

# OUR CARS



New driver's seat base is slimmer and has a shorter thigh bolster than the original passenger perch

## PHIL LETS A MAGICIAN LOOSE ON HIS E-TYPE TRIM



### 1962 JAGUAR E-TYPE SERIES 1 FHC

Owned by Phil Bell, [phil.bell@bauermedia.co.uk](mailto:phil.bell@bauermedia.co.uk)

**TIME OWNED** Three months **ENGINE** 3781cc, in-line six-cylinder  
**POWER** 265bhp @ 5500rpm **TORQUE** 260lb ft @ 4000rpm  
**PERFORMANCE** Top speed: 152mph; 0-60mph: 6.9sec  
**MILEAGE SINCE LAST REPORT** 1000 **LATEST COSTS** £2050

**THERE WAS ONLY ONE** serious problem with the E-type fixed-head coupé I bought in February – I didn't actually fit in it. Jaguar boss Sir William Lyons' obsession with lithe bodywork means the car was never designed to fit people who are, for example, 6ft 1in tall. Even with the seat pushed hard against the rear bulkhead my legs were so bent I couldn't toe-and-heel to master

the tricky Moss gearbox because my knee collided with the steering wheel, even with the wheel reach adjusted as far away from the dashboard as possible. Worse still, I was forced to drive with a neck-cracking stoop because I couldn't sit upright.

But my choice of car isn't as daft as it seems – before buying it I'd heard that Jaguar specialist CMC's newly expanded 850sq ft

trim shop (01746 765804, [www.classic-motor-cars.co.uk](http://www.classic-motor-cars.co.uk)) can work miracles stealing space from within the E-type's cramped cabin. With luck it would mean modifying the original 3.8 buckets rather than resorting to later or non-E-type seats, or cutting into the beautifully restored bodyshell.

When CMC boss Nick Goldthorp discovered that mine is a February 1962 car, built before the rear bulkhead was dished to allow extra seat travel, he warned: 'There's only so much we can do.'

Head trimmer Tom Hampton has tackled every interior and

hood job you can imagine over the past 20 years, and not just on Jaguars. In fact his team of three was just completing a particularly snug-looking roof on a Mulliner-bodied Bentley S1 convertible when I uncurled myself from the E-type outside the workshop at Bridgnorth in Shropshire.

My optimism grew as Tom outlined his plans: 'We can reduce the depth of the seat base to drop you down lower, and modify the seat back so you're not sitting so upright. And if that's not enough removing the seat runners will give a little more headroom.' I wanted to avoid the last option because my wife needs the seat at the front of its travel to operate the pedals.

That still left me with a legroom problem but Nick explained how the pedals could be moved nearer to the bulkhead

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while still allowing enough travel. 'In any case, you've got a left-hand drive pedal box in there anyway,' which is why the pedal spacing was so awkward.

After taking a few measurements from car and driver – Tom insisted I held the tape for the inside-leg dimension – he had the seat out and stripped to a bare carcass in minutes, marking cut lines in the back that would allow it to be reshaped to curve comfortably over the rear bulkhead. As well as creating a more natural driving position, adding rake would squeeze out some extra headroom. But the biggest gains are to be had in the removable seat cushion. Tom's plan was to make a new one, replacing the thick plywood base with a sheet of aluminium and fitting slimmer foam on top with a shorter thigh bolster.

Fortunately Tom's a little taller than me and I was able to leave him to work around his own dimensions. In the end it was ready the day before my 700-mile round trip to the Le Mans 24-hours, so it was a relief to slip into the seat and find headroom to spare plus pedals perfectly positioned to play tunes with the engine, gearbox and brakes.

I was still delighted with it when I arrived at the Circuit de la Sarthe a couple of days later. Inevitably the seat cushion was on the firm side, but now the car seemed tailor-made for me, so I could make the most of taking the Ecurie Bell E-type to Le Mans for the first time in its 48-year life. Everywhere – little towns we stopped in on the way down, the Classic British Welcome at St Saturnin and finally the circuit campsite – the E-type received more second glances and friendly comments than any car I've driven there before.

There's a lot of labour involved in creating extra space, but as a Jaguar Enthusiasts' Club member I get CMC's reduced rate of £48 per hour, and the total figure for the work so far comes to £2050.

Next month I'll tell you about another clever tweak CMC did to make me more comfortable – one that's proved a real talking point wherever I've used it.



Above: CMC's Tom Hampton gets to work stripping the seat (right). Far right: new seat base (foreground) uses a less bulky base and foam filling (right below). Below: Phil was finally able to get comfortable for the drive to Le Mans

