**My 1975 XJC affair**

Do you remember the time when you were seduced by and fell in love with the Jaguar motor car? I do. I was in high school and my friend’s mother used to glide in each afternoon with a beautiful dark brown Series 1 XJ6. Rather than trading the car for a newer model they elected to refurbish it including new paint and a set of gleaming chrome wire wheels. That is the instant I fell in love with the Jaguar motor car.

It would be many years, post career establishment and child raising, until I could pursue my passion. I started with a 2003 XKR that I bought sight unseen from Melbourne. I remember stepping off the plane in Melbourne with cheque in hand, taking possession in the airport carpark and, together with my wife, immediately setting off for the trip back to Brisbane.

Although I enjoyed the XKR, a niggling passion for something with a bit more chrome was in the back of my mind. I still had a very clear vision of my friend’s mother’s XJ6 and I knew of a unique two door variation being the Series II XJC Coupe. What I didn’t know was it is one of the rarest production cars produced by Jaguar with fewer than 10,500 built between 1975 and 1978 and the only pillarless Jaguar. Only 241 coupes were imported into Australia, 97 being 5.3 V12 models.

If I was to be custodian for one of these, I wanted it to be like a new car. I love driving, admiring and caring for my cars, so I find it difficult to be in one that is not just right. I thought it would be great if I could find one that needed significant restoration so that I could pull it apart and rebuild it to as-new condition. One day, while having my XKR serviced I noticed one in the workshop and it was for sale. It was a 1975 Brisbane delivered 5.3 V12 XJC, and the heritage certificate has it listed as not having a vinyl roof which is rare. Although driveable, it needed significant TLC. Perfect, as I wanted to strip and rebuild it anyhow.

I had some limited restoration experience having recently owned a 1975 Triumph Stag. The work I did on the Triumph was not to the standard that I wanted for the XJC.

I knew it would cost serious money to do a complete restoration, so it is important to select a car that will be of value, and hold its value, post restoration. I must admit though, I often had comments from the people working on the restoration that what is easy to do on a classic Holden, takes three times longer on a Jaguar. They are built in a complicated sequence so typically significantly more time is required to carry out tasks on a Jag. I am sure Jag owning readers already know this!

A client with a history of Jaguar ownership once said to me, “Jaguars are like children, you love them heaps, they are expensive to keep, but well worth the pleasure”.

I bought the XJC and drove it for a year while doing my restoration investigations. When I thought I knew what I was doing, first mistake, I embarked on the restoration journey. My first words of advice to those thinking of a full restoration, you have a lot to learn and you can only do it on the job. I had a budget and a timeframe. Well now for my second piece of advice, triple both these… and I am not kidding. Don’t start unless you can afford to keep going through to completion. In my travels I have come across many restorers that are five to ten years into their restoration. Sadly, after that period of time there is a high risk of running out of energy and money. It is very hard to recover even a fraction of your investment if all you have is a trailer or two of car pieces. I knew I needed to keep going through to completion.

Rather than doing the work myself, I decided to employ professionals to carry out the restoration, that is the perfectionist in me. I knew I didn’t have the time, facilities, tools or skills to do the work to the standard the car deserved. The first decision was should I take it to one person to manage the whole restoration, or sub-contract it to various professionals? The advice was to leave it to one person to manage the job. I selected a restorer on the Sunshine Coast, where I was living at the time, who was able to do most of the work, but I ended up sub-contracting much of it out anyhow. I had a body shop that did most of the stripping, panel and paint and re-assembling. I sent the motor to a specialist to be rebuilt, the gearbox to another specialist and the interior was with another specialist.

I still remember the first week I drove the car from home into the workshop for the mechanical rebuild. I came back during the week to find the car stripped of its motor and gearbox. I shipped the car to the panel shop, and again came back in a few days to find the car stripped of all the interior and most of its panels. I must admit, having driven the car into the first shop less than a week earlier to then see a barely recognisable shell of a car less than a week later caused my heart to skip a beat and I thought, what have I done!

