



# For the Love of Twelve

Stew Jones Restoration: Crafting the World's Fiercest and Finest Series III E-Types

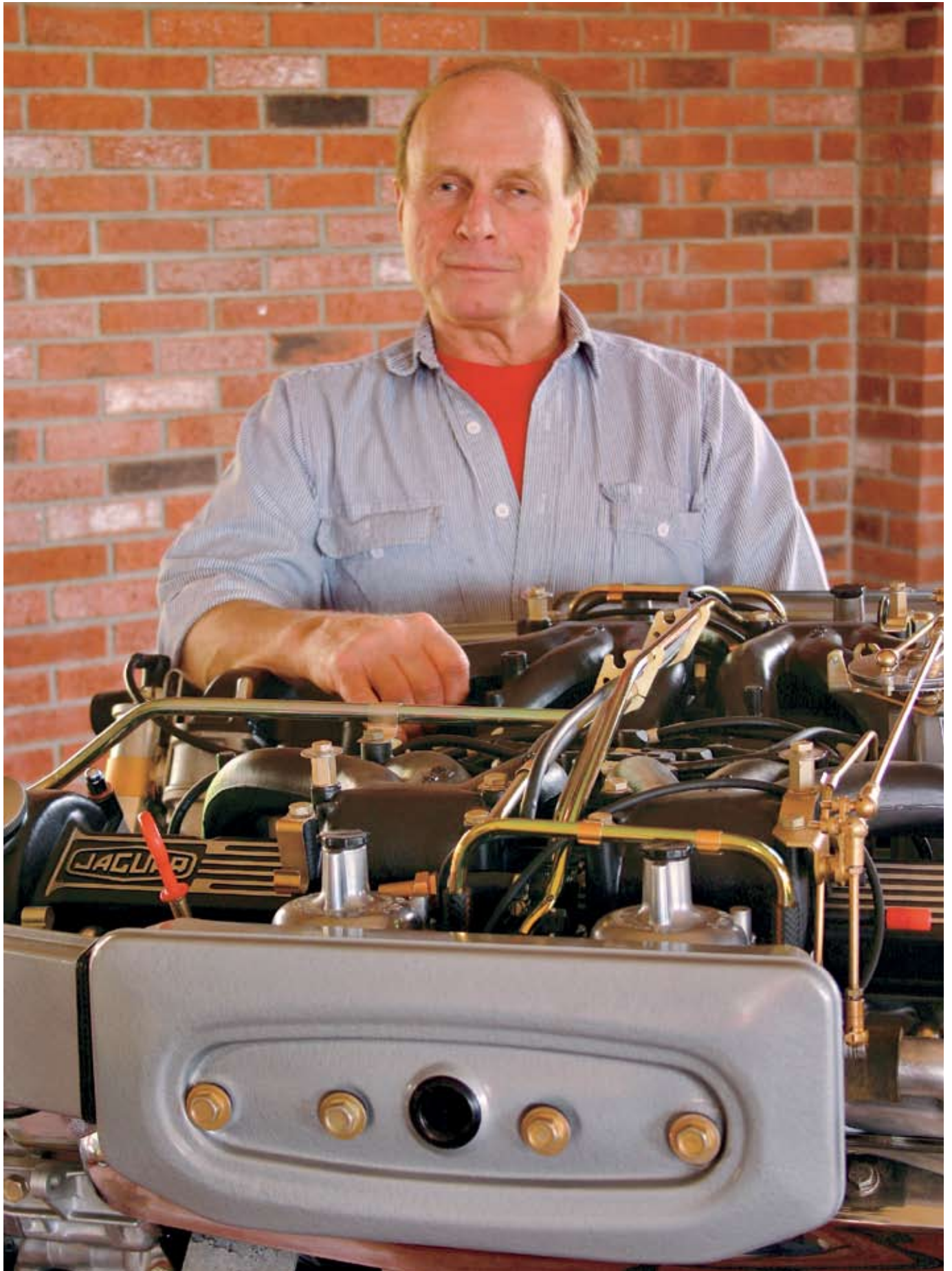
WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARK J. McCOURT



The world of concours d'elegance is one of style and ceremony, one designed to celebrate the finest automobiles ever created. For attendees, concours events mean strolling on the lawns and admiring gleaming paint and chrome; for participants, concours events mean meticulous preparation and sweating the smallest details. To win a concours event is high praise; to win a national event, and be the first of your kind to do so, is the ultimate. In the vast international world of Jaguar, with specialists on almost every continent, it took a small specialist shop in rural Winsted, Connecticut, to create the best V-12 E-Types extant: Stew Jones Restoration.

