicely broken in. Waller has the car up at £19,950 - top money for a MkII in Britain - but is confident it will sell, probably in Europe where most of the nice, expensive cars end up these days.

Waller, who specialises in older Jaguars, echoes Goldthorp's comments: "The cars are much more highly thought of on the conti-

nent. There were always much fewer of them over there. It was a special car."

Based on a sound California donor, Goldthorp's MkII is a breathtaking restoration with a show-car silver paint job that would do Rolls-Royce proud, panel gaps that Browns Lane could only dream of and an air of hand-crafted quality to all the fixtures and fittings, even in the places you don't normally see, that would do justice to Aston Martin. You don't have to look for long to see where all that money - and the 1800 man-hours - has gone.

Destined for Japan, this is the most highly specified Classic Motor Cars MkII yet although CMC will happily build you a standard MkII for around £60,000 depending on how much work the donor car needs. Outwardly it looks mainly standard, though the Sundym glass and Coombs-style cutaway arches - well filled by fat 215/70 tyres on E-type competition wires - hint at something special. Lift the bonnet and you could eat your dinner off those handsome cam covers, although the Weber injection looks unfamiliar.

Glance underneath and the cantilevered quarter-elliptic springs have been replaced by dual-rate coils, the axle properly located and having a longer, higher-mounted central Panhard rod to lift the roll centre.

At the front there are stiffer springs, a redesigned and better located anti-roll bar, and a powered XJS rack taking the place of



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the original Burman recirculating ball steering gear. Modern engine mountings cut vibration and take the weight of the engine off the body, further improving the handling. The Dunlop disc brakes have been uprated, but the original solid rotors are deemed adequate on a road car. If you want them, Classic Motor Cars will fit XJ-style ventilated discs, or anything other options.

In place of the original Borg Warner DG auto gearbox is a three-speed Borg Warner 66 automatic, but you can specify a later all-

synchro' Jaguar unit with overdrive or a Getrag five-speed. In the pipeline is a modern four-speed auto with top gear lock-up.

Inside, XJ Vanden Plas front seats have replaced the originals: "They give more lateral support than the original seats, but the pleating is similar so at a glance they look as before." Clever, but not so clever is the XJ-style T-handle with its wooden grip (what's wrong with the column shift?) or the Moto-Lita wheel that would look happier on an MGB. Again, the big plastic wheel found in the standard car has a lot more period charm and it could be retained if you wanted it.

The loud mid-blue seat trim wouldn't be everybody's choice but, like everything else on this car it's beautifully crafted. The downside is the smell: the concoction of leather, glue and plastic that permeated the interior of the original car is gone. Now the Classic Motor Cars MkII just whiffs blandly of new leather which, to me, is a shame.

Cast an eye over the rich, glossy walnut dash and it's mostly familiar MkII fare: tragically unergonomic but as handsome a dash as you'll find. The air conditioning outlet slots neatly into the space where the oddments tray used to be, and there are power windows and an electric sunroof, all operated by slightly out of character modern plastic switches.

One key works everything on the CMC MkII, ending the confusion most owners of older Jaguars suffer when locking and starting their cars with one of two or three identical looking (and tiny) keys. Central locking completes the list of executive labour-savers.

The traditional pushbutton starts the CMC MkII. It fires first touch and pulls cleanly from rest; the original car - though a prompt starter on its auto choke - tends to gag and cough until fully warm. Painstakingly rebuilt by the ultra-enthusiastic and very talented Andrew Tart (again late of Vicarage and a director of Classic Motor Cars) this engine feels freer, sweeter than the original. So it should: everything that moves is balanced, and the majority of moving parts are new. It runs cooler in traffic too thanks to electric fans. With better insulation on the bulkhead it's quieter than before, with much less heat soak.

With all the tinted windows tightly shut, conditioned air wafts gently around your face and neck, a welcome change from the lather

you get into driving the factory car with its feeble two-speed blower and pathetic ventilation.

Into gear and the torque converter 'bites' properly for a crisp take-off from rest. Although the upchanges aren't as silken as on the latest self-shifters, downchanges are almost undetectable and there is crisp part-throttle kick-down response the factory automatic MkIIs never enjoyed.

Subjectively the car didn't feel much more energetic than our standard manual 3.8 driven vigorously through the gears but, in reality, makes much more relaxed progress, never using more than 3500-4000rpm, particularly if the going is twisty, and requires far less effort from the driver.

Power peaks at 235bhp at the flywheel - the original car probably has a true 180bhp if you disregard Jaguar's boastful SAE figures - and Tart's injected engine plots a fat torque

curve with 269lb ft available at 2500rpm. The engine should rev freely to 6000rpm says Tart (try that with an original XK engine) and pulling 26.1mph per 1000rpm in top, should reach 130mph at 5000rpm. With near-identical gearing the manual overdrive 3.8

ran to 126mph in *Autocar's* 1960 road test, blasting to 60mph in 8.5 secs, still in second.

