

THE XK SPIRIT

THE ARISTOCAT REGISTER MAGAZINE



Whitstable Car Show

WINTER 2023 Learning to live with the 'Cat' P4



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ENGINE NOTES

EDITORIAL

Whatever happened to 2023? I'm here typing my piece for the winter edition of 'The XK Spirit' with all the Razamataz for Christmas 2023 already appearing on our TV screens; it feels like only yesterday when I was doing the same for 2022. I'm sure that as I get older time seems to pass quicker! Or is it just me?

As I mentioned in the last edition I have now fully recovered from the detached retina to my right eye, only to be diagnosed with Atrial Fibrillation at the end of August. I had been feeling very low on energy for a number of months and this was the reason why. I then found out that currently on the NHS to get an appointment with a Consultant Cardiologist was going to take 4 to 5 months. I've always believed that our NHS is a brilliant service but as we all know is definitely under enormous pressure due to lack of funding and staff causing big delays getting into the system. Due to my current family circumstances, being ill is not on my agenda, so



we decided that seeing a Private Consultant Cardiologist would have to be the way forward and I was able to get an appointment within a week. I now rattle due to all the pills I'm currently taking but 'HEY HO' I'm slowly on the road to recovery and am somewhat poorer as Medical Insurance I do not have.

The good news is that I'm still here and able to get out and about a bit and have enjoyed a couple of trips out to Classic Car meetings courtesy of my good friend Barry, in his wonderful 1953 Jaguar XK120 Drophead Coupe.

My other shock in September was my current insurance going up from £600 to £1500 a year and even shopping around I couldn't do any better. On that note we are so grateful to Adrian Flux for agreeing a further year of Sponsorship and they give a discount to all members.

From all of us we wish you a restful and enjoyable Christmas and New Year season; plus a big thank-you to all of you for your articles, photos and contributions to our magazine. I'm looking forward next year to receiving and abundance of fresh material for next year's issues.

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DRIVER'S SEAT

COMMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN

That time of the year is here again, looking forward to Christmas spending time with family etc. but also time to put away our lovely Aristocrats for the winter. As I am sure a lot of you are aware, but for those new to owning a classic Aristocat, I would like to share some of the best advice I have had over the years.

First is to run out the majority of petrol and then drain most of what is left prior to storing your car. You should leave some petrol to stop seals and petrol pipes drying out and shrinking. Petrol does not keep well and also the moisture levels in modern fuels will rot your fuel lines from the inside. Then when spring comes around put fresh 5% ethanol fuel in your system and check for leaks, start your engine (with fresh fuel this should be easier) and again with the engine running check for leaks again.

You also need to check your anti-freeze concentration and water level to ensure that you don't get



a frozen engine, a very costly occurrence! Also make sure you put screen wash anti-freeze in your washer bottle and activate the washers to ensure that there is anti-freeze in your washer pipes as well.

Make sure your tyre pressures are correct and if possible, put your car on stands to take the weight of your tyres, as if left standing too long in the same position you can get cracking on the bulged-out part of the tyre at the bottom in contact with the ground.

While you are under the bonnet you might as well check other fluid levels such as engine, gearbox and power steering oils, as applicable.

I hope you don't mind me giving this advice as I am sure many of you are already doing all this and more but if this helps one person out there and stops major problems in the spring it is worth repeating.

With all this said may I wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a Happy and Prosperous new Year!

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Learning to live with the 'Cat'



I guess that it all started a few decades ago when I bought a copy of Elton John's album "A Single Man". The album centrefold side profile of the XK shows what a lovely car it is and kindled a desire to own one one day. Over the years, I occasionally spotted adverts for the cars and realised that ownership was a pipe dream that was way out of my price bracket for a car that I would not be able to use regularly (or rely on in any way).

As I became aware of the kit car and replica scene, it crossed my mind that just maybe an XK120 replica might exist and offer the pleasure of ownership without the costs and frustrations. Google introduced me to the Aristocat concept within seconds and I started to contemplate the idea. One of the biggest obstacles in my way was the lack of a garage, surely an essential for a car with such minimal weatherproofing; but I kept trawling the internet to see what was available.

