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E Type 50



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Above:
Goodwood House Hotel,
most of the red cars seem to
have parked together.

Below: First night's stop
at Coombe Abbey near
Coventry. The car in the
middle is 1 VHP the first
production right-hand drive
Series 1 E Type.



I think a quick flick through my trusty thesaurus will be necessary to find sufficient superlatives to describe the E Type fiftieth anniversary trip to Geneva organised by Jaguar Heritage under the guidance of Tony O'Keeffe and his team. The planning for the event took many months and its execution for the participants, their cars, and the support crews was outstanding.

The intention was to make a similar journey, albeit at a far slower pace and with much better accommodation, to the trip undertaken in 1961 by Norman Dewis. Norman famously completed the journey from Coventry to Geneva in about 14 hours at an average speed of around 64 mph. We spent about 4 days doing the same journey paced mostly by the rate at which we could traverse French highways, drive round race tracks, eat four-course dinners and drink bottles of French bubbly. In truth, although our journey to Geneva was not driven with

quite as much urgency as the original trip the full itinerary meant that there was little time to ease off the throttle.

In view of the extensive coverage recently given to the E Type's 50th birthday it would be difficult to have missed the fact that the car was launched at the Geneva Motor Show on March 15th 1961. Two cars were originally at the show – chassis number 885005, which now belongs to Dr Christian Jenny and chassis number 885002 better known by its registration number, 9600HP. The former was unveiled for members of the press in the restaurant at the Parc des Eaux Vives overlooking Lake Geneva before being moved to the Geneva Salon for the motor show, which was open to the public from the following day. The other car (9600 HP) was intended to take journalists and potential customers for test runs along the roads in the Parc des Eaux Vives. The response to the unveiling of the E Type was nothing short of spectacular – large crowds gathered in the exhibition hall to get a look at the car and the queues of people outside wanting a ride in the demonstrator grew to lengths that could not be accommodated.

Realising that they had underestimated the reaction of the public to their latest offering the Jaguar chiefs at Geneva (notably Sir William Lyons and Bob Berry) decided that they could do with another car on site as quickly as possible. A call was put into Browns Lane asking for reinforcements to be sent immediately.

All this was going on completely unbeknown to poor old Norman Dewis, who was happily trundling

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Just a little bit of history repeated



equipment from 77 RW and gave the car a service.

Finally setting off from Browns Lane at about 7.30 pm he arrived at Dover at about 9.45 pm – not bad for a journey of about 180 miles. Remember that there were few motorways in 1961 and Norman’s journey took him through the middle of London ... he recalls hitting all the lights in the Edgware Road at green by virtue of travelling through them at about 70 mph.

Opposite: In Coventry Transport Museum Dr Ralf Speth (Jaguar Land Rover CEO) exchanges a few words with Jaguar legend, Norman Dewis.

Below: Monday morning all the cars gathered in Millennium Square, Coventry, ready for the off.

round MIRA in 77 RW (the first prototype E Type Roadster) carrying out brake tests. The earliest indication he had that something was amiss was when one of the officials at MIRA flagged him down and told him he had to return to the Jaguar factory tout de suite. Norman duly did as he was asked and, when he arrived back at Browns Lane mid-afternoon, was told that he had to take 77RW to Geneva to be there by 10:00 the following morning. He protested that he had better go home to pack a bag, only to be told that someone from the factory had already been to see his wife and that a packed bag was to hand. When he pointed out that it would mean driving almost non-stop through the night, despite having been up since early morning, it also fell on deaf ears. Norman resigned himself to his fate and went off to get some fish and chips for his tea, whilst the Jaguar engineers removed the brake test





Above: Jaguar Heritage's Chief Technician, Richard Mason, helps ensure that the rally stickers are applied without too many bubbles.

Opposite: Hazel Barratt and Derek Hood brave the damp and cold of an early morning start in Coventry.

Below right: With the Jaguar band playing and the Mayor of Coventry waving the Union flag, the cars set off on the first leg of their journey.

Opposite: Ex-Jaguar saloon car racer Win Percy (left) and ex Jaguar Le Mans winner, Martin Brundle (right) entertained us after dinner at Goodwood, recounting some of their Jaguar memories.

