

## Best Laid Plans

In September 2018, after months of searching, I bought a 1964 3.4 litre Jaguar Mk2. On Friday 6 December 2019 it made its maiden voyage of 4 miles under its own steam. Things don't always go to plan!

I'd owned a rather dilapidated Mk2 in the seventies maintaining it on breakers yard bits and a reasonable aptitude for basic DIY maintenance. My friends, similarly running ropery old cars on tight budgets, and myself frequented a breakers yard in North London near Staples Corner and run by "Nick the Greek". The standard arrangement was to explain what you wanted to Nick or one of his henchmen following which you would be adjured to, "Ave a look dahn the yard mate". We eventually realised this was no special treatment for valued returning customers but applied to any visitor. We decided to test the theory and started asking for outrageous bits such as a supercharger for an Alfa 8C, or a wheel for a Bentley



continental to which the response was always, "Ave a look dahn the yard mate". The breakers yards always had a good selection of Jaguars because at that time they were expensive to work on and became too expensive to repair when they were just old cars. So my 3.8 Manual Overdrive was not your typical student ride.

I still rate the Mk2 as one of the most exciting cars I ever owned and after all the intervening years I thought I'd like to own one again. I'd seen lots of examples advertised on classic car web sites so armed with "The Buyer's Guide To The Mk2 Jaguar", I started my search for a 3.8 or 3.4 litre car with manual gearbox. I suppose having bought a Mk2 for £50 in the seventies and then having run it for 12 years it didn't occur to me that there's quite a difference between a 10 year old car and a 50 year old version of the same model.

I travelled to Hampshire, Kent, London, Shropshire and Lincolnshire before it finally sunk in that what vendors classed as "good condition" differed greatly from my expectations and the opinion suggested in my Guide. I also discovered that informing vendors their "pride and joy" is a bit of a heap often offends. The final straw was a 3.8 car advertised as sound with upgrades and current MOT in Stockport. Could this be the one?..... No! This car was so rotten that I showed the owner I could push my fingers through the front chassis rail where the subframe was bolted to the car. The owner had been wholly accurate in describing the work done to the car and produced bills for thousands of pounds but was carried away with the huge prices at which collector quality vehicles were advertised. At its simplest the corrosion made that car dangerous and with the need for a total body restoration, a repaint, a complete interior including wood work and a replacement headlining the asking price of £19,000 was overly optimistic.

Somewhat disillusioned I contacted the Jaguar Enthusiasts Club Mk2 specialist and met with him at his workshop near Worksop. He suggested I should confine my search to classic car dealers as although you might pay a premium over a privately advertised car it was more likely to be to a

reasonable standard as dealers don't like getting stuck with a lemon. Moreover, social media makes it much more difficult for poor dealers to avoid a bad reputation. Over time Ken showed me some beautiful Mk2s in his stock which would have been perfect except one was on offer for £45,000 and the other for £79,000. These were true collector's cars, perfect condition, low miles, low ownership and comprehensive service histories. So perfect in fact that they were not for me (even if I could have afforded the cheaper one). My experience had been of a car worth £50, and could drive it in rain, in snow, tow a caravan, park it anywhere without considering what may become of it and flog the living daylight out of it without worrying about a stone chip or two.

I eventually tracked down a 3.4 litre model from a Classic Car Dealer in Chigwell in London. It was Sherwood Green, a colour almost universally detested by everyone except me apparently. It was in reasonable condition with service history from 1968 until 2018 and had MOT certificates and a service bill for every one of those years. At an asking price of £23,000 it was affordable at a stretch and the documentation alone made it quite rare compared to other examples that I had seen.

So down to London again and finally I found a car that actually matched its description. After much examination and a test drive I really felt I wasn't going to do better in my price range and so the conversation got serious. I wanted to see the documentation and was invited into the vendor's house there to be presented with 3 cardboard boxes full of documentation amassed by the three original owners. Whenever I have bought a car before I usually expect a 5 minute flick through the paperwork but I really hadn't expected this. Having owned the car for over a year now I still haven't read it all!

Clearly the documentation was all the vendor had said it was and more. The car had no chassis rot at all and though the paintwork was poor I found a bill for repainting the two sides dating from the mid eighties. Having a first reaction of, well that's a bit poor, I felt like an idiot when I realised that was

nearly 35 years ago. After a bit of negotiation we agreed a price of £21,000 and my ownership had begun.



Getting the car home came next and would be easy. I'd drive it from London to Yorkshire. So with my son driving us down to collect the car we made preparations to take it in easy stages. The first step would be to get to my brother-in-law in St Albans where we could check everything over and see if any problems were emerging. Well we didn't have to wait very long.

As we headed toward the M25 all of a sudden the biggest red warning light on the dash came on.....brakes. Oh! A gingerly stab at the brake pedal revealed we still had brakes so it must just be fluid level down in the reservoir. Fortunately a quick stop revealed that though the level was not up to the maximum, there was plenty in the reservoir. We could see no evidence of leaks but decided before we got to the M25 we would stop at a services and top up.

I tend to avoid motorway services so I didn't realise there is very little in the way of motoring consumables. Sweets, cakes, groceries, alcohol, no problem but bulbs, fan belts, brake fluid.....well, lots of luck. In the end we did find some brake fluid in a garage and topped up. Light out and good to

go. So onto the M25 and within minutes, on came the brake warning light. It's a sort of psychological warfare wondering whether we'd run out of brakes and have to coast to a halt on a busy motorway or make it to the next junction. With no hard shoulder now all you can do is stop in lane one (police parlance) or the Dignitas Lane as my wife refers to it. It is remarkable how when you want a refuge bay or exit ramp..... nothing for miles.

We finally got off the motorway at Potters Bar and rechecked the reservoir. Full! So the warning light was lying. With much relief we re-joined the motorway and got to St Albans for a well-earned cup of tea. We also took the opportunity to fix a non-functioning tail light which would become important as the evening drew on. Fortunately it turned out to be a disconnected wire under the dash rather than the bulb so an easy fix once we found out we had no illumination because we had no power.

Refreshed and more confident now that we knew the brakes were good and the warning light could be ignored we set out for Yorkshire and made it all the way.....to Milton Keynes. It was all going so well until the temperature gauge started to rise. I eased off, I turned the heater on, I turned the fan on but, when the temperature gauge needle disappeared off the scale, it was a bust. We made it into the Milton Keynes Bus Station and called the AA.

The rest of the journey went without a hitch with us arriving back in Sheffield several hours later, on the back of an AA recovery truck. The car still ran and the AA patrolman was confident a new thermostat would sort it. It turned out to be a bit more than that but that's a story for another time.

In the following weeks I did get a chance to properly go through the service history where I discovered that for the previous 19 years the car had never done more than 20 miles a year being the distance it was driven each year to the local agents who serviced the car and put it through the MOT. It was then returned to its garage and left unused until the following year. Seen in that light, 37 miles to Milton Keynes Bus Station was two years motoring in a day. Not bad eh!