With a brick and glass showroom and

mechanical shop, based in a former ice house, nestled on the edge of Highland Lake, and an ultra modern body-paint shop and office across the road behind an 18th century colonial house, Stew Jones Restoration is the dream come true for its founder, the energetic and eponymous Stew. A life-long enthusiast who bought his first car—a 1931 Ford Model A roadster—at age 13, he planned to get an SCCA racing license when he turned 21, where he would race his modified 1955 Triumph TR2. “Unfortunately for my racing career, I was married with a child before I turned 22, which required a major priority shift,” he chuckles. Stew was deeply infected by the Jaguar bug after meeting Oliver Jones,





**Almost surgically clean and heated by a radiant floor and 1.2-million BTU furnace, the 6,000-square-foot body and paint shop and main office has room for numerous restoration projects, and houses customers' cars like "The Beast" and an autocross-modified Mark II.**

the proprietor of a Jaguar repair and racing shop in Farmington, but his young family meant that practicality came first, so he couldn't indulge in the classic Jaguar XKs and new E-Types that caught his fancy.

"I found a 1955 Jaguar Mark VII M in a back lot that needed a new clutch, so for \$100 and a new clutch, I was cruising in the stately elegance of a black Mark VII with the special 3.4-liter engine, four-speed transmission, bucket seats, suspension upgrades specific to the M

model and a custom-installed baby seat. To keep such a car on the road, it was necessary to learn all the mysteries of Jaguar repair," he recalls.

Stew watched the E-Type evolve from its purist six-cylinder 3.8 model through the complex Series III V-12, and surprisingly, it was those last models that fascinated him the most. He watched them through the end. "I'll never forget it: In 1975, I drove by the Jaguar dealer in Farmington, and there were two leftovers, both roadsters,

that did not sell in '74, sitting outside in the rain. I thought, 'Wow, this is what Jaguar has come to.'"

The vintage Jaguar sedan that he'd mechanically restored and upgraded in the 1960s had been Stew's entry into the Jaguar fraternity, and the work he performed on that car would forecast his future career. "The Mark VII led to a 1952 XK120, a 1956 2.4-liter sedan, and finally, after much volunteer restoration work for friends, my own Jaguar repair shop in 1977." Although it was where he enjoyed spending his time the most, his shop wasn't Stew's primary income; he was a high school automotive shop teacher, a job he held for 20 years until a car accident took his eyesight in the early 1980s.

What may have been insurmountable for some was a stepping-stone for this enthusiast. "It was very handy, as when I lost my sight, I had this place here. I just had to figure out how to run it," he says. Keeping loyal customers' XJ6 sedans in shape was good business, but Stew continued to be drawn to the V-12 models, and the E-Type in particular. He hired a talented staff, indoctrinated them in the Jaguar world, and expanded the business by building the 6,000-square-foot shop and setting up a 2,000-square foot warehouse in Torrington to store the spare parts from the roughly 30 Series III E-Types he's dismantled through the years.

Although he works on all Jaguars built between 1948, the start of the XK era, and 1987, a year he says the cars changed greatly, he has his favorites. "You can't



**Stew has designed and built his own components to assist E-Type restorations, including two 360-degree body rotators and unique rear suspension supports for the two-post lifts.**

do an awful lot of things, too many things, and know all about them. Here, we specialize in the V-12s, and we are really experts in them. I believe that you're better off working on one kind of car, and specializing in an engine is a good idea. If you try to work on every car that there is, there are just so many things for you to learn. I often have cars come into my shop that have been in other shops, and are in total disarray...the cars are just not working right. Sometimes they have no idea how to make them work."

Stew has developed a number of improvements for Series III cars that make them operate and perform as he feels they were intended to from day one. He leads us over to a handsome roadster; "Here's a nice car. Years ago I would have just fixed it as it was [factory spec], or restored it. At this point, I've done a lot of modifications to it, none of which show. For instance, the cooling system isn't up to the task in these cars. In this particular car, the only thing it required was a good aluminum radiator, which is a lot more efficient than the original unit, and a cooling fan activating switch, a proprietary thing that

I created: It turns them on between 160-165 degrees instead of 180-190."