Below: E Type Register members Gaynor Cauter and Len Hand arrive at a cold Castle Combe for a lunch stop.

When he arrived at the ferry terminal to catch the 10:00 boat to Ostend he was told that he was too late and that the loading doors had already been shut. However, once the official on the quayside had shone his torch on the car and realised what it was he quickly telephoned the men on the ferry and told them to reopen the doors, as there was a car on the dock that they would definitely want to look at. Needless to say, Norman made it onto the

having now been without sleep for about 28 hours, only to be told that he was urgently needed to take potential buyers up the hill for test runs in the car he had just delivered. Which is how he spent the rest of the day. What is all the more amazing is that when you talk to Norman today, now a sprightly individual a mere 90 years old, you could easily believe that given the chance he would do it all again tomorrow.

For the 2011 trip a fabulous selection of E Types was gathered covering almost the whole spectrum of cars built at Browns Lane during the 13 year production run. To meet us in Geneva were two of the very earliest prototypes and on the run was 1 VHP, the first right-hand drive production car together with HDU 555N, the very last E Type built, which is part of the Jaguar Heritage collection.

My chauffeur for the expedition was fellow JDC member Martin Heathcote who had taken part in the 40th anniversary trip in 2001. He was keen to repeat the experience 10 years later.

Starting on Sunday 27th February our first port of call was Coombe Abbey hotel just outside Coventry where we picked up our route books and schedule for the week. Unfortunately, it was a cold wet day and there really were not many opportunities to stand among the cars chewing the cud. The first person I met in the hotel foyer was ex F1 driver and 1990 Jaguar Le Mans winner Martin Brundle. He was on the trip with his wife Liz in a Series 3 Roadster that he has owned



ferry and then, once into Belgium, drove through the night to Geneva. The journey is made all the more remarkable by the fact that not only was he travelling on 'A' roads



but, as many of us know, the headlights on early E Types were really not very good.

Norman arrived at the Parc des Eaux Vives at about 9.45 am – to be greeted by Sir William Lyons who in the manner of a military officer said little more than "Well done, Dewis, carry on". Norman sought out Bob Berry to ask about his hotel accommodation

for two years. Although he may have been the most easily recognised he was not the only well-known name from the Jaguar world to be taking part.

We drove from Coombe Abbey hotel to the Coventry Transport Museum for dinner. Guest speakers included Dr Ralf Speth (Jaguar Land Rover CEO) who spoke of the special place the E Type held in Jaguar's history and of course Norman Dewis who told us about his original drive in 77 RW. Norman was flying to Geneva the following day so that he could be at the opening of the motor show.

We left our cars overnight in Millennium Square in front of the Museum and returned to our hotel on an old double-decker bus. Up bright and early next day we returned on the same bus and were greeted by the Jaguar band and the mayor of Coventry, Brian





Kelsey, ready to wave us off on the first leg of our journey. The first port of call was not too far down the road as, despite the normally stringent security restrictions in place, we were allowed to drive around the internal perimeter road of the Jaguar development site at Whitley. All of the staff lined the pavements taking pictures of the cavalcade. Try as I might I did not get a glimpse of any secret Jaguar project cars.

From Whitley we followed directions in the superbly prepared Jaguar Heritage route book which took us along some lovely 'A' roads to Castle Coombe race circuit near Chippenham for our lunch stop. For



anyone who wanted, the track was open for parade laps. I was pleased to watch Jonathan Turner and James Blackhall in their genuine lightweight E Type parading as only a very fast sports car can. Sadly this valuable car, one of only twelve made and with an estimated value of about £2million, succumbed to



mechanical problems later on the trip, which despite a team of knowledgeable and well equipped back-up mechanics, led by Jaguar Heritage's Richard Mason, it could not be repaired. Having anticipated every eventuality, two of the three Land Rover Discovery support vehicles that accompanied us were towing trailers. These contained new Jaguar XF diesels which, in the case of terminal breakdown, could for the duration of the journey be exchanged for an ailing E Type.