Rack and pinion steering with consistent weighting and crisp gearing transforms the feel of the MkII, the biggest single improvement to the car. Few big-gun sportsters could run with the MkII in its heyday, never mind wood-and-leather saloons.

On swoopy rural secondaries the Goldthorp car soon pulls decisively away from the massively understeering original: roll and plough-on are halved and the car feels alert and modern, dispensing with the armfuls of lock and wallowy roll the driver of an original MkII must endure. The nose goes where you point it at the flick of a wrist - compared with the original at any rate - the whole balance of the car as near to neutral as you can get with 57 per cent of the weight over the front wheels.

Brakes are excellent - as are those of the standard car to be fair - and with the wide, square pedal used on all auto MkIIs you can left-foot brake deep into corners.

At constant high speeds wind noise still intrudes on Goldthorp's MkII - he says it's incurable because of the design of the roof guttering - but it is nothing like as bad as on

**CMC car retains 3.8 engine, but it's fuel-injected by Weber, uprated from 180bhp to 235, and mated to a new three-speed auto. Better insulation stop heat bleeding through to cabin**



**Below: standard car runs two SUs, and takes a while to pull cleanly from cold**

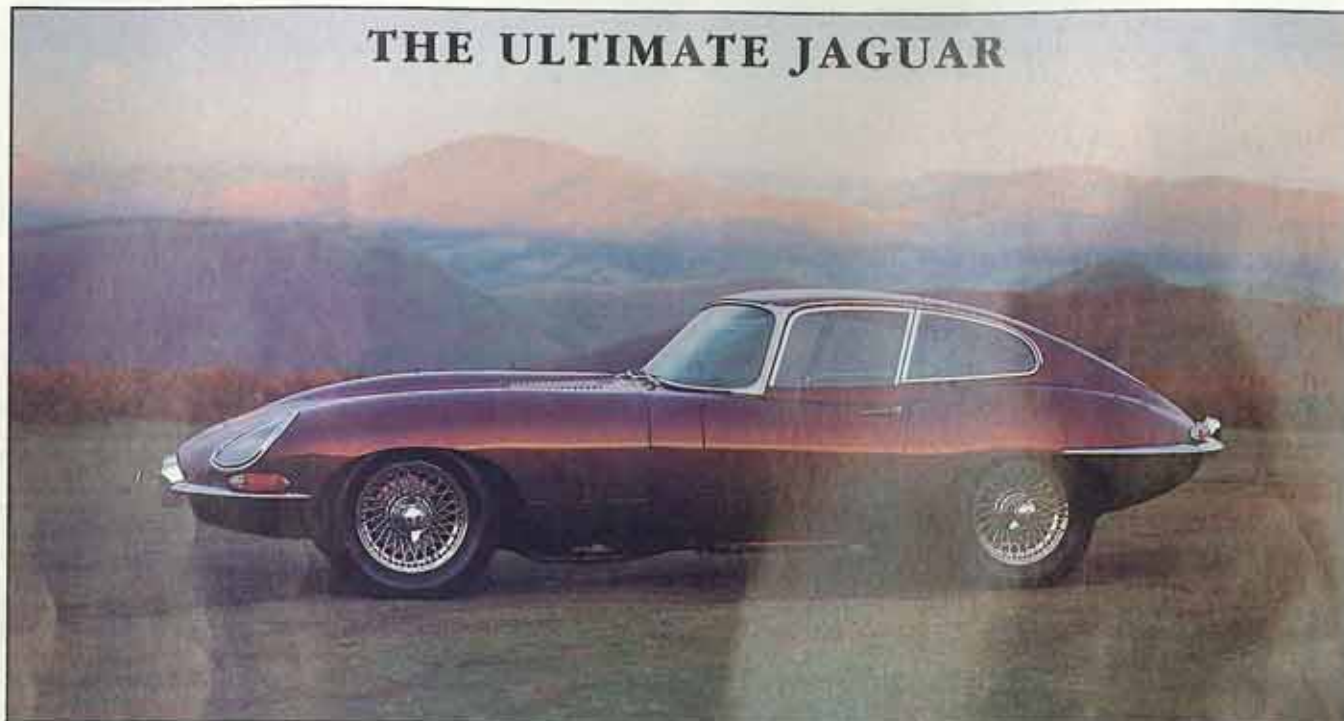


TONY BAKER



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Big cat leaps forward with great poise on wider rubber and E-type wire wheels



Original wheel, as here, suits MkII best



Shifter now on console; choice of 'box

the factory car where wind whips and whistles around door seals and quarterlights at anything beyond 75-80mph.

The original car's wipers start to lift at this point and their two speeds can't cope with a torrential downpour with the same dismissive aplomb of the CMC MkII and its modern XJ wiper motor. There is no misting up either - a constant headache in most '60s saloons.

