

# Heart over HEAD

When John Jones bought his **TR7** for just £100 back in 1994, little did he think it would become the perfect example it is today

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If we are to fully understand John Jones's motivation behind taking on his mammoth TR7 project, it's essential to start by telling the crazy story behind it. This tale is one which, like so many, begins in a pub over a beer with a good mate. The year was 1994 and a young John and friend Neil hatched a plan for an epic road trip across mainland Europe to Greece. More beer followed and the conversation turned to a forlorn looking TR7 that was sitting unloved in a village garage. Theirs for just £100, John and Neil set to work tarding the car up ready for their big trip. The pair rented a garage on a farm and painted the car Ford Rosso Red before, handkerchiefs still being dyed red with each sneeze, hitting the road to Greece.

The trip wasn't without incident, recalls John. 'As we blasted along the Italian Autostrada near Turin, there was an almighty 'bang!' We coasted to the side of the road, followed by a trail of oil and coolant. The fan and pulley had come off, punching a hole in the radiator before ricocheting back and tearing the sump. A local garage pieced the car back together, welding the sump in-situ, brazing the radiator and sending us on our way. I guess that's the point at which a future restoration of the car became inevitable. Everyone likes the plucky underdog and this one really was a fighter.'

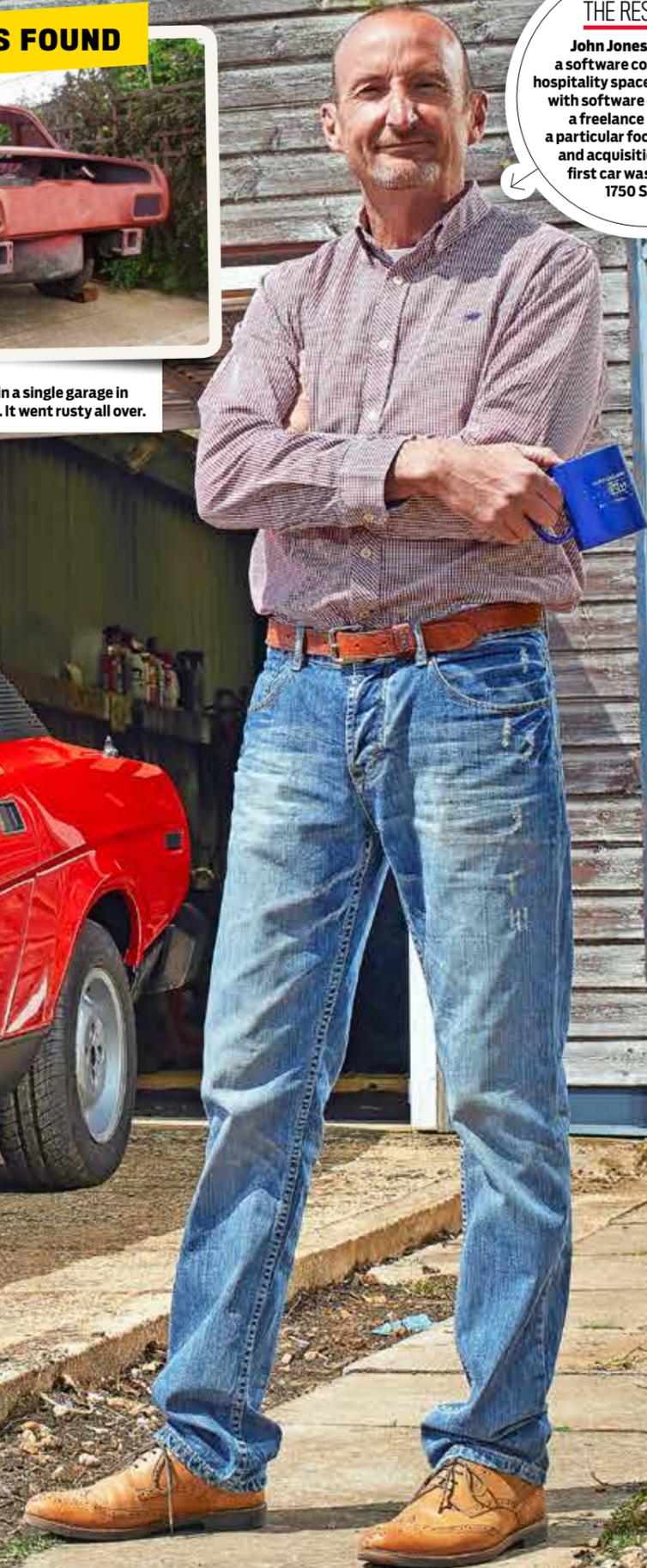
## AS FOUND



John had started a token restoration in a single garage in 1999. He took the paint off then left it. It went rusty all over.

