

MODIFIED

TEN YEARS AFTER

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY JIM PATTEN

Found in a barn a decade ago, this 3.8 Mk 2 has been gradually transformed to finally become the beauty it is today. We drive it



MODIFIED

Mk 2

WHEN, IN 1966, legendary guitarist Albert Lee and bass player Leo Lyons joined a British blues band, variously named the Jaybirds, Blues Trip and Blues Yard, they changed the group's name to Ten Years After. Some say the name was inspired by the passing of ten years since Elvis Presley's most successful year, others that Leo saw the name in the *Radio Times*, ten years after the crisis of 1956 when Egypt nationalised the Suez Canal. In 2021, Tom Lenthall's Ten Years After moment marked the time he found a 3.8-litre Mk 2 saloon in a garage, desperate for resuscitation.

Would Tom have given a second thought to the lyrics of Losing the Dogs by Ten Years After, which opens with, 'Well you work the day sweatin' while you're tryin' to earn your bread'? Almost certainly not, but that is exactly what he was doing back in 2011, when, just four years after starting his new business specialising in Jaguars, he decided to restore his own Mk 2. At least he had a target in mind. Retaining much of the original essence of the car, he intended to make his Mk 2 a modern driver.

Tom is young enough not to be caught up in the nostalgia of 'I had one when I was a teenager', but likes the Mk 2 for its own qualities. Working around Jaguars for most of his adult life, his relationship with the marque could have gone either way; he might have tired of them from the intensity of his work, or form a deep bond. The latter prevailed and now he is totally immersed in everything Jaguar.

It was a sad sight that greeted Tom as a set of double wooden doors were pulled back on a lock-up garage. Barely visible beneath the piles of rubbish that had been thrown in and around the car, Tom knew immediately that it was a Mk 2 by the distinctive front form. The spotlights were smashed, the grille was damaged, and a big cable roll obscured the distinctive leaper. This would take some serious digging out before making any rash decisions.

Years of accumulated dirt and rubbish were cleared away to reveal a car well worth saving and one that would live again in Tom's dreams. He knew what he wanted, but had yet to work out the journey. All products would be the very best available to reflect the high quality of his company's work.

A genuine 3.8-litre with manual overdrive gearbox, it had the right credentials. The first job was to completely strip the car down to the last washer, with all the major body repairs – such as new floors, sills and so on – carried out in-house.

In homage to the Coombs options, Tom decided on a louvred bonnet, which, as well as distinctive, does serve a purpose in getting heat out of the engine bay. This, along with the bootlid, he made himself from aluminium. He also liked the Coombs subtle treatment of the rear wheelarches, which were flared out slightly. Knowing that he would be using wider wheels, he increased the flare ever so slightly to compensate.

With the body sorted, Tom turned his attention to the mechanical side of things, doing the work in his spare time; after all, he had a business to run. Keeping the original engine in standard appearance, Tom rebuilt it himself to fast road tune, with electronic sparks: quick and yet still docile enough for the road. His company has designed its own TL Performance exhaust system, which, with

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ceramic-coated manifolds, was his choice for the Mk 2. Cooling was by a highly efficient multi-core radiator, from NAR. To transmit the power, he used a Realm Engineering sourced Toyota five-speed gearbox driving a 3.54:1 Powr-Lok differential.

Tom likes the handling of a Mk 2, but acknowledged that there was room for improvement. He also recognised the necessity of improved braking for a fast classic on modern roads. Although nothing was done to alter the basic Mk 2 suspension system, it was upgraded to include Harvey Bailey front springs and anti-roll bar. At the rear, a Harvey Bailey anti-roll bar was used in conjunction with the standard leaf springs. Gaz adjustable dampers were adopted all round. The racer in Tom knew that an early Mk 1 steering box has a quick ratio, but accepted

that it would be heavy. To combat that, he used the EZ electric power steering column. Brakes are Coopercraft all-round with four-pot calipers on the front. Avon CR28 205/15 tyres are fitted to MWS competition wire wheels.