Google has a nasty habit of opening your search parameters and after a year or two of typing XK120, I found myself being bombarded with XK8 adverts. The idea of a very affordable all weather convertible appealed and I bought a 6 owner 65,000 mile XK8 for less than 10% of its new value and joined the JEC. After doubling the car's mileage over 5 years, I "downgraded" to the much less practical later model XK and continued to enjoy all things Jaguar for another 3 years whilst



continuing my search for a house with a decent garage.

Two and a half years into retirement I was beginning to get desperate in my search for garaging. If it took much longer, my health was likely to fail before I got to enjoy tinkering with interesting cars.

Then, suddenly the perfect garage appeared within walking distance of home. The estate agents details were really badly presented and left me lukewarm at best, to the point that I did nothing for 3 weeks. Then, one lovely July afternoon, I decided to go out for a walk and wandered past the garage (and associated house) and decided it was worth booking a viewing after all. I continued with my walk and found two old Morris 8s in someone's driveway. I stopped for a chat, and spent the next 90 minutes admiring his cars and talking cars in general.

As we parted, Colin (my new friend) told me of a local cherished car group which meets monthly and suggested that I should attend their next meeting that was that very same evening.

Not naturally a social animal, I carried on with my walk with no intention of attending the meeting but, with nothing better to do, I changed my mind and had a splendid time chatting to a handful of the members including a chap called Derrick who shares my historic passion for the Herald derived Triumphs.

Imagine my surprise when it was Derrick who greeted me on the house viewing two days later. The garage was everything I could have dreamed of together with enough space to store and work on 3 cars at the same time. So much for coincidence; surely fate was shining on me. The house was "OK" and the deal was done. At last my search for an Aristocat could commence in earnest.

I had visited Autotune a few years earlier and discussed the kits in great length before buying a copy of the build manual. After a week of studying the manual, I realised that building my own car was just a step too far. I wouldn't say that I was looking for instant gratification, but the build time was going to be too long and I knew that I would lose hope before seeing the light at the end



of the tunnel. I spoke to Carolyn about the brokering service and would occasionally look at the web site to see what was available. Meanwhile, I joined the owners club to see what I could learn from 'The XK Spirit'.

Having seen very few cars that truly appealed to me over the last year or so, I opened the Autotune web site with little hope. But, there were 3 cars all being marketed at the same time. I phoned Carolyn and discussed my options before making a trip to the West Midlands to view Martin Webb's car.

First impressions were not favourable. Noisy, with a suspension that really could not cope with the potholes of the test drive area, but a second test drive, with side screens fitted, didn't seem quite as bad. My initial disappointment was tempered by the realisation that this was an

itch that needed to be scratched, and surely the point of a kit car is that it is an ongoing improvement project. Maybe my memories of 1980's motoring were seen through rose tinted glasses. If so, the thought that an original XK120 is technologically 40 years older made the replica seem like a very sensible compromise; and so the deal was done, for better or for worse.

After so many years of waiting and searching, all my Christmases had come at once; with an Aristocat and a garage to house it, and all negotiated in the space of a week.

The car is an Oxford Blue OTS, completed it 2021 using a 1985 series 3 XJ6 donor. I should stress at this point, that I do not intend to say anything derogatory about Martin or his car build. This was a project which he had completed 12 years earlier and his focus had moved onto new projects. ▶



growls and howls when you are really making it work. The journey to Scotland was largely on Motorway and the smooth surfaces masked the imperfections of the suspension, but the exhaust drone at a steady 2500rpm for 6 hours is something that needs attention. The suspension issues returned on the back roads of Fife and jumped to 2nd place on my priority list of jobs to tackle when I got home.

Number 1 priority, however, was the mirrors. Clearly not the mirrors used for the IVA, the two low mounted door mirrors show almost nothing, and the left mirror is completely masked by the side screen frame. Fortunately, my journey in both directions was made with the hood down, allowing my ears and a cyclist's neck motion to do the job that decent mirrors would make much easier.

Overall, the trip was a success, revealing no catastrophic problems, but plenty of areas for improvement. The only thing to fail was the fuel gauge that went into a sulk after having the tank brimmed twice in one day.

Still not having access to the new garage, most of the jobs needed to wait. Fitting a pair of Morris Minor wing mirrors, however, was within the space constraints of my old driveway. Removing the inner wheel arch liners to fit them found the solution to the suspension

dumbed down my skills over the last 20 years), I kept worrying that the sudden reduction in steering load was an indication of under-steer.

