

ME  
AND MY  
RESTO

# Škoda SAVANT

After decades of neglect, James Goulding's 1978 Škoda 120 L is back on the road again

WORDS MATT GEORGE PHOTOS MATT HOWELL

Like so many of us, my specific interest in a particular automotive marque – in this case, Škoda – came about due to a serendipitous twist of fate more than anything else. When I was 11 years-old, a chap that worked with my father at the time bought himself a blue one and I was just completely taken by it. I then bought my first one when I was 12. My growing Škoda interest and addiction meant that the collection expanded throughout my teen years and now, aged 19, I actually own 10 of them. This gaggle of Škodas includes a Felicia, a Fabia and a Rapid with just 12,000 miles on the clock – plus seven Estelles!

This '78 120L is something of a rarity in the UK these days (it is believed to be one of only 16 in the country) and, despite being in fine fettle now, that wasn't the case for a very long time. It was taken off the road in 1989, before the owner at the time passed away, leaving the car marooned in a dingy lock-up garage. Eventually it was bought by another gentleman, who decided that the car needed a fresh coat of paint and preceded to strip down the exterior and generally take things apart – before leaving the car parked up in a lorry yard for a further lengthy period, until I took the car on in 2018.

Sadly, another misfortune befell the car during its period of inactivity in the lorry yard when, you guessed it, a lorry inadvertently reversed into it. Thankfully, the damage was limited to one wing, which was the first area that I had to repair. Despite having been stripped down for a respray, the car's paint was actually in pretty good condition.

Even the underbody still wears the original green paint that was applied at the factory. It seems that the previous owner was unaware that Škodas of this era came off the production with a factory 'dull' finish, instead mistaking it for

weather and UV damage. In fact, the majority of the paint that you see now is original, with piecemeal repairs being undertaken to the lorry-damaged wing only.

With the body in hand, I set to sorting out the rest of the car that was, by my own admission, in a million pieces. When I first bought it, the engine was missing the rocker cover and air filter, while bumpers and overriders were also on the MIA list. Unfortunately, although the previous owner had promised to provide me with all of the parts that had been removed from the car, that didn't happen. This meant that, during the process of recommissioning the car, I had to dedicate a lot of my time to sourcing parts that were both rare and difficult to get hold of. Thankfully, my determination to see the project through meant I was eventually able to find everything that was required.

## Final stages

Having covered just 8000 miles in some 11 years before its long hiatus from the road, most of the 120's mechanical parts and running gear were still in usable condition. The Jupiter alloy wheels came from Scotland and were refurbished in Viachrome and gloss black, finished off with new centre caps. Having bought the car at the 2018 NEC Classic Motor Show, I actually had it back on the road in time for the same event a year later in 2019 – a satisfying feat to say the least, despite the issues I had to deal with along the way. Now the car is roadworthy I plan to cherish it, while using it sparingly in order to keep the incredibly low mileage down. It is a good job that I have plenty of other Škodas on hand to keep me both busy and mobile. ■

## Practical Classics Restorer of the Year

James is entered into the PC Restorer of the Year competition. You can vote for your favourite in a future issue of Practical Classics magazine.

## AS FOUND



Having been taken off the road for some remedial work back in 1989, then left in a garage for a number of years, James found the car in a lorry park having been stripped down for a respray. The challenge was on...

## Interior

The original interior is still present and correct, having required nothing more than a good clean before it was ready to receive passengers once more.



## Engine

Having covered just 8000 miles prior to the car being laid up, the original 1174cc engine was actually in very good condition. A light recommission was all that required, including fresh belts and hoses to replace the perished originals, before it was ready to hit the road.



## TIME TAKEN

(MTHS)  
**12**

## EST. COST

(£)  
**1k**

## BEST HELP

'Being in the club makes so much difference, both in accessing advice and sourcing parts.'

## Marque(d) man

James is a proud member of the Škoda Owners' Club GB and attends numerous shows each year in order to spread the word about these cars.



## Storage

Rear-engine layout allows for a surprisingly roomy luggage compartment over the front wheels. Like the exterior, all that was required in here was a good clean and polish.



## One of a kind

This limo is the only one made. 'Fortune Auto Sales owned it from new and was the biggest UK Škoda distributor at the time – I bought it from them.'