## THE RESTORER

John Jones was MD of a software company in the hospitality space before working with software companies on a freelance basis, with a particular focus on mergers and acquisitions. His very first car was an Allegro 1750 Sport.



## THE BIG RESTORATION /

By the time that the chaps had returned to Blighty, the paint had faded, the body was full of dings and the big ends had gone, so in August 1994 the car was put into a lock-up and forgotten about until 1996, when John bought his first house and moved the car into his single garage. By 1999, John had summoned the enthusiasm to begin restoring the car, removing the paint and filler and returning the car to bare metal, as well as making his first attempt at MIG welding, before once again the car was left untouched for a number of years as life took over.

### Decision time

Fast forward to 2005 and John had moved house, the car was lingering in a barn and it was decision time. 'I had to decide whether to press on and restore the car properly or scrap it and move on. I couldn't bring myself to scrap it, and I knew that if I tried to sell what I knew was a fundamentally good car would just attract tyre kickers and time wasters given its surface rusted state, so there really was only one option left.'

And so it was that John made the use of his new home's large garden and built himself a garage big enough to restore the car before moving the now very sad looking TR in and setting to work. The first job was to slowly strip the car to a shell before mounting the body on a rotisserie to enable better access to the areas in need of attention. John confesses that this was the low point of the project. 'There really was nothing positive about this bit. No easy wins, just rot, rot and more rot with oil and grime thrown in for good measure.' With the car baring all, John made a start on the metalwork working from the front of the car back, with the engine bay fitch panels first to go under the MIG. Then bit by bit, panel by panel, the TR regained its rigidity. Says John: 'It was slow progress so when I wanted a little win, I would get to work on the running gear, stripping cleaning, painting and reassembling subassemblies ready for them to eventually be fitted to the shell.' 'But it wasn't until the welding was complete and the body could be removed from the rotisserie that I finally felt that I was winning. That was the turning point for sure.'

With the body solid once more, attention could turn to paintwork. John spent a huge amount of time preparing the body, applying filler, flattening and repeating in time honoured tradition, but as time marched on and mechanical components were one by one restored, so the level of finish required changed. Says John: 'As the project went on, I kept upping the ante and so it



Two-litre engine now runs as well as it looks.

Original interior is a great place to be. Oh-so Seventies.

### TECH SPEC

**Engine** 1998cc/4-cyl/OHC  
**Power** 90bhp@5000rpm  
**Torque** 105lb ft@3000rpm  
**Gearbox** 4-speed manual  
**0-60mph** 11.3sec  
**Top speed** 108mph  
**Fuel economy** 33mpg  
**Price new** £3334  
**Value now** £12,000

Attention to detail is just superb.



DODWELLS



New old stock decals adorn the wheel centres, bonnet and boot lid.

## 'John is incredibly grateful for the help he received from his mates during the build'

eventually became apparent that a professional respray would be required. I read in Practical Classics that Nigel Clark had entrusted the respray of his beloved GT6 to Complete Car Care in Thedingworth, which isn't far from me, so I had a chat with Nigel before booking my car in with them for a bare metal respray.' In order to guarantee their work, the body shop removed the filler and primer John had applied, taking the car back to bare metal once more. 'That was disheartening,' admits John, 'but the finished result speaks for itself. It was definitely the right decision entrusting the prep and paint to the experts.'

### Opportunity knocks

In total, the car was away at the body shop for seven months, giving John plenty of time to strip and rebuild the engine while the garage was empty. John had sourced what he was told was a fully rebuilt 2.0 litre lump to replace the tired 1850 lump that took him to Greece, but chose to strip the engine anyway to check it over and found the 'rebuild' to have amounted only to a fetching coat of paint. Despondent but not beaten, John bought a refurbished crankshaft complete with bearings and fitted these having established that the bores and pistons at least were good enough to go again. He removed the valves and lapped them into their seats before reassembling the engine with new ancillaries including a rebuilt set of carburettors and a viscous fan that he had bought for the car 30 years previously.

The gearbox also got the full John treatment, being cleaned and carefully checked before being reassembled with new gaskets and seals. 'The gearbox mounts', reports John, 'are always a problem on these cars. The originals turn to jelly after years of oil leaks and replacements are too hard and transfer too much noise and vibration into the cabin.' Striking a compromise between the two, John fitted a pair of mounts from a Volvo 340 that offer OE performance and are discreet enough not to detract from the TR's originality.