A challenge presented itself with the interior. The original seats might look glorious, but they offer little support and are not too comfortable on a long run. However, X308 seats are wonderful. Tom located a set sourced from an upmarket Daimler and set about altering them to fit. Doing this at home, he says he spent far too many hours seeking a solution. The fronts, with their electric adjustment and heated base, proved the easier to adapt, while the rears were designed for a much wider car and considerable work went into getting the proportions right. Not only did the dimensions have to be altered, but it had to be done in such a way that the levels of comfort remained the same. The results are perfect and Tom reckons it was all worthwhile, especially as he now has the pattern to do more sets to suit customer demand. Trimmania retrimmed the seats in red leather, and also fitted the red wool carpets and a new headlining. Quickfit Safety Belt Services supplied the inertia reel belts with the correct Jaguar logo.

Looking for something just slightly different on the dash, Tom had Classical Dash finish the centre instrument panel in Piano Black, rather than vinyl, while the rest of the interior (including the X308 picnic tables in the back of the front seats), was re-veneered to an extremely high standard. Speedy Cables overhauled the instruments, while LEDs supplied by Better Car Lighting were used for the lights.

Pressure of work put the project into stall and it wasn't until late 2020, during the Covid lockdown, that Tom had time to resume (while the workshop was busier than ever, he did have spare time outside of working hours).

He wasn't without interesting cars in the interim. He bought and regularly uses a very standard XK 150 and can be seen commuting to work on a fine day. He also found a very nice Morris 1000 convertible for his wife Meg, to use for family fun, like multiple holidays in Cornwall, and speeding home late at night.

It didn't take too long to resurrect and finish the Mk 2. A Classic Car Stereo's sound system was fitted with iPhone connectivity, and the usual shakedown sorted any minor gremlins. ▶



ABOVE: Dash is pure Mk 2, but with luxurious veneer and a Piano Black instrument panel
BELOW: Still wearing its B-type 'head', this 3.8-litre engine packs a punch



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Ten years before

sourced modern Toyota gearbox is perfect and works in harmony with the car's balance. Easy to use with perfect ratios, the conversion makes complete sense.

The power, though, would be useless without a decent chassis and brakes. On deserted roads, I arrive at the twisties with some decent speed. Confident in the brakes, I dab them while changing down from third into second. There's hardly any roll or suggestion of oversteer as I stamp on the throttle and accelerate hard out of the corner, shifting gears along the straight. Fifth is redundant for now, that will come into play on long high-speed runs for effortless cruising.

Potholes and road irregularities are taken with scorn. I did expect some wrenching through the steering column, but the forces are absorbed before that point. At the end of the run, it is like parking up a modern car. No overheating and no fluid leaks. The difference, though, is visual. Unhindered by modern legislation, the shape retains its pure beauty.

Could this be the perfect Mk 2? Tom plans to use the Mk 2 for shows and as a demonstrator, but, speak to him nicely and it might even be for sale. **JP**

Thanks to: Tom Lenthall (0118 9731614; www.tomlenthall.co.uk)

ABOVE LEFT: Aluminium louvred bonnet was fabricated in-house. **ABOVE:** Seats may be from the X308, but they still have picnic tables in the back. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The subtle increase in the Coombs-inspired wheelarch flare is almost impossible to see.

We're still in lockdown, but our profession allows for permissible travel, and, on this bright sunny day, life almost feels normal, especially when I arrive at the workshop. Knowing how interested I would be in the detail, Tom has the Mk 2 on the ramp and my first glimpse is underneath. Here, I see the detail in the workmanship, and can examine the Realm gearbox, Harvey Bailey handling kit and exhaust system at close quarter. Tom is fussing, irked at how the new plated fasteners have deteriorated, but we all have to contend with that. After taking in the superb Gunmetal paint finish, it is my chance to drive.

I am so comfortable – the seats are a revelation and I would encourage anyone

having a Mk 2 modernised at Tom Lenthall Ltd to consider the option. Perhaps my biggest surprise is how good the EZ power steering system is. Tom knows I am not a fan and waits for my response: it is light, and self-centres without any snag. A good way to judge any set-up is to see how the wheel returns to centre just sliding through the fingers. This is a delight.

Perhaps it is the sight of the louvred bonnet ahead, but I sense the need for speed and the 3.8-litre engine is happy to oblige. This is one very fast car, and, like the Coombs modifications of the Sixties, needs no straight-port cylinder head or big carburettors to achieve the goal. It flies. As might be expected, the Realm-