

LIVING WITH “REGAL RED” OUR XK 150

FIFTY YEARS, MANY ADVENTURES AND FOUR CHILDREN LATER

STORY BY JOHN LEDBROOK | PHOTOS SUPPLIED BY JOHN AND FRIENDS

Do we or don't we? The deadline to register for the Perth National Rally had all but passed when we decided that we would give it a go! A few phone calls and emails and we were in. Now, the work begins to get car and passengers ready for a 5,500 mile drive. Liz: “Where are my clothes going to fit?” Umm, the concept of us being on our second honeymoon wasn't received with the enthusiasm I had anticipated...

An extract from John's article in the July 2012 AJD about their trip across the Nullarbor and back. Ed

The die was cast for me at a young age with my family's involvement in cars. My father had a keen interest in cars over his lifetime and did most of his own repairs, including rebuilding an engine and converting a Chevrolet car to a Ute very early on. I don't know if he had heard about this being done elsewhere or if he was the original “Ute” man!

Dad learnt, the hard way, to be careful of what he said around his sons. He had brought home a car to use as spares for our family car. My brother and I asked him what he wanted the car for and he said he was going to “wreck” it. We thought we would help him out with this project so we wrecked the car for him whilst he was at work. We used hammers, an axe and a crowbar, smashed windows, headlights and broke off the spark plugs and generally demolished what was a going car. I never, ever heard my dad swear but he must have been close that day when he returned home!

My first experience with Jaguars was when a tradesman I was working with invited me to go to a property between Bourke and Louth on a Queen's Birthday long weekend. He had a Mk V that had an XK engine fitted to it and I had several hours behind the wheel over that long weekend. That could have been the catalyst for my Jaguar connectivity.

When I started my apprenticeship an FJ Holden was my means of getting around. The next car was a Peugeot 403. I enjoyed the 403, it was the type of car a young driver could not get into much trouble with.

For entertainment over the weekends a drive down Parramatta Road, calling into Geoghans Sports Cars was always something to look forward to.



John and Liz at the 2019 50th Anniversary NR

I can remember seeing a white 150 S there and it had black crinkle paint on the cam covers and SU carburetors. It looked very nice. I had no knowledge of what an ‘S’ model meant then, I just knew I liked it.

On one of those drives I spotted an XK150 in John Thompson's Performance Cars. This was a year or so after seeing the 150 in Geoghans. I asked for a test drive and that was it, I was hooked and have been now for fifty years.

A deposit was put down on the 22nd of June 1969 and I called back later in the week to pick the car up. On the deposit docket was a proviso that the car was subject to a ‘performance test’ upon being picked up. More about that later.

I now had two cars, the 403 and the XK. Not long after I sold the 403 and the 150 was my daily transport. I was still an apprentice and attending TAFE once a week. In my final two years I had to change Colleges as my original College did not run the course that year. The

new TAFE carpark was only for teachers. The students had to park on the road. I did not like this so I parked in the staff carpark. I got away with that for close to the whole year until they worked out that the Jag in the carpark belonged to an apprentice. Damn!!

Not long after buying the XK I met up with a girl whom I had known since the age of eleven. Liz and I had both been members of our local swimming club. She was now a Uni student. I offered her a lift home from the railway station and we have been together ever since.

Liz was studying for a BA Dip Ed majoring in Maths at Sydney University. Before we married I was carrying out repairs which involved the overdrive so the engine was out and car was undergoing a general going over. Liz would be around on the weekends helping were she could. Putting the carburetors back together was a job she took on. I think Mechanical Engineering may have been a good course for her, she is always there for me to discuss maintenance on the car with. Poor woman,



Regal Red Gracing the town of Chiltern at the 2019 National Rally

she knows more about this car than a lot of men know about theirs and can comfortably recite word for word all the relevant facts about the car!

One hard learned lesson occurred whilst assembling the gearbox was to “check” for the gear selections *before* you install the engine. On the 150 the

engine gearbox/overdrive comes out as one unit, and goes back into the car as one. I had to remove it all again to correctly assemble the gearbox.

The car featured in our wedding in 1971, as the Bridesmaid’s car, and then we drove it to Queensland on our Honeymoon. We overnighted in our

car after we attended a Parade through Cessnock with the MG club and other JDCA members. We took the seats out and placed blankets and pillows on the floor and slept there for the night. I am amazed my wife is still with me!!!