Our next stop was Goodwood House hotel which is located in glorious countryside about one mile from Goodwood House. In the evening we were taken to Goodwood House by coach for a conducted tour and dinner, after which we were treated to an impromptu chat by Martin Brundle and fellow Jaguar racing driver Win Percy. Following a nasty accident a few years back Win is only able to get around with aid of two walking sticks and, despite being in considerable pain, remained in remarkably high spirits throughout

the week. His car for the journey was a 3-litre XF S diesel fitted with hand controls. Rumour has it that, on the return journey his average speed from Geneva to Calais was 91 mph and that, excluding time spent on Euro Tunnel, he completed the trip to Coventry at an average of 74 mph. The only information missing is the fuel consumption figure.

Day three started with a trip up the famous Goodwood Hill, albeit at a slightly sedate pace following a brand-new Rolls Royce from the nearby factory. From there we went on to the Goodwood race track for more parade laps. Having watched many races at Goodwood it was interesting to drive the circuit to see it from a different perspective – I was surprised by how wide the road is.

With barely a chance to retrieve our passports from our suitcases we left Goodwood for a dash along the south coast to Folkestone to catch the

Opposite: Tour Organiser, Tony O'Keefe poses in the sun before we leave Reims.

Below: The last off the line – HDU 555N is part of the Jaguar Heritage collection and was driven by Heritage's Finance Director, Tony Duckhouse.



Above: Christian Jenny and Georg Donni needed full weather gear and crash helmets for their journey in the Group 44 Replica. As they already live in Switzerland they did the journey in the reverse order.

Above left: Charles Cross and Dennis Robson in their 3.8 Series 1 FHC pass Trevor and Vanessa Schofield in their 4.2 Series 1 FHC.

Opposite: Nigel Webb and Dee Gardner nicely framed in our rear view mirror in the afternoon sunshine as we head towards Dijon

Opposite: A stray XKR does not look too much out of place in among the E Types.



cross channel shuttle. As soon as we reached the far side we took advantage of the French toll roads to complete the day's lengthy journey which finished in Reims. Our hosts for the evening were the good people of the Taittinger champagne house. We

Above: Ex F1 Driver and Jaguar Le Mans winner Martin Brundle seen in his Series 3 Roadster with his wife, Liz. He was allocated number 3 as that was the number on the XJR 9 that he took to victory at Le Mans.

Opposite: Catching us up quickly, Georg Donni and Christian Jenny never stayed behind anything for long.

Below: Current Chairman of Ford UK and ex-Jaguar Land Rover CEO, Joe Greenwell with his wife, Anne, in their Series 3 Roadster await their turn to complete a few laps on the undulating Dijon-Prenois circuit.



Opposite: Pretty cars all in a row. At the head of the column is the Series 1 FHC of John and Anne Cornwell.

Below: E Types in the snow. Driving through the mountain passes on our way into Switzerland.



were given a conducted tour of their extensive cellars followed by a superbly well-prepared meal. It was quite a learning experience, for example, I discovered that the more champagne you drink the better it tastes.

With only the slightest of sore heads we woke to a very cold but bright start on Tuesday morning. Many of the cars parked on the shady side of the hotel car park needed to have ice scraped off their windscreens. The first stop of the day was the old Grand Prix circuit at Reims – a great photo opportunity not to be missed. A few laps of the circuit, now all open public roads, was called for and Nigel Webb's Series 1 Roadster made a fabulous noise as he howled past the pits. With a short break for lunch en-route our primary destination for the afternoon was the motor racing track at Dijon-Prenois. This is not a track I knew much about and was surprised to find that it had been used for Formula 1 races up to 1984. It might best be described as a Tarmac roller-

coaster. It was great fun to drive, but I suspect the heavy undulations would make it quite tiring for more than about half a dozen laps.

Our last evening in France was spent at Chateau Chailly about half an hour from Dijon. This hotel certainly had the nicest rooms of the whole trip and afforded a great setting for taking pictures. The big question over our evening meal was whether the mountain pass through the Haut Jura would be open in the morning or, if there had been a snow fall, and we would be making the trip along the less interesting motorway. Fortunately, advanced scouts from the Jaguar Heritage support team confirmed that the passes were clear and we enjoyed a great drive through snow-banked roads. Travelling through such beautiful scenery in a convoy of E Types is certainly to be recommended as a means of lifting ones spirits.