Having got home without incident, the sense of panic subsided and I made the brave decision to use the Aristocat for my one-week trip to Scotland the following week. 300 miles each way and a short weekend drive across Fife to attend the Scottish round of the BTCC at Knockhill should be a good shakedown and an opportunity to list my priorities for maintenance and improvements to the car.

On the test drive, two things really grated on me. Firstly the way the car banged and crashed through potholes and secondly the unnecessarily noisy exhaust. Even in my youthful days of TVR ownership, I found their loud exhaust systems an embarrassment. After almost 10 years of driving the newer XK Jaguars, I love the refinement of an almost silent exhaust which only

After all I was looking for a car which I could use right away, but also a car which I could improve upon over time. My emphasis on areas for improvement should not be taken as criticism of what has gone before. Mechanically, the car seems to have been well assembled and cared for. The interior suggests that the light at the end of the build tunnel was too tempting and that useable was good enough at that stage of the project. Actually, perfect for my requirements.

I collected the car on a Wednesday afternoon, leaving Martin's house just as heavy rain really got going for the 75-mile journey home. The weather gear was adequate (just) up to 60 mph, although it took me about 50 miles to venture past 45mph. The demister was just adequate (in July). The steering has an unpleasant over-centre feel to it as it changes from slight left to slight right. In a strange car on wet roads (with a little niggly at the back of my mind that ABS and traction control have probably

issues. The bushes at the top of the left strut were non-existent with just a little bit of sponge foam filling the gap where they should live. A pair of new front struts were ordered and fitted and all of a sudden the driving experience of mid 80's technology felt much more how I remembered it.

So what next? The car is now living comfortably in my new workshop/garage. Another week might see the workshop cleared of all the other items transferred from old house to new that have yet to find a home and then work can commence. I have booked to take the car to the 'Laon Historique' next May. Having stumbled over the event 5 or 6 years ago, it looks like a great opportunity to mix with owners of almost 1000 modern classics.

That gives me a deadline to work to, therefore which jobs will take priority. Unfortunately, budget may have more influence than desirability, but I'm sure time will tell. In no specific order, this is the picking list:

A decent radio with front mounted speakers (preferably with built in Navigation functionality).

Luggage compartment mods. to allow the hood to be stored above the fuel tank and avoid losing so much luggage space.

Retractable side windows to avoid

losing vast quantities of luggage space to storing the side screens.

New dashboard in leather to replace the tired wood, which has seen too much damp over time.

Improved heating and de-misting system.

Immobiliser for security (and insurance).

Tonneau cover to avoid the faff of erecting the weather gear whenever parking.

Additional exhaust silencing.

Move the drivers seat mountings to allow a short-arse like me to reach the pedals.

Fit Aristocat badging in place of the "dishonest" Jaguar badges.

Replace the spoked wheels with period steel wheels as I hate cleaning and looking after wire wheels.

I intend to write up the "Tour de Laon" in due course and will update on how much easier it becomes to live with the 'Cat' as improvements are made.

In the mean time, I hope to meet a few fellow owners over the next year. and If anyone has a set of steel wheels and would like to replace them with wire wheels, please get in touch.

- Kevin Hook



Central handbrake

In the past I enjoyed competing in various team sports. Originally basketball then football and eventually graduating onto SwimRun events. As always age eventually catches up and I succumbed to a number of leg injuries. Knowing that these injuries would limit my flexibility, when I purchased the Aristocat.

I had the door sidebars lowered to help me get in and out of the car. I did not want the floor area on my right cluttered by a handbrake either, (as favoured in a lot of the builds.) So overall I felt the best solution for me would be to mount the Handbrake on the prop shaft tunnel next to my left knee.

The original hand brake mechanism on my Daimler XJ6 series 3 was configured in the form of a side pull Mechanism. I decided to take the opportunity to improve on this, by re-engineering to Centre-pull, so both rear brakes would be turned on equally at the same time. Luckily on inspection I could source the pulleys and levers from my donor car brake mechanism.

I looked at various handbrake levers. A Triumph handbrake lever looked fine but I was unable to source one. I toyed with buying a Trigger Handbrake but eventually settled on a Ford handbrake lever from Autotune.

Once I had selected the hand



brake lever, the position of the lever had to be carefully selected, so that it would be comfortable in use and not obstructed by the seat. I found the best position on the propshaft tunnel frame to be between the two uprights adjacent to the gear selector.