Restoring a car is a very hands-on, labour intensive job and it is surprisingly difficult to find people to do that work. Most modern panel shops are geared for new cars where they just replace damaged panels, not actually restore existing ones. I walked into my restorer’s panel shop one day where a very experienced panel beater was on a stool with casters rolling his way around the car carefully shaping and adjusting to get everything just right. I really appreciate the preservation of that skill and dedication to quality.

It was surprisingly easy to find new panels or pieces which allowed rusted metal to be cut out and replacement pieces welded in. In my case this included new wheel arches and floors. Where pieces could not be sourced, replacements were built on site. My third piece of advice is to buy some donor cars. It was over a year into the restoration before I realised the advantages of this. I ended up with two complete Series II V12 4 door sedans which are identical to the XJC other than the extra two doors plus another Series II XJ6 shell which had been previously stripped of all mechanical and running gear. I continue to use many parts from the shell, and I used some parts from one of the complete cars. It was a great security to have ready access to parts if they proved difficult to source elsewhere, but also, I shipped one of the cars to the body shop to use as a template during the re-assembly of the XJC. I still have the spare shell and a complete V12 sedan, but I sold the other car to a fellow Queensland Jaguar Drivers Club member who I know appreciates the car.

I helped to source many of the parts and I was able to do fiddly bits like the chrome refurbishments and for example dissembling the chrome hub caps and painting the black centre piece and cleaning the gold Jaguars in the middle. These things take an extraordinary amount of time which helped me appreciate the bills as they came in for the restoration. On average I was paying between $90 and $120 per hour for the restoration work, so the fiddly things that I was capable of proved a good saving. But I certainly appreciate the time required in total which runs into many hundreds of hours. Really, it’s the hours that add up as much as the parts. So, if you are considering doing much of the work yourself, that will save significant sums, but be careful of the never-ending restoration!

I estimate at least 25 people worked on the XJC at some point including disassembling, cutting and welding, motor, gearbox, paint, air conditioning, radiator and cooling, auto electrician, tyres, chrome work, tow truck, interior and trimming, woodwork, general mechanical, re-assembling and finishing.

Because I ended up having parts of the car in different places, delays by one party accumulated along the production line between different shops. So, in the end it took three years to complete the restoration. It’s quite a stressful time when you get towards the end of the restoration at which point you have paid out significant money but can’t see a re-assembled car. But I kept at it like a “dog with a bone” until suddenly, I had a complete car. Well it looked complete, but I knew it would take at least another 6 months to fine tune the finishing touches and get the beautiful V12 running as it should. The finishing should not be under-estimated both in time and cost – probably 15% of the restoration costs were invested into finishing.

Where possible I recommend you use people who know Jaguars. You may pay a higher rate for that speciality, but they know “where to hit” if you know what I mean. On several occasions as I moved the car between specialists, I had to have work re-done where usually a non-specialist had been involved. I had the re-work done by the specialist and kept moving forward with the restoration. The time delays caused some problems because people doing initial work were sometimes no longer available for the re-assembling. That was disappointing and costly but again I opted to just keep moving forward. So, another tip, wherever possible, if someone disassembles to rebuild, try to make sure they are available for the re-assembling. Another piece of advice is to seek out specialists who are passionate about what they do. I found that the passionate trade professionals will do the job right, to a high standard and are keen to ensure you are happy with the work done. They are craftsman who I greatly enjoy working with.

I absolutely love the finished product and the car is a joy to drive. In the end it probably cost the same as buying a new Jaguar off the showroom floor, but it is unique and beautiful and will most likely hold or increase in value, unlike the new car off the showroom floor. It was a wonderful journey and a great distraction from my day to day work. I am thoroughly enjoying the Jaguar Drivers Club of Queensland including my extra involvement as club treasurer. The club is about bringing together people with a common interest in the Jaguar motor car and provides a valuable community with which to share our mutual passion. I hope my article contributes to that purpose. Pleasurable and safe motoring to you all.