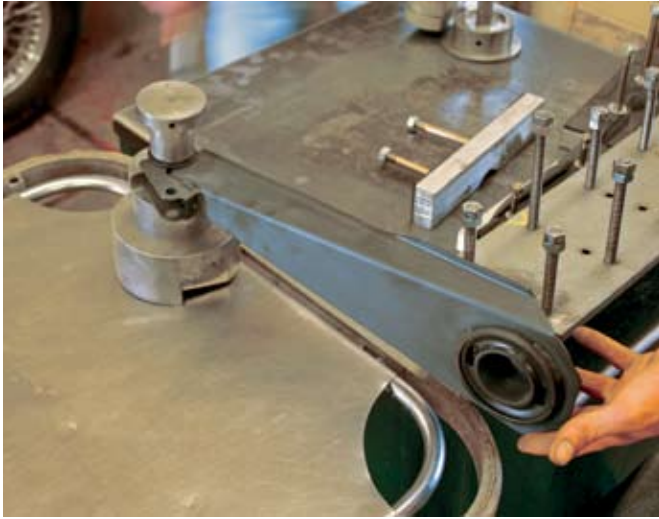
He continues, "The ignition system was pathetic on these cars. In my personal car, we used the original-type ignition system up until a few years ago. In the 20 years that I drove it, the ignition control module, which is the heart of the ignition system, failed five times. A company up in New Hampshire has come up with an upgraded system that goes in the original housing and keeps the original wire harness, so it looks like it's original—nobody except us can tell the difference. Not only does it work for more than a couple of years at a time, it's much more powerful than the original electronic ignition, and it works a lot better. The carburetors are another issue. At this point in the Seventies, the Federal government was coming down on automakers. The carburetors had all these emission devices in them, but I upgrade the carburetors, and we make them work really well. We also go through the brakes, the hoses and all of the things that deteriorate through the years; this is core for me, and I do the little package on almost every car that comes through here."

Transmission upgrades are also key for many of Stew's customer cars. He's often asked to swap automatics for manuals, and he uses the five-speed Borg-Warner T5 as used in late-model Camaros and Mustangs. "The [stock] transmission was good for the day, but nowadays, our expectations are different. We were happy with four-speeds back then, but new transmissions have raised the bar, and everybody wants a five-speed. When we put one in, you can't tell it's been changed—the shifter comes through in the same place. When they were new, these cars really didn't work well. Jaguar has a well-deserved reputation for being a problem car, and they were. But when we get done, these cars work."

Driveability modifications are just the tip of the iceberg for Stew Jones Restoration, as he and his team have built everything from mildly upgraded E-Types with heavy-duty suspension components and Weber carburetors or XJ-S fuel injection to Jim Roberge's Jaguar Club North America slalom champion, "The Beast" (Performance Builder's Guide, *HS&EC* #26), whose 5.3-liter engine was bored to



Working in the main shop's Accudraft downdraft spray booth, which has the capacity to change the air every 20 seconds, body and paint specialists Tom Jones and former fabricator Marc Rosenberg rub down a bonnet mounted on Stew's special 90-degree tiltable bonnet stand.



**Years of specializing in E-Type restoration mean they've created devices like these machined aluminum radius arm bushing presses.**