Sometime later we moved to Forbes where Liz was employed at Red Bend College as a Maths teacher driving the XK to school every day. Red Bend was an all boys’ school then and Liz was fresh out of Uni. Imagine a young teacher in a miniskirt with long legs and long honey blonde hair arriving at school in a red Jag. Years later, one of the boy’s mothers confessed to Liz that “half the boys were in love with her and the other half were in love with her car!”

Long and short memorable drives are plentiful. The longest drive without sleep was when I returned home from the Solomon Islands. I had driven to Brisbane and left the car with relatives. When we returned to Brisbane I had a few hours sleep and was on the road at 4am. I drove to Sydney to visit a friend who had been taken to Hospital while I was away. I arrived in Sydney in time for visiting and a quick bite to eat then back in the car for the drive back to Forbes, arriving home around midnight. Strangely I felt invigorated, awake and relaxed.



The subject of conversation on the 2013 Post Rally Tour at Bathurst

On one occasion I had a contract to inspect and report on Liquid Petroleum Gas installations in schools in western NSW. Instead of taking a work vehicle I thought it would be good to take the XK for a country drive. The kids in some of those remote schools loved seeing the car and waved when I arrived and left. Some of the roads were not tarred and at one school after travelling some distance on dirt the principal of the school asked me if I was lost and informed me that the Redex trial had finished some years before!

Researching the history of the car I discovered that it was the first Right Hand Drive (RHD) Fixed Head Coupe (FHC) 3.8 S manufactured on Monday 4th August in 1960. Our car was the 33rd of one hundred and fifteen XKs manufactured in this configuration. Biscuit was the colour of the interior trim and Regal Red was the exterior. It was dispatched from the factory on 22nd January 1960 and was bought by Mr John Bodie of London. The Retail Dealer was Harold Radford and Co. of Kensington, whose plaque is attached to the right hand side sill face and is clearly visible when the door is open.

John Bodie wanted a fully optioned car. He ordered his car to be factory fitted with a boot rack, badge bar and the centre dash panel to be upholstered in red leather instead of the standard grey leather finish. Also a map tray was fitted under the dash on the left hand side. In addition the car also had period racing mirrors installed on top of the mudguards.

As well as being retailers of new cars Harold Radford & Co. of South Kensington SW7 also had a bespoke coach building business. They fitted a Motorola radio into the car and possibly custom made rubberized leather bound floor mats with 'Spot the Dot' fixings to the floor. Fitted on top of the front guards was a bulbous light, with a red and white lens on opposite sides of the glass lens. The switch for these lights was fitted just under the dash on the 'A' pillar. I believe all of the above items were Factory fitted. I have been told that these lights were fitted on cars likely to be parked in fog areas, so oncoming traffic could determine the position of the car. This car was based in London. On the dash, next to the glove box on the left hand side is a multi-directional map light which could have been fitted by any of the car's previous owners.

Our car had some personalized treatment from Harold Radford in the colour selection of 'Regal Red' as well



Our daughter on her wedding day



Participating in the 2019 Mountain Rally

as the fitment of extras. The exterior colour, "Regal Red" was a special order paint finish. Regal Red being manufactured by ICI Belco and is believed to be a colour used by Rolls Royce. This car was the only XK (120, 140 or 150) to be painted Regal Red, which is a metallic paint.

The original Registration booklet records the change in ownership from John Bodie to D E and J Levy, the second owners who employed John Brodie, a Surveyor, in their property development firm. The ownership then passed to Ian Spry for a sum of £600.

On August 14th 1963 Clayton's Cars issued a notice to Thomas Cook and Sons Ltd., Shipping and Forwarding Agents of London, stating that "this

car is in excellent condition with the exception of a small dent on the off-side and near side front overriders. The car was insured for £850 and shipped from London to Melbourne on the "Port Brisbane" to Consignee Sprys, Riverina Transport Co in Griffith, NSW, Australia

During his ownership Ian Spry had an accident in the 150 damaging the front guard and the car was sent to Brysons in Melbourne for repair. The repair presented a small problem in that they could not match the paintwork as Regal Red was a non-standard colour and could not be matched with paints available in Australia at that time so 'Carmen Red' was selected and the car remained in that hue for the next thirty odd years until a total respray was car-

ried out during my ownership in the late nineties when it was returned to its original colour of Regal Red.

