

Living the DREAM

Parking an XJ40 in a single garage is one thing, but Gary Langton restored and painted his in one, too

INTERVIEW AND PHOTOS THEODORE J. GILLAM

My wife, Sharon, had always wanted an XJ6, so imagine her surprise 18 years ago when I told her I'd bought her one. She wasn't so excited when I told her it was only £200, though. A guy in the office where I worked had this XJ40, which he never serviced, so when it wouldn't start one rainy day and he was late after catching the bus, he said: 'I'm sick of the sight of that bloody Jag. I want it off my drive, so it's yours for £200.' I nursed it home thinking it was going to cost me a fortune to put right because it ran so badly; the paint was beginning to fade; the lacquer was starting to peel in places; and rust was trying to break through. However, it looked presentable and Sharon was very impressed. I started with the basics and gave the car a thorough service and thankfully it drove like a dream.

The car evolved from there. It's the poverty spec model with steel wheels, plastic hub caps, and cloth interior, but I was able to buy a complete leather interior and some imperial steel wheels from an XJ breaker in Portsmouth. We used the car for about ten years, until I was driving home from work one day and saw plumes of white smoke in the mirror and knew the head gasket had gone. I changed it, but decided to keep the car off the road to tackle some of the bodywork issues, like the bottom of the front wings and the boot lid, where they usually go. I started it one day and it made a nasty bang, then stopped. I took off the rocker covers and saw some valves had dropped. I have no idea why; I'd invested money in that daunting job, I'd done it properly and the timing was spot on. Most of the interior was out, the bumpers were off and now the engine was broken. I got disheartened, shut the door and left it. For six years.

Renewed enthusiasm

Two years ago, Sharon asked me if I was going to finish her car and gave me carte blanche to stay out in the garage to get it done. I'd joined the XJ40.com forum by this time and saw a breaker selling a complete



engine, delivered for £320, and having costed up repairing the engine myself, it made sense to buy a replacement. The Internet solved the next problem; I bought a virtually new engine hoist on eBay for £100, took out the old engine and fitted the new one, then sold the hoist on again for £100. With the engine running, I could then drive it in and out of the garage.

Taking the plunge

I paid £140 for secondhand front wings and a boot lid, stripping and overhauling the complex bumpers. I'd been losing the battle with rust in the nearside rear wheelarch, so I cut out the rot and welded in a repair section. And then it needed a respray. I didn't have five grand for a professional job, but I'd painted small areas before, never a whole car, but I thought, 'how difficult can it be? I had nothing to lose; if it was rubbish, I'd save up and get it done properly.

As I've only got a single garage, I sprayed the car in sections. I bought cellulose primer, colour and clearcoat and first sprayed the roof and the bonnet, parked the car as close as possible to one wall and sprayed the doors, then moved the car to spray the other side, before moving on to the rear wings. I painted the front wings and the boot lid off the car. It was trial and error, but I was getting better as I went on; the biggest problem were the patches I'd sprayed years earlier that reacted with the cellulose, so I had to sand it all back to the manufacturer's paint and start again. The clearcoat didn't come out too well, being very orange-peely, but I'd put plenty on so I wet-flatted it all down, then polished it. Seeing that shine was the project's highlight.

I've gone through the brakes and running gear from front to back and was rewarded when I took it for an MOT; there wasn't a single advisory. And now Sharon's got her dream car. ■

Practical Classics Restorer of the Year 2021

This car is entered into the 2021 Restorer of the Year competition. You can vote for your favourite in a future issue of Practical Classics magazine.



AS FOUND

Despite being garaged while in Gary's ownership, the bodywork was getting very tatty with the red paint fading under the lacquer, which was also starting to peel in places, rust beginning to break out at the bottoms of the front wings, boot lid, and bumpers. And then the engine destroyed itself...

Interior

Being the base model, the seats were originally cloth but one of the first upgrades was a complete leather interior from a breakers yard. Gary has since done some extra trimming to make it look this good. The analogue car phone hints at the kind of corporate lifestyle it enjoyed in the Nineties.



Engine

The low point in Gary's ownership came after diligently replacing a head gasket, only for valves to drop soon after. Gary costed up a repair, but bought this engine that had covered just 99,000 miles. He scrubbed it with a toothbrush and changed every hose and clip, including the one under the inlet manifold.



TIME TAKEN (YRS)	EST. COST (£)
2	3125

BEST HELP
'You'll always come across problems, but don't be beaten. Walk away, give it a rest, then come back fresh.'

Wheels

If the original metric tyres weren't good, Gary wouldn't have bought this car, just one costing about as much as the whole car cost him. He won this set of 8in-wide XJ12 alloys on eBay for £167 without knowing they were highly sought after. He painted the centres grey 'so they don't look like dustbin lids.'



Garage

Gary's motor house is a prefabricated concrete sectional garage on the side of his bungalow. He's been able to extend the length, but there are barely a couple of inches to spare between the XJ40's wing mirrors and the opening, it's that narrow. Undaunted, he managed to spray the car to the highest of standards.

