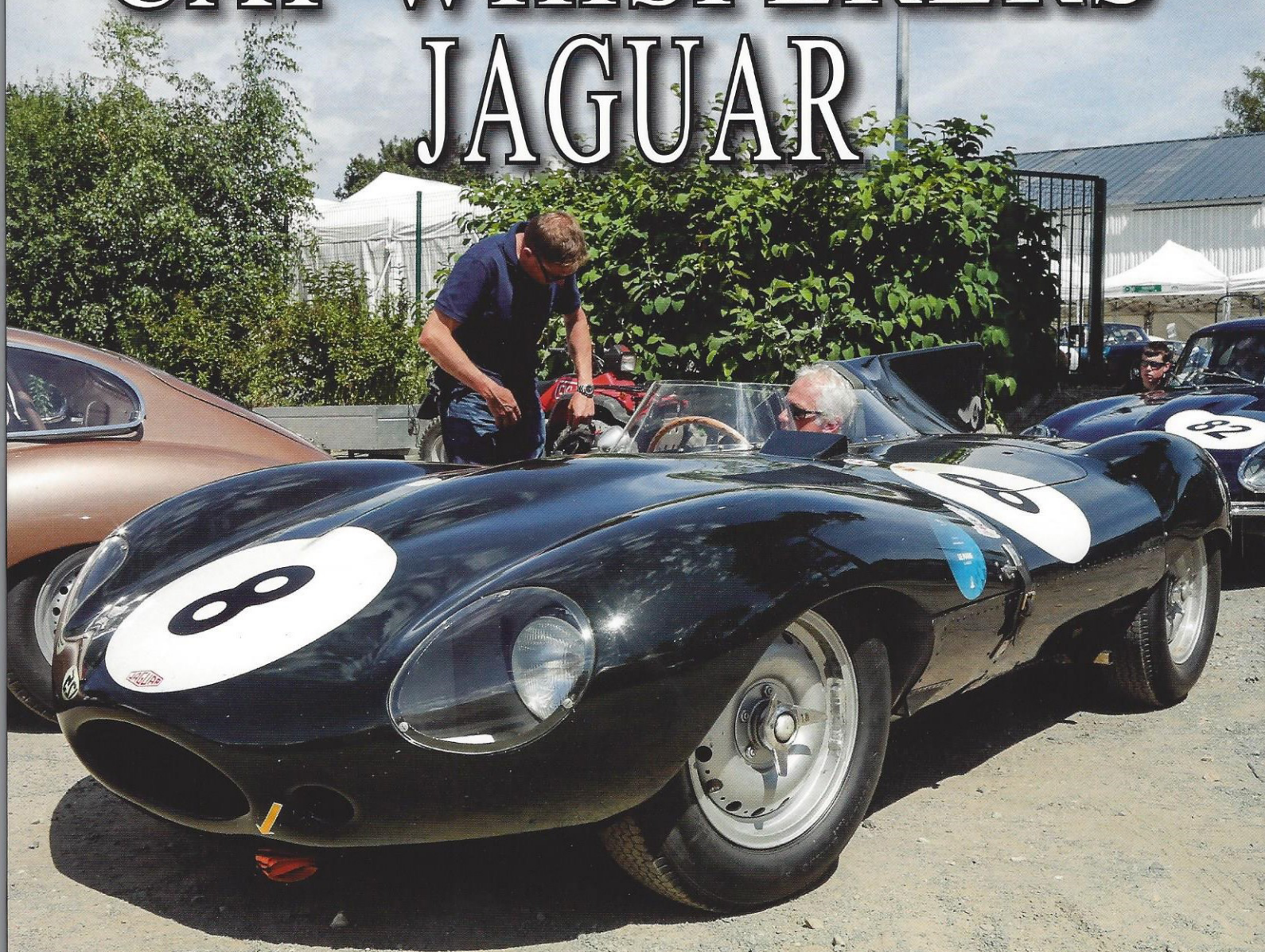


REBUILD . RELIVE . REDISCOVER

# REWIND

ISSUE 031

## CAT WHISPERERS JAGUAR



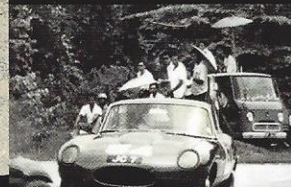
Jaguar's Classic  
Department



Fashion & Racing  
At Goodwood



Lyons' Cats  
In Asia



SGD5.00  
ISSN 2010-1023



# THE SPECIALISTS

## ***XKs UNLIMITED***

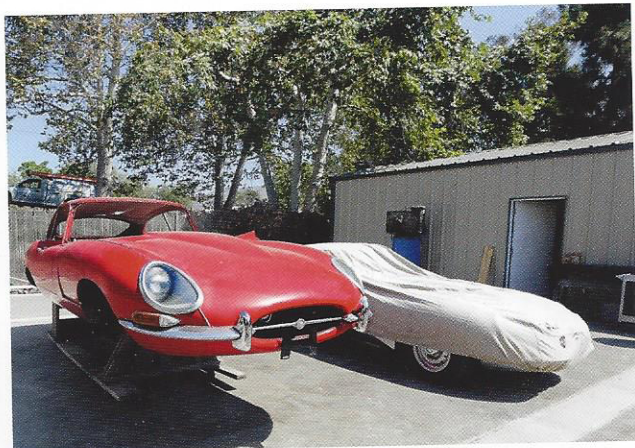
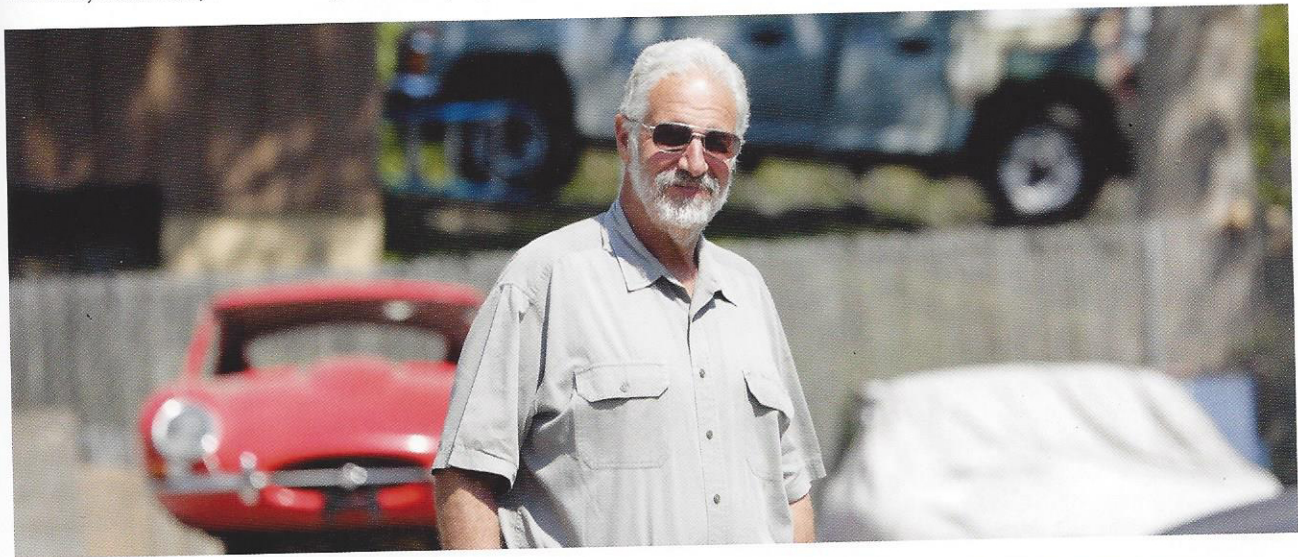
### Coventry in California

**I**t all started with the Californian car culture in the 1950s and '60s for Jason Len, owner of XKs Unlimited. Jason grew up watching Carroll Shelby's men working on AC Cobras at their Venice workshop south of Santa Monica. Like most American kids growing up in California during the period, imported cars