Mounting of the handbrake lever needs to be worked out before the propshaft tunnel fabrication is completed. So that the cable is not snagged and can be made weather proof as it passes through the aluminium plate into the tunnel. The picture above shows where the handbrake lever is mounted with the front cover plate and lever gaiter removed.

The new handbrake assembly was separated into two separate chassis parts. There are also two cables, one connecting the handbrake lever to the pulley

mechanism and another cable connecting the pulley mechanism to the rear hand brake levers.



The hand brake lever assembly

This assembly is bolted to the Prop shaft tunnel, inside the cockpit, adjacent to the front offside driver seat. It is made up of the following parts:

A chassis plate that is used to house hand brake lever + micro switch

A handbrake lever modified so that it can activate a micro switch

A micro switch

Clevis pin + split pins and various bolts, washers and nuts.



The pulley mechanism

This assembly is bolted under the car at the rear of the prop shaft tunnel in front of the rear brake callipers. It is made up of the following parts:

A chassis plate used to house the pulley wheels and lever

Three pulley wheels, spacers and lever sourced from the XJ6 donor 2 x Clevis pins + split pins and various bolts washers and nuts.

Handbrake cables

The new handbrake mechanism uses two cables. The handbrake lever cable and the rear handbrake operating lever cable.



The handbrake lever cable

This cable connects the hand brake lever to the pulley mechanism. It's also used to adjust tension of the handbrake cable. I purchased this cable from Quiller Triumph. Unit 1 White Hart Rd, Plumstead, Woolwich, London. SE18 1DF. , Part No121726. Tel: 020 8854 4777 Email: quiller@quillertriumph.com A similar cable could be custom made by Speedy cables.



Rear handbrake operating lever cable

This cable connects the pulley mechanism to both hand brake operating levers and was custom made by Speedy Cables. Abercrave Swansea SA9 1SQ. Tel: (0)1639 732300 732309



Handbrake cable attachment

The pictures illustrate connection between the Handbrake lever and Pulley chassis in the propshaft tunnel.



This picture illustrates connection between the Pulley chassis operating lever cable and the nearside rear handbrake operating lever. Obviously the offside rear handbrake operating lever is connected to the other end of the operating lever cable. To ensure smooth operation the pulley rollers must be lubricated well with grease. Adjustment of the handbrake lever cable should be made to achieve the correct tension.

In this case the hand brake was adjusted so that there were three clicks before fully applied.

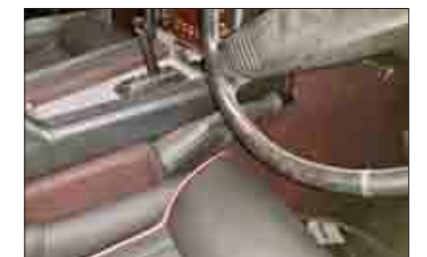
Finishing off in the cabin

The Ford lever came with a rubber gaiter. I wanted a leather finish so I purchased an XJ8 leather gaiter including plastic frame as a replacement. Although OK I was still not happy with the fit and appearance, so I reverted to making my own custom version.



Leather handbrake gaiter

Leather Handbrake Gaiter was purchased from Car Builder solutions and 6mm closed cell foam from Ebay. This was customised to fit lever and reinforced by an aluminium mounting plate.



Finished handbrake lever

Overall it was definitely worth fitting the brake so I could operate with my left hand. It feels more comfortable with no obstructions on the floor making it easier for access.

- **Barrie Trentham**

Summer Trips



Over this summer period we've had a few good trips out. At the beginning of August we took the Aristocat to a charity event at a private car museum at Churt, near Hindhead. The collection is owned by Robert and Tanya Lewis, spectacularly rich and affable hosts, who open up their grounds for charity allowing attendees to view their extensive car and memorabilia collection. With over 100 vehicles of all types in fantastic condition arranged in themed display barns. It is a brilliant experience to go too.

A week later we attended a very big car show at Cranleigh. There were over 1000 cars on the day with displays and stalls as well. Just walking round the car park took hours with so many cars to look at.



In September we travelled over to the Isle of Wight and stayed in an apartment above Shanklin with fantastic sea views. The driving on the Island is lovely and relaxed, nobody seems in too much of a hurry. There is a lovely road along the south of the island from Ventnor to Freshwater with fantastic views and lovely sweeping curves, definitely one to try if you're over there.

