

Postcard from America

A day at a Jaguar club concours reminds Howard Walker of the toll 'Federalization' took on the legendary E-type



On behalf of all my Jaguar-loving fellow Americans, let me hereby apologise for the way America essentially screwed-up the E-type back in the late 1960s and early 1970s. I'd almost forgotten the impact the States had on one of the purest automotive shapes ever created, that was until I turned-up at a concours event staged by my local Jaguar club here in Florida.

Demands to meet tough US Federal safety and emissions regulations meant that poor old Browns Lane either had to comply, or quit selling cars in the States. For Jaguar, it was the same as Leonardo being told the Mona Lisa needed to have a bigger chin. Or show more teeth. And a slow walk past the line-up of classic Es instantly brought back the horror of it all. Remember those truly appalling overrides they fitted to the '74 V12? They looked like a couple of painted housebricks bolted to the front and rear ends.

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Then there were the open headlights that started with the so-called 'Series 1½' in January '67 and continued through to the Series 3. Compared to the original chrome-ringed glass covers, they looked butt-ugly. But nowhere near as ugly as those giant, over-sized front and rear lights they inflicted on the Series 2. And, to add insult to injury, the Feds also demanded those appalling side-repeater lights. And let's not forget either the ear-less spinners – knock-offs were supposedly just too darned dangerous to pedestrians.

I even blame the States for the dreaded 2+2, even though it had nothing to do with safety or emissions. Americans loved the E but, in their usual fashion, they wanted it bigger – and

equipped with an automatic gearbox and air conditioning. Every time I see one, with its towering roofline and barn-like doors, I cringe.

I had first-hand experience with 'Federalized' Es. My last car in the UK, before moving to the States in 1992, was a '68 'Series 1½' coupe that had been shipped in from the US back at the time when they were as cheap as dirt. At the time I knew zip about the differences between UK and US specs. That was until I tilted the hood and, instead of seeing a trio of familiar SU carbs, I was faced with two small and odd-looking Zenith-Strombergs.

What I desperately needed back then was Stew Cleave's remarkable new guide to judging Series 1½ E-types in

Jaguar Club of North America concours events. For anyone restoring a Series 1½ (a colloquial term for these open headlamp variants that bridged the pure 'Series 1' 4.2 and the Series 2 proper), it's the most comprehensive guide to what's original that you can find.

Stew is the Chief Judge for the Jaguar Owners Club of Oregon and previously penned the Judges' Guide to the Series 2 'E'. His ability to track down all the myriad of changes would make Sherlock Holmes proud. He's still putting the finishing touches to the final draft – it gets approved at the JCNA's AGM next March. But you can take a look by logging on to the Association's website at www.jcna.com.

Stew does confuse things a bit by introducing a new model to the E-type line-up, the 'Series 1¼'. He uses this term to describe the rare 1967 model that came with an open-headlight bonnet, but avoided all of the other Federal changes that came later. It's certainly worth a look.