were a big deal and MG's little TC was the bee's knees. During summer vacation, Jason would hang out at a British car repair and restoration business where the TC was being worked on.

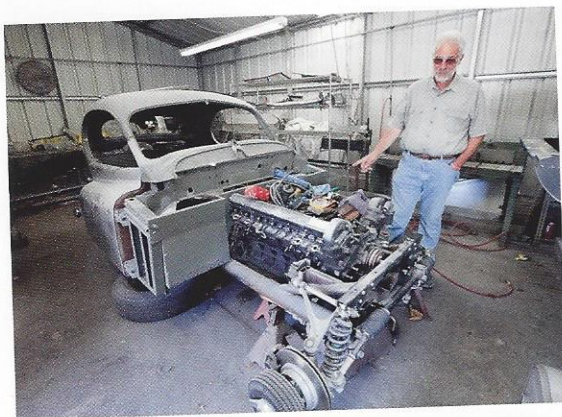
In his senior year in 1973 at California Polytechnic in San Luis Obispo, Jason opened a British car repair shop. The '70s was the worst period in British automobile history in terms of quality and reliability of cars manufactured in the UK. "Luckily, most of the cars I worked on were from the '60s because most of the students couldn't afford a new one," Jason chuckled as he recollected how it all began. "Also, one of the things that got me started in Jaguars was at my freshman year at Cal Poly, I was studying engine

