

## Profile in Excellence



# X-ceptional Authority

On the Pacific shore, rare Jaguars rule

BY JIM DONNELLY AND CRAIG FITZGERALD  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEFF KOCH

Probably, it all comes down to a hard-calloused grip on the history. When it comes to Jaguars, and their lithe bolting to glory out of Coventry, that's the straw that stirs the drink, as overpaid guys in the NFL seem to like putting it. A singular reverence for these most distinguished of British sporting motorcars has made, and kept, XKs Unlimited a beacon in the odysseys of people just like them, in deep, unbreakable love with Jaguars.

Initially, anyway, that should be a little short of remarkable. The earliest rooting of XKs Unlimited goes back an even 35 years, to 1973, when its founder, Jason Len, was ensconced as a proper student of mechanical engineering at Cal Poly, formally known as California Polytechnic State University on the Central Coast in San Luis Obispo. If you've ever cruised up the Pacific Coast

Highway through that area, you know that Jags have always been easy to spot. Jason was grabbing some ready money as a student by first repairing them, then finding dormant examples to restore.

Ultimately, he located an area shop that had been operated by a specialist in British cars, who was planning on ceasing the business. That, to him, was opportunity defined. He bought the shop, also in San Luis Obispo, plus its inventory, which included a lot of arcane hand tools that seemed to date from the Rule Britannia era, but were essential for any early XK buildup that didn't involve a lot of nasty verbiage. On that note, most of the venerable Jaguars purring on the California coast back then were XK 120s, 140s and 150s, with the odd Mark 2 or Mark VII sedan also in the mix. The E-Type was still a new car back then, as

the Series III, including the V-12. For a long time, the early XKs paid for a lot of groceries at Ralphs before the world of Jaguar, like most others, inexorably pivoted.

Truthfully, at the time of the company's establishing, the E-Type was just another driver, especially in its hometown, maybe a trade-in for something less unpredictable as factory-new. The early reality of Jason's operation, however, is unquestionably changed now. A recent query of customer needs conducted by XKs Unlimited's Dave Light showed demonstrably that about 70 percent of them now are trying to keep E-Types—today, against some expectations, fully capable of six-digit resale—both potent and presentable. Not bad for a toss-off from not that far in the past. Trying to quantify their nouveau desirability, Dave told us, "Usually, it's for sentimental value.





**At XKs Unlimited, bodywork restoration tasks take place in a dedicated shop complex. One early XK fixed-head coupe gets its new metal massaged in the foreground.**

But the cars from the 1970s aren't throw-away cars. Jaguar never built those."

Here's an example of what that means at XKs Unlimited. To any stadium full, or so, of Jaguar adherents, the cry-in-the-bitters reality was that the E-Type never proceeded beyond the Series III, laid to rest for U.S. supplicants in 1975, in time for the coming of the comparatively unappreciated XJS. Jason and the Jag-nauts did something about it by creating the whimsically enraged E-Type Series IV. They grabbed a Series III V-12 2+2, chopped nine inches lengthwise, provided Series I coachwork, including the requisite covered headlamps, and beefed the V-12 to 400-plus horsepower, thanks to triple Webers and an overbore to 5.7 liters. Jay Leno liked the Series IV so much, as Victor Kiam might have put it, that he bought it.

At its core, XKs Unlimited is a parts provider for those expecting to exercise extra care when sourcing their Jaguar restoration. If you're a DIYer, or maybe just distant from California, the company can furnish just about anything in the way of major engine and body components, or less taxing stuff such as precise reproductions of original wooden dashboard panels. One thing that caught our eye at once, most favorably, was the offering of ultra-strong Carrillo connecting rods as part of an internal engine-rebuild kit. Carrillos knot together the rotating assemblies of a lot more very expensive powerplants, Jaguar and otherwise, than many people guess. Parts, big and not, presently constitute about 70 percent of XKs Unlimited's operations, enough to keep its 300-page catalog amply stuffed. A more recent sidelight is a segue into stock-



**Is a big Coventry straight-six proof against destruction? Not completely, but the engine and machining facility here can do just about anything needed to make one snarl in anger.**



**XKs Unlimited has broad skills needed to work on modern, fuel-injected Jaguar engines, too.**



**Need a fresh dash bezel for a Smiths ammeter or an interior domelamp? They've gotcha covered.**

**Any Jaguar needs proper ministrations. Hand-formed fenders are laboriously shaped and welded for this fixed-head-coupe XK. The upgrade to beefy disc brakes with Wilwood calipers gets a nod, too.**

ing parts for some other regionally popular Brits, the Land Rover Discovery, Land Rover Defender and Range Rover lineup. Beyond that, Jason and his team have launched WireWheelSource.com, distributing premium Dayton wire wheels and Vredestein tires, but also stocking wheel components for the broader range of British marques.

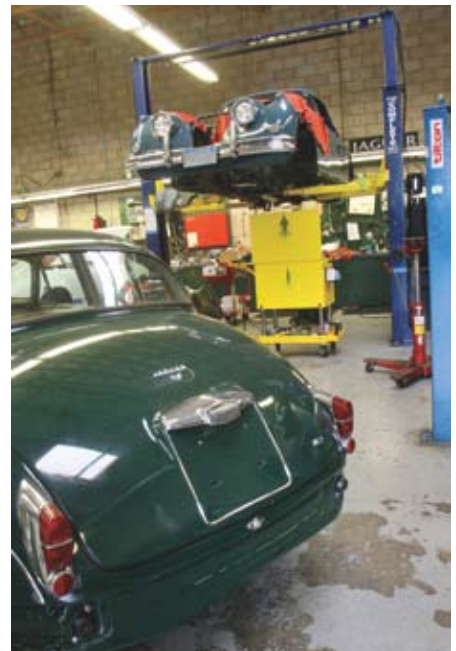
If parts represent the bulk of the work, restoring cars is an immovable adjunct to the daily business. XKs Unlimited's restoration shop is actually several separate installations, walled off to specialize in driveline and other mechanical work, body fabrication, finishing and hand-fixed interior trim. A separate service facility handles maintenance and upkeep for later-model Jaguars, MINIs and more recent off-roaders from Land Rover. The workforce now numbers around 40, nine of whom are dedicated

solely to restoration work. That, in turn, ensures a supply of restored Jaguars for sale to turnkey customers, in keeping with a marked escalation in purchaser interest for cars that can be driven and enjoyed at once.

And at this specialist in elite vehicles, supplying parts is considerably more involved than carrying boxes in the back door, emptying them, and handing their contents over the counter out front. XKs Unlimited is actively involved in developing braking systems and five-speed gearbox adaptations for timeless Jaguars, and, happily, electricals far more reliable than the ones the lads in Coventry spliced together. As Dave expressed, "Our upgraded wiring harnesses make for a vast improvement over the original. We build them here from scratch." 🌐



**Original steel-girder frame, rivaling London Bridge for stoutness and longevity, gets fresh underpinnings such as lightweight control arms, disc-brake and rack-and-pinion conversions.**



**Parts, customer care, full rebuilds, performance upgrades and even turnkey sales work here.**