A couple of winter projects to undertake this year: firstly, the rear suspension needs an overhaul. There is a nasty rubbing noise, probably the hub bearing, but I'll take the whole unit out and refurbish everything; it was over 25 years ago that I initially built it, so it hasn't done too bad. Secondly, I am trying to design and 3D print a cold air intake manifold. As I have 3 carbs the available space is a bit restricted and thus the flexibility to design a custom fitted manifold might just work. I really need it in the summer because the engine just sucks in hot air reducing the efficiency of the engine and causing it to run really rough.

- Ian & Rebecca Cooper



Happy long term member

Carolyn Taylor
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21st January 2023

Dear Carolyn

Hope all going well with you and the family, I loved the last Aristocat edition which recited some of the visits we had at Castle Coombe, Ect that was always a very well attended event at more or less the end of the Summer. It would be good to have something like that as almost an Aristocat meet up!

I think like most people we tend to go to local or in my case a lot of shows in the south East, but I really should make the effort to attend Some shows farther north!

Thanks for the advise re – Ken Norman , I ended getting everything from him, prices so much better than the normal XK specialists! Y exhaust was around £ 120.00 (stainless steel), I had quote for around £375.00 for same from exhaust specialist. I found an old receipt from years gone by for the Y exhaust and the silencers ,it was from Norman Motors in north London, costs were very good then. Car all back together (End of Summer), Both Insurance paid me out , S Type was actually cited as beyond economical repair, despite looking like new and with 40,000 miles on clock, anyway all fixed and looking good, Aristocat was quite minor rear end damage, nothing out of shape so it was just a matter of stripping all down and getting it ready for re-paint, what I agreed with painter was for him to repair and paint the complete rear end, he used to do work for Lotus cars back in the day so spent time flattening the body so actually looks amazing, After 34 years there are a few battle scars on the car so I said I would like everything off the front end and he can do the same flattening and levelling , maybe later in the year. The Aristocat is just such a great car, even in the Winter with nice cold but sunny day, it's a joy to use with hood down and heater on. Let's hope for another good spring and Summer and we might be able to meet up somewhere, speak soon.

PS- I mislaid the little slip , cheque for membership enclosed.

Kind Regards

Richard
Richard and Kim Kendall

If only ...



When I was a lad, back in the day, in the east end of London, bomb sites everywhere were littered with pre-fifties cars. They were recklessly dumped, without regard for antiquity, simply in favour of new shapes and colours, very often still in serviceable condition. They became the playthings of the young and I'm sure it was in these abandoned stationary relics that I learned the rudimentary process of driving and changing gear.

We had been moved out of London by the LCC to Kent and it was while walking in a street in Lewisham that I spotted an old unwanted car. I had no idea that I was gazing upon a British legend even then. I was so impacted by this beautiful vision I wanted, even at the tender age of eighteen, or thereabouts, to take it home.

I'm sure it was the image of that dumped cars shape at a youthful impressionable age that, in my

mid-twenties, prompted me to purchase an affordable MGA.

A lifelong regret of not having the wherewithal at the time to take that dumped car home quietly haunted me for years and years, standing there in the street its tyres still inflated and with its iconic badge still in place!

In my dotage (second childhood) and as the owner of a very fast sports car, my interest was sparked when I discovered an article in a car magazine on the history and achievements of another icon, Stirling Moss and his exploits in the record breaking Jaguar XK120.

Its accompanying photo identified, at long last, my life long lost opportunity. It did though only serve to compound my sadness and feeling of 'if-only'. It has to be said that, in all honesty, part of my despair has to be the eye watering price for these cars nowadays.

The extent of my delight, and that of those that accost me when out-and-about cannot be measured having discovered that my dream could in fact be realised; and at a realistic fraction of the cost. This was exemplified on our first outing to the August Kirkcudbright car rally: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FOB4AsCBOOY>

There, visitors either wanted to know all about it, wanted to see under the bonnet, wanted to sit in it or wanted to be photographed with it.

Even the many classic experts who came forth with stories and advice were grateful for the presence of 'Felix'.

All of the happy faces confirmed in me the satisfaction of owning something of beauty that reflects a justifiable proud British history, replica she may be but non the less for it.

- John Jennings