dynamics and I had a professor who was a Jaguar enthusiast. So all our class problems were based on Jaguar motors," he said. It was the perfect foundation for the young student and British car enthusiast. In addition, fulfilling warranties for broken down new MGs, usually caused by engine fires due to the ill-positioned catalytic converters below the carburetors, was big business for his fledgling business. And yet, "half the town were betting the business wouldn't last six months."

Working on cars didn't make as much money as dealing in parts for old British cars. Al Moss of Moss Motors, USA, was leading the way for old MGs. Jason thought that perhaps there was also a market for old Jaguars. He put in "a little classified ad" at the back of *Road & Track Magazine* for anyone who wanted a classic Jaguar parts catalogue. The catalogue didn't even exist! Two weeks later, his mailbox was inundated with catalogue requests. Jason quickly typed one up over a weekend and "zeroxed" copies went off to







potential customers. And so began XKs Unlimited, a name he acquired from an XK wrecking yard in Los Angeles. His focus was on the XK120, 140 and 150 models, very popular sports cars that ran rings around big American cars at race tracks such as Riverside. "In fact, in the late '70s, when I came out with an E-Type catalogue, my XK customers were upset because they said those were not classic cars, no one's ever going to restore an E-Type," he grinned at the thought of how the market has changed.

"One of the things that's really changed over the years...Jaguar produced very few of their own parts and I could go to England and find the guy that made the door handles or the tail lenses. If he still had the tooling, he'd make them for me if I ordered 20 or 30 or 50. Now those shops are gone, the tooling is worn out." It's pushed XKs Unlimited more and more into manufacturing their own parts. Gone are the days where Jason knew every one of his vendors.

Undoubtedly, Jason is a big Jaguar enthusiast. His second passion is motorcycles, and he's not averse to three-wheelers as well – he has a new Morgan at home. When I walked into XKs Unlimited's office in San Luis Obispo after a three-plus hour drive south of Carmel, the first thing I noticed was a silver lightweight-looking E-Type in race

trim behind a Mk IX saloon. Jason has raced that 1964 3.8-litre E-Type for 40 years, and you can wager that it's pretty well developed. "Racing a Jaguar is like racing a fighter plane," he told me. "It's four hours of maintenance for every hour on the track!" He's also restoring an XK120 Coupe. In his collection is also an SS100 replica from Suffolk Sportscars. He's good friends with Roger and Fraser Williams, and Fraser spent three months at XKs Unlimited in 2015. Jason has a couple of other Suffolk replicas, which is a pretty good endorsement of Roger Williams' product.

Both of us agree that there's been a change in mindset of today's classic car owners. Ten years ago, the in-thing was to restore a car to original stock standard with no room to consider upgrades. Today's owner wants a safe drive in his or her car and this has created a whole new market for upgrades and performance parts. Anything, stated Jason, that doesn't intrinsically alter a car. No cutting or welding, but brakes, cooling, gearbox and suspension upgrades are kosher.

"You know the very first Tremec five-speed gearbox conversion ever done, we did 30 years ago for Jay Leno for his XK120. In those days, there was no kit for them so we did it from scratch," Jason said. With XK and E-Type values now at stratospheric levels, he echoed a sentiment

that resonates with most genuine classic car enthusiasts today. "From a business point of view, it's terrific. It's the first time in 40 years where you can restore an E-Type and if not make money, at least get your money back out of it. But from an emotional point of view, I hate to see them so expensive because there are so many enthusiasts that are just priced out of the market."

We acknowledge that Jaguar's modern classic, the XJS, is still too expensive to do a frame up restoration, but there are a lot of good cars that require little work and could be had for very little money. "When you think about it, you can buy a really nice XJS Coupe for USD15,000 and have a V12 high performance car. That's a lot of car for very little money!" he pointed out.

Jason is pleased with how XKs Unlimited has developed. He recognises that they may not be able to compete with parts prices from the UK but his guys go the extra mile when it comes to technical advice. Mike Marter, Vice President and GM, and sales representative Don Green made sure my queries were addressed, and what was meant to have been a visit to pick up a pair of ceramic exhaust headers and a Cometic head gasket for an over-milled head turned out to be a much bigger order that will help me complete the engine build of my XK150. ◀