Once in Geneva, and having overcome the horrors of their traffic jams, we arrived at the Parc des Eaux Vives for lunch, where it had all started almost fifty years earlier. There to greet us were Norman Dewis and Jaguar's Managing Director Mike O'Driscoll. Norman's chariot from 50 years earlier, 77 RW, was parked in pride of place outside the front door. Sadly the car's current owner, Michael Kilgannon, could not be with us. After lunch we all took the opportunity to snap pictures of Norman standing by the car.

A quick dash to our hotel in the afternoon took far longer than planned because of the weight of traffic – adding 50 E Types to the Thursday afternoon rush-hour probably didn't help. We had little time to freshen up before once again setting out on a coach ride – this time to the Geneva Motor Show.

The first major stand we saw was Bertone where they were displaying their concept new small Jaguar. Before the show I had seen pictures of the car and thought it looked good. In the flesh it is a disappointment. It bears no resemblance to any of Jaguar's current product, set looking more like a small X350 with rear suicide doors. I can understand





performance package. With a top speed of 186 mph and a 0-60 time just over 4 seconds this is claimed to be the fastest production car that Jaguar have ever produced. With a price tag of £97,000 it is not cheap, but against its supercar rivals it does represent good value for money. The car is available in five different colours – the general opinion was that the other four, whatever they are, would be better than the colour on display at Geneva. **See our special feature on page 66.**

why Jaguar has shown no interest in the car. It would not enhance their current range. **See page 40.**

Moving through various exhibition halls to the Jaguar stand proper there were two cars that just had to be seen. The first was the XKR-S and the other was Christian Jenny's original 1961 show car which has now been fully restored and looks brand-new – there were those who asked why the E Type was not given a more prominent place – I guess the answer can only be because Jaguar are no longer selling E Types.

The XKR-S has an impressive pedigree and following 2 years of development delivers an exciting

Friday was a rest day, no driving was required and we enjoyed a full lunch on a well equipped restaurant boat that cruised gently around Lake Geneva. Our final meal in the evening was in a large private dining room in the Intercontinental Hotel. After dinner, short speeches were made by Tony O'Keefe, Mike O'Driscoll, Martin Brundle, and of course the man of the week, Norman Dewis. Martin Brundle had been extremely pleased with his journey pointing out that for 50 year old cars E Types were more than capable of keeping up with and overhauling modern traffic. He did wonder if he might swap his Series 3 V12 car for a 6-cylinder model as through the mountain passes he had struggled to keep up with Henry Pearman, of Eagle fame's, 4.2 litre Series 1 car, which appeared to hold the road better.



Saturday morning was something of an anti-climax as we prepared to make our journey home. The organised trip was over, and we were to find our own way back to the UK without formal support. Many of us broke the journey with an overnight stop in Reims. Sunday saw us back in the UK feeling somewhat deflated after the superb experiences of the previous week.

The components of this tour, the cars, personnel, venues, and media coverage all served to underline that even today the E Type holds a very special place in the heart of the motoring world. Drivers travelled from far and wide to participate in this run, which even as it was happening, became part of the living history of the E Type. It was a great opportunity to catch up with old friends and to make new ones. Chances for reunions are plentiful this year with so many E Type related events taking place and, if not, then there is always 2021 to look forward to.



Opposite: American Gary Bartlett keeps this car in the UK for trips such as this one. It has a fabulous patina looking little different from when it took part in the 40th anniversary trip in 2001. Co-driver this year was the editor of Octane magazine – Robert Coucher.

Left, top to bottom: My chauffeur for most of the 1800 miles was Martin Heathcote, seen here enjoying the midday Alpine sun. Fifty-year old car, ninety-year old driver – Norman Dewis reunited with 77 RW and they both look in superb good health. Dr Christian Jenny is now the owner of this Series 1 E Type which was the original Geneva show car from 1961. Seen here back on the Jaguar stand.

Below: Despite receiving a good deal of approval in the motoring press the Bertone styled Jaguar concept car was a step back in time.

The interior of the Bertone styled concept car looked interestingly different.