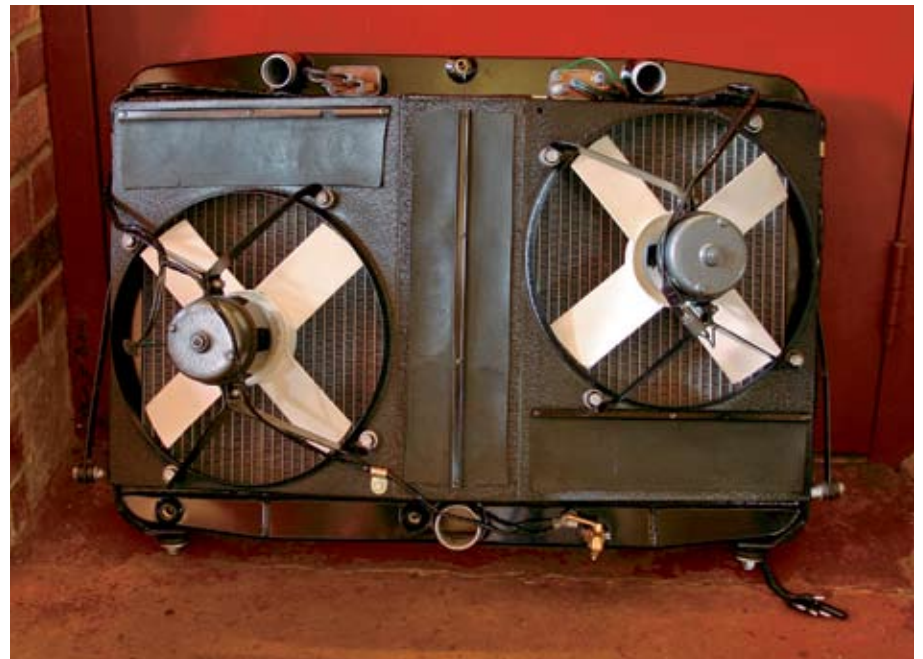
7.3 liters and makes a streetable 600hp. "The V-12 didn't perform like the earlier cars. It rode nicer, but it was more of a grand touring car than a sports car. What we do is make them sports cars again. We take the air conditioning out, firm up the suspension and make the car back into what it was meant to be. The next step above the 5.3-liter is a 6.0-liter; a little bit of work, and almost no one knows that it's a 6-liter. Then you take the crankshaft from a 6.0 and a special set of pistons and liners, and you can raise it to 6.8, which comes to about 420 cubic inches. The Beast has a 7.3-liter, which is more than 450 cubic inches. In the twelves, there's a lot of room; you can make these engines

bigger without a lot of problems. We hold all the records now with V-12s, and I love to say to the six-cylinder guys: 'Well, that's pretty good for a six.' They used to beat the twelves, but we've managed to put the claws back on them."

While they've proved their ability to extract reliable performance from the proven E-Type platform, it is the award-winning restorations that have brought Stew Jones Restorations into the national spotlight. They built the first 100-point Series III, and in the past 13 years, Stew Jones-restored cars have won seven JCNA National Champions in the V-12 E-Type Class Seven. Customer Terry Love's 1974 Open Two Seater has won the

coveted Biennial Best in Show Challenge Champions an unprecedented two times. Another benefit of specializing in these cars is the resource that Stew has become when judging authenticity; he was heavily involved in contributing to the JCNA concours judging guide, offering things as detailed as photographs of all three types of emergency brake handles that Jaguar used on Series III cars.

Stew's years of working on V-12 cars mean he's invented a number of specific tools to assist in routine tasks. In addition to using Coventry factory-sourced items like V-12 engine stands, which he's modified to roll on dollies, he's built his own door stands, bonnet stands—which tilt 90



**Other proprietary components include V-12 cylinder head support and special cooling fan activation switches for aluminum radiators.**



**Surrounded by Jaguar sports cars in his Highland Lake showroom, Stew is joined by his wife Karen, a highly accomplished competition driver who, in addition to helping sort their restored and modified cars on the road, has piloted The Beast on its record-setting runs.**

degrees for top and bottom access—and 360-degree body rotators, which attach to the monocoque at the frame rails and firewall. “I built two rotators because they’re so handy; they will stay at any angle you put them, so when Tom [Jones, the body fabrication and paint specialist] is welding or painting a body, he can place it in an ideal location and just turn it as needed. They fit in our trailer too, so we can take a body to the bead blaster.”

Other proprietary tools include a V-12 cylinder-head support stand, radius arm tools for pressing bushings in and out of the suspension arms, and cylinder liner pullers to remove the steel cylinder liners from the engine block; all are machined from solid aluminum. “We have all the factory tools, but Jaguar never made these ones, so we had to invent them,” he explains. This self-sufficiency is almost all encompassing, to the point that bead blasting, upholstery and chrome plating are the only restoration processes that Stew’s fully equipped shop farms out.

“We’re right at the forefront of encouraging Jaguar people to drive their cars more than just look at them. They’re works of art, that’s for sure, and a lot of people love them for their beauty, but these cars are made to be driven, and if you get everything right, you can drive



**Mechanics Chris Stewart and Frank Marinelli mate a Borg-Warner T5 to a rebuilt V-12.**

them and drive them hard,” he smiles. “It was the dream of my life to put a shop like this together. I have a really great time running this business, and sometimes I let my heart direct me with projects like The Beast. But why run the business if you can’t have some fun with it?” 🌐

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