By now the rolling shell had returned. Resplendent in red it was a great giver of motivation as John entered the final stage of the project: reassembly. Although John did most of the work on the car himself, he is incredibly grateful for the help he received from his mates throughout the build who called in from time to time when their diaries allowed.

## Here's how John did it

### 1 2005-2018 Welding!



John embarked on a massive welding project, cutting out rot and replacing it with new metal over many years.

### 2



### 3 APRIL 2018 Second time lucky

John sourced a 'rebuilt' engine, but ended up rebuilding it himself... properly.



### MARCH 2018 Paint time

The car went to Complete Car Care for paint, after John had seen their work showcased in PC on Nigel Clark's GT6.



### 4 JAN 2019 Big build up

With the car back from the paint shop, reassembly could begin.

'It was so satisfying bolting shiny parts I'd previously restored onto the freshly painted shell' beams John.



### 5 JULY 2021 Jolly good!

After a successful MOT pass in April, John's TR7 attracted the attention of designer Harris Mann at its first event at Gaydon.



John's TR7 looks as good now as the day it left the showroom.



Taught and together, just as it should be.



## WHAT'S IT LIKE TO DRIVE

Lowering myself into the tartan seat, the first thing that strikes me is the fit and finish of this interior. John has done a superb job of restoring it to factory standard (and better) circa 1977. Turn the key and the wedge bursts into life, that slant-four engine producing a pleasing burble at the back of the car

through the peashooter OE spec exhaust system. Drop it into gear and off the kerb and the engine pulls quite happily. John had only just finished the car when we visited, so I'm getting a smell of newness as paint burns off the exhaust, reminding me not to get too carried away as he is still in the early stages of

running in the new 2-litre engine. Suspension is well composed, and the car feels really planted on the road, just like it should. This remarkable TR7 resto really is a genuine Triumph.

Neil, with whom John had driven to Greece all those years previously, was on hand when it came to fitting the engine and gearbox to the car as were friends Chris, a young mobile mechanic just starting out, and Terry, a former GPO engineer whose assistance deciphering and connecting the wiring was invaluable. 'I'd made a bit of an error when removing the wiring loom' admits John. 'I'd carefully removed it all and stored it sensibly, but had neglected to label anything, so Terry's patience and experience was incredibly valuable.'

John had assembled the engine and gearbox on the bench ready for the lifting party to assist with its installation and so it didn't take long for everything to be connected and made ready for a first start. 'It fired up and ran beautifully,' says John, 'but when we tried to put it in gear it made the most horrendous noise.' It was clear that there was something afoot with the clutch and the prospect of having to haul the engine and gearbox out once again was very real. 'Then Chris decided that he was going to try to remove the gearbox from underneath without removing the engine first. I didn't think it could be done, but I really do take my hat off to Chris, who successfully managed it. He had youth and enthusiasm on his side as well as an enviable amount of mechanical aptitude.'

## USEFUL CONTACTS

**CJW Autos**, Chris Weston, 07549059355, facebook.com/CJW-Autos-101510365109127  
**Complete Car Care**, completecarcare.co.uk  
**Robsport International**, robsport.co.uk  
**S&S Preparations**, ss-preparations.co.uk  
**TR Drivers Club**, trdrivers.com

With the gearbox out of the car, the problem quickly became obvious. 'In a moment of madness, I'd installed the clutch release bearing backwards! There was significant heat build-up on it from just a short time running, but luckily no long-term damage, so we fitted a new one and put the whole thing back together again.'

John rebuilt the braking system, then sorted the suspension with new springs and damper inserts. 'The car really came to life when we connected the headlights for the first time. As they rose from the front of the front panel, they really did give me a boost. The car was nearly done!' recalls John. 'The headlining was the trickiest part' he recalls. 'It took a month of work to get it right and cutting the hole for the sunroof in the brand-new material was a very scary moment indeed!'

This really is an exceptional restoration with fastidious attention to detail. It's clear what this car means to John and his achievements really do speak for themselves. It's no wonder that on its first outing, to the BMC/BL show at Gaydon in July 2021, it attracted the attention of one Harris Mann. 'Harris inspected and signed the car at the show. That felt like a real endorsement and somehow gently closed the restoration chapter of the car' concludes John. ■

## Restorer of the Year

Later this year you will be able to vote for your favourite restoration featured in PC via [practicalclassics.co.uk](http://practicalclassics.co.uk). Then you can look forward to the 2022 Practical Classics Classic Car and Restoration Show where we will present the most popular restoration.