Both feel massively stable, like good front-drive moderns totally unaffected by side winds. Here even the older MkII is a hugely impressive car, with the steam and stamina to hassle reps and dawdling executives from one end of the motorway to the other. It rides well, the sheer mass of its mechanical elements pummeling most bumps into submission, though the springs in the unsupportive front seats can sometimes have their occupants bouncing out of phase with the suspension. The ride of the new car is even more boulevard, though the rear axle can patter over certain kinds of disturbance: the rear dampers need revalving, says Nick, to improve response in rebound.

Around town the differences between the pair are even more distinct. Manoeuvring the unassisted factory car feels like a session at the gym, with muscle-toning steering effort for parking (five turns between dismally poor locks) a heavy clutch that doesn't always disengage and a sticky, stiff Moss gearchange, living up to its reputation for weighty, slow shifts and synchromesh on second gear that has long since departed. Goldthorp's auto MkII feels half the car in the same situation: you can drive it casually with one hand, and slot it neatly into

a parking spot without raising your eyebrows, never mind a sweat, just like the latest XJ6.

There can be no doubt that the Classic Motor Cars MkII is an impressive piece of engineering, the best restored car of its type I've seen, yet its character is somehow anodyne: you begin to miss the yowl of the old-fashioned Moss 'box in bottom gear, the more intrusive snarl of the carburetted straight-six engine, the deep character lines in the aromatic seats only years of use can give.

If I was choosing the specification of my ultimate Classic Motor Cars MkII perhaps I'd be a bit more discerning: the power steering conversion is a must, the suspension modifications desirable, but I'd keep the interior standard and could do without the electric toys and even the fancy fuel injection. To me, they are not what owning a MkII Jaguar are all about, though air conditioning would be nice, especially a subtle installation like this.

As it stands this particular fully-loaded car is a superbly crafted pastiche of a MkII, a modern, beautifully engineered executive barouche disguised as the best-looking saloon Jaguar ever made. The man who owns it probably won't drive it much, but when he does he is unlikely to be disappointed: at 15mph in a Tokyo traffic jam, he'll hardly be able to tell the difference from his Lexus.

Thanks to Simon Waller of Barnsbury Classics for finding the original 3.8. Ring him on 0171 609 4949 if you are looking for a MkII

"THEY  
AREN'T  
BUYING  
THEM  
INSTEAD OF  
A DB7 BUT  
AS WELL AS"

### IMPROVED MkIIs: OUR GUIDE

#### CLASSIC MOTOR CARS

Price: £60-80,000  
depending on options

Build time: 12-16 months depending on spec; eight built  
Options: injection, five-speed or modern automatic transmission, uprated suspension and brakes, rack steering, central locking, electric windows/sunroof, air conditioning.

Service back-up? Yes  
When established: 1993

Where: Building 6, Stanmore Industrial Estate, Bridgnorth, Shropshire WV15 5HR; tel: 01746 765804.



Classic Motor Cars  
LIMITED

#### MILL LANE ENGINEERING

Price: £56-66,000  
Build time: 6 months;

eight built  
Options: 4.2 engine, injection, Getrag five speed, 6in wire wheels, handling kit, dual circuit uprated brakes, central locking, electric windows, improved seats, all leather trim.

Service back-up? Yes  
When established: 1981

Where: Ash Road, Aldershot, Hampshire GU12 4HD; tel: 01252 22002



#### ROADSTER GROUP

Price: 160-240,000 Dfl  
depending on spec

Build time: 9-14 months depending on spec

Options: catalysed 4.2 injection engine, rack power steering, uprated suspension (coil spring on rear), uprated brakes, modern automatic transmission, improved ventilation and air conditioning, improved front seats, electric windows, central locking

Service back up? Yes, plus Europ Assistance.  
When established: 1991

Where: Postweg 57, 3769 BV Soesterberg, Nederland; tel: 0031 346 353440



#### VICARAGE JAGUAR LTD

Price: £55-65,000  
depending on spec

Build time: 7 months; 200 built

Options: 3.8 or 4.2, four speed auto, four/five speed manual, cruise control, rack and pinion power steering, uprated suspension, brakes with ABS, VDP style trim, air conditioning, central locking

Service back-up? Yes, plus agents in Hong Kong, Japan, Germany, Spain, Oslo

When established: 1983

Where: Unit 1, Modular Business Park, Aspley Close, Four Ashes, Wolverhampton, Staffordshire WV10 7DE; tel: 01902 791818



#### JD CLASSIC AUTOMOBILES

Price: £40-60,000  
Build time: 5-6 months; eight built per year

Options: five-speed or modern gearbox, rack steering, uprated brakes, improved interior

Service back-up? Yes  
When established: 1988

Where: Units 1-7, Moreland Road Ind Est, Old Barn Lane, Rettendon, Chelmsford, Essex CM3 8HA; tel: 01245 400060

J.D. Classics