

The Prettiest Race Car You've Ever Seen

By Ray David

Sun Coast Jaguar Club-Florida January 2006

I don't know about you, but when I see what I think is one of the most remarkable looking Jaguars ever, I just have to find out more about it. Such was the case last September at the Challenge Championship in Atlanta when I came across a series III E-type roadster that just about took my breath away. Everything about it said "professionally-prepared race car", and I noticed quite a few others were just as impressed as I was. But it had an aura about it that other race cars just cannot manage.

Really, up close and personal this car is drop-dead gorgeous. Any Jaguar fan would recognize it immediately as an E-type, although any closer definition might give you cause for pause. Partly because of a few mild body changes which include widening the rear fenders to accommodate larger wheels and tires, although the traditional roll around the wheel opening that distinguishes a Series III from a I or II was retained. There are, of course, a few other subtle styling tweaks as well that make this car stand apart from the crowd, such as the Miata taillights that look perfectly at home on this big Jag. But when all is said and done – and there has been plenty said about this car – this is just about the cleanest, most perfectly done E-type race car you're ever likely to find.



The rear fenders have been widened, the bumper removed, the license plate panel sculpted and re-designed and the taillights replaced with Miata units. And it all comes together better than if Jaguar had done it at Brown's Lane.



Clean and simple - a race car doesn't need door panels but this one looks better for it.

Little things, like the door liners, complete the show-car appearance that most serious racers lack, leaving nothing unfinished, but also nothing overdone. Many of those simple touches had to be pointed out to me before I caught on to what a professional package this car presents. The cockpit is as spartan as any other in the racing business, but somehow looks like it just came out of a showroom. It is the attention to little things like neatness and cleanliness that earns this car a reserved seat wherever it goes.

My first exposure to it came on the slalom course where it was the center of attention on or off the track. With 600 horsepower and the exhaust note that goes with it, everyone knew this car was serious about its work. At the time the car had only been in a couple of slaloms and an autocross or 2 and still had some shakedown cruising ahead of it, but every outing gave its owner and its builder a bit more feedback for the inevitable fine-tuning to get it just so.

The car is owned by Jim Roberge, a resident of Lincoln, Mass. and a member of J.A.N.E. It is a 1972 model which he bought a few years ago. He already had a Jaguar that he raced, but wanted something just a step higher up the competitive ladder, so 4 years ago he sent it to Stew Jones, owner of Stew Jones Restorations in Winsted, Conn., with instructions to make it something other cars would have to move aside for. In late 2004 the car was back on the road, going through the first stages of road testing and tweaking. Drivable, but not quite track-ready, its 7.3 liter V-12 drawing huge quantities of racing fuel through 6 Weber carburetors, with racing cams and an 11.6-to-1 compression ratio, both car and driver had some sorting out to do to become comfortable with each other.



I can't remember when I've seen a neater, cleaner interior in a race car. There's nothing there that it doesn't need, but everything it needs is there.

Jim is a professor of electrical engineering at M.I.T., an institution he entered as a freshman in 1956 and never left, and he has been a weekend racer since the 1980's. He is always testing his own limits along with his cars, and with this new one he may have found the right combination. The car weighs in at 2,700 lbs. and at that probably carries about 3 or 4 lbs more than it needs, but that bit of extra heft seems to be all in the right places so the car looks as good as it goes. In fact, it took first in its class at the Challenge Championship Concours.



The reason Jim chose a roadster over a coupe for racing is simply because, at 6' 4" he can't fit into a coupe when he's wearing a helmet. And you'll notice how tall the roll bars are on this car – a concession to its owner's height. In competition on the slalom course in Georgia the car did every bit as well as some of the 6 cylinder E-types while Jim was in the pilot's seat, but Karen Jones, Stew's wife and a champion Jaguar racer in her own right, did even better. Mind you, she has had a more varied experience than Jim in that very car, having crash-tested it last year on the race track at Lime Rock. In that instance Gary Hagopian was giving the car one of its first road tests with Karen along as passenger when it left the ground going over a rise and ended up in the tire barrier, upside down. Despite considerable cosmetic damage to the car, the only injuries suffered by the occupants were a broken fingernail for Karen and a bruised ego for Gary. But the fortunate part of it is that with 2 very experienced racers involved,



Karen Jones on the track at the Challenge Championship.

they were able to reconstruct the sequence of events that caused the mishap, and itemize the corrections needed to lessen the chances of the same thing happening again. So all four, Gary, Karen, Stew and Jim knew what to look out for next time. It had something to do with super-stiff racing suspension, a bump in the track surface, cold brakes and 600 horsepower, all of which happened to come together in perfect harmony to provide a truly memorable track experience.

By now most of the sorting out should be all done and Jim Roberge and his gorgeous E-type will be looking forward to spring in New England and the beginning of a new slalom season. I expect to see some pretty good times for this car in the slalom results by this time next year. And keep an eye on Karen, too. You'll see her picture - and her slalom score - behind the wheel of this excellent 'E' in the current issue of Jaguar Journal. And if you're ever in the neighborhood when this car is on display at a concours somewhere, make the effort to go and see it. It's a first class example of what can happen when a determined car owner with very specific goals teams up with a builder/designer who can't abide second place.



Just as clean as a Jag V12 engine bay could be.