Whilst in the ownership of Ian Spry, Ian's father returned home from a trip overseas, with a Phillips, 12 volt record player to fit into the XK which played 45 RPM records. I have not seen the player installed but have seen photos of a 150 with one installed. I have the record player and have heard it play a record on the work bench. The player is a positive earth and is not suitable for the car now as I have changed the earth to negative. I wonder if it was played whilst driving or was it only used on picnics.

Ian Spry owned the car until 1966 when he sold it to the new owner in



Competing with my grandson in the 2013 Alpine Classic Rally

Albury, NSW. No other recorded history is known of the car until June 22nd 1969, when I, purchased it from John Thompson Performance Cars.

Our car has undergone various repairs and alterations over the years but remains basically in standard mechanical condition. Brian Pleash and Terry Hilton need special mention here for their expertise and patience in the restoration of this car. Paint, carpet and trim have all been replaced and minor alterations have been carried out. I mentioned before when I picked the car up that it was subject to a performance test. Years later I found out that the problem with the lack of performance occurred after driving in the rain or going through a car wash. The problem was that the gutter that



extends around the firewall and down the sides of the engine bay, actually stopped above the air cleaner and water could drain directly into the air cleaner. I have extended that gutter and it now drains past the air cleaner.

After fifty years of owning and driving our XK 150 S we still enjoy using the car. These days, driving our car anywhere, will always raise comments from bystanders. Recently in a service station at Lithgow on our way to the Mountain Rally, an elderly man who was a passenger in a car, walked over, on walking sticks, to ask about the 150. The female service station attendant commented that our car was the best she had seen all day and a man who pulled up behind us when waiting for the Wiseman's Ferry got out of his car and came over to us and commented that cars like ours could only be seen in museums or showrooms these days. He was very happy to see the car on the road and being used.

Our four children have only known the XK being there all their lives. It is part of the family. Once my eldest daughter had a speech to prepare and present to her English class. She certainly got their attention when she stood up and declared, "My dad is having an affair and it's been going on now for over fifteen years." Things calmed down after a while when the truth about "the lady in red" was revealed!

Our youngest daughter wanted to use the XK as her wedding car with me as her chauffeur. A lot of time was spent detailing the car and driving it to the Hunter Valley where she was being married. After we got her into it in her wedding dress it looked like a white puff ball had exploded in the cabin. Luckily we only had to drive on a quiet country road to the church in a vineyard. Changing gears was interesting. I could not see the gearstick, everything was covered in white material. A great moment to share with my daughter on her wedding day.

The Mountain Rally has always been a favourite event for us to compete in, Liz enjoys navigating and I enjoy the roads that you usually never explore. Contrary to speculation, I do not compete purely for the delicious soups, cake and sandwiches made by community groups in rural locations.

I have also competed in Rallies organized by the Classic Rally Club and on one occasion my grandson navigated for the weekend. I hope he does not read this as it was the first and only time we have been lost! We did however, win the prize for the best presented car on that Rally.

We are very fortunate that, in the last 50 years the question of selling the 150 has never arisen. It is considered part of the family, our eldest daughter thinks it should be hers, our son is 6ft.6 and cannot fit in it, so what will become of it? We are not sure. Perhaps, maybe in another 10 years, we might have to think about a modern Jag.

Being members of the Australian Jaguar Drivers Club and lately, the Jaguar Drivers' Club of Canberra has greatly increased the enjoyment of owning our car and the special friendships and amazing people we have met over fifty years from all walks of life and places near and far. To have kept our car for so long would not have been possible without the association with like-minded friends.

We have travelled to all states in Australia in our car, twice to National Rallies in WA, once in 1984 and again in 2012. The first National Rally we attended was in Cowra in 1972 and we have attended many Rallies since then. Liz enjoys our drives in the car as much as I do. After travelling to Perth in 2012 and returning home some eighteen days later, we pulled into the garage and she looked at me and said, "Let's go again." We are planning to go to Perth again in 2020.

Post Script: My internet research has led me to finding the original owner of our car. He is amazed that his car has survived and that I have found him alive and well and approaching ninety years old. In his emails to me he has confirmed the details regarding the car when he purchased it. John Bodie also told me that the luggage rack was fitted as the suitcases used in those days were rigid and difficult to fit in the boot. He remembers on one trip to Italy arriving at his destination to find that his luggage had gone, removed in a village that he had passed through by very crafty villains. John always finishes his emails with the notation: 'Hope you are looking after my car'.

Liz is now keen to visit John in England and photograph the two owners together. After fifty years of ownership what other surprises will we find? This car keeps on giving and leading us to adventures in all directions.