

CLASSIC DRIVER

Step inside the Swiss collection with some of Jaguar's most historic racers

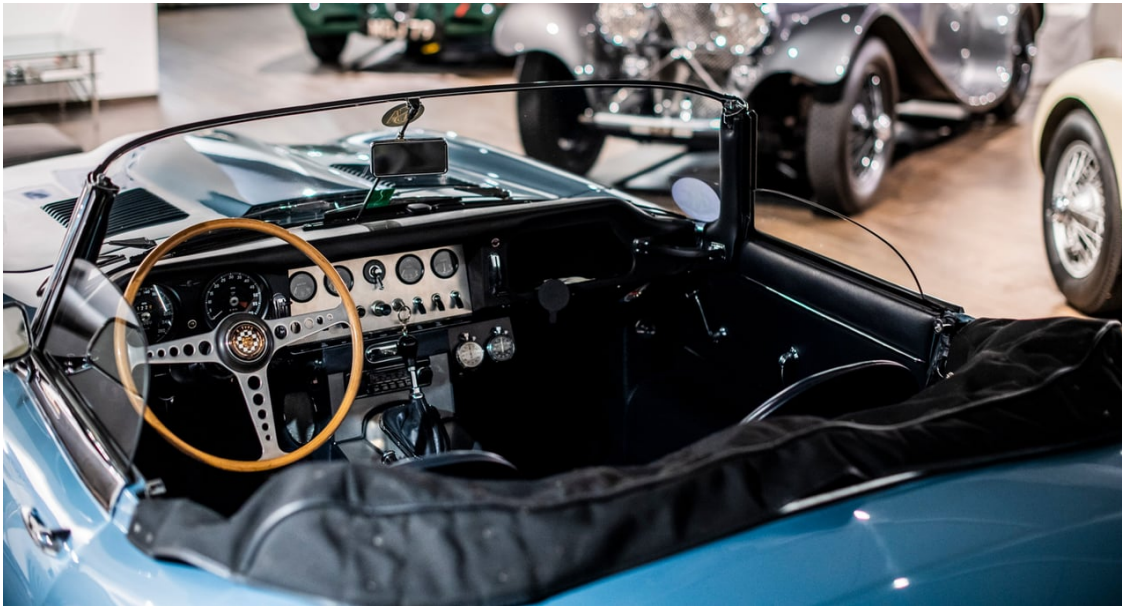
Lead

Hans-Martin built his first car when he was just seventeen. We met him in his 'smoking lounge' - which happens to also be home to some incredible Jaguars - to discuss his passion for adventure and the cars that have taken him there.



Hans-Martin, thanks for chatting with us! Looking around your garage, there are some fabulous examples of Jaguars from the SS100 to the E-Type. Have you always been interested in cars - when did the passion start for you?

I was interested in cars very early on. I think I started to build go-carts when I was about nine or ten years of age. Then, when I was seventeen, I was thinking about taking my driving test and getting my license, so I needed to get a car ready for my eighteenth birthday. I didn't have much money, but I could buy an old Porsche 356 which was all rusted and then I used its mechanicals with a fibreglass dune buggy body. Maybe it's not what you would do today with an old 356, but it was ready for my eighteenth which was the point at the time! My first trip in the car was a drive from Switzerland to Paris and then I took the scenic way back via the Loire Valley. I had a lot of fun with it.



What an adventure! Building your own car aged 17 is a sure sign of being born with the car gene. So how did that experience shape your interest in cars?

Then I needed to get my first daily driver and I found an old MG midget which also was in a poor state, but it was affordable. I think I paid around 600 Swiss francs for it. I had fun in that little car. Soon after that, though, work and career became my focus, and I didn't have time to enjoy classic cars for a while.



So after working and focussing on your career, when did you decide to get back into classics, and which cars interested you most?

I got back into vintage cars when I turned fifty and had more time. I grew up in Switzerland and there the most prestigious motorsport event is the Klausenrennen - an international hillclimb event started in 1922. The route from Linthal to the top of the Klausen Pass takes in 156 bends and is 22km long! It attracted the best drivers of the pre-war era, and today it is run as an event for prewar racing cars. So I bought an MG K3 as my first proper classic, with six cylinders and a preselector box, which I found really interesting from an engineering point of view.



Now your garage is almost exclusively Jaguar - what drew you to the Marque?

With the MG, because it was not an original K3 but a reproduction using some original parts, I found that it was not eligible for the events that I was interested in. So I looked for a car to replace it that had a really good pedigree. I found a 3.5L SS100 and had it overhauled and brought up to concours standard. I had a lot of fun with it, running it in the Mille Miglia, Grand Premio Nuvolari and the Ennstal Classic. It also did the Concorso d'Eleganza Villa d'Este, and then of course the Klausenrennen - I've done that twice now in the SS100.



So the SS100 started your interest in Jaguar?

Yes, I really enjoyed the car and started to get interested in Jaguar as a company and what they did immediately after the SS100. I really got hooked on the brand and the racing history during the 1950s. I love that era - the XK engine won Le Mans 5 times during the 1950s, which was amazing for a production engine against purpose built racing machinery from manufacturers like Ferrari and Maserati. I decided that the next thing that I needed was a car with a great racing history. Of course I liked the C-Type and D-Type, but most of those were out of my budget at the time... but maybe I could find an XK120 with interesting racing history. I started to research and made a shortlist of the XK120s which really interested me - it was just five chassis numbers.



When Jaguar introduced the new XK120 they built six cars for competition in 1950 - so I imagine it was the five of those cars that may one day be available?

I started asking around and in 2008 a friend calls up and says 'you know one of the cars on your list is coming on the market at Retromobile tomorrow morning - I can arrange that we go to look at the car before the show opens'. That was how I ended up with my XK120. It has a really significant history so I had the car inspected by marque expert Chris Keith-Lucas, who confirmed that it was indeed the 1950 Le Mans car. MGJ 79 was the no.15 1950 Jaguar 'works' Le Mans entry driven by Peter Clark and L.H. 'Nick' Haines (the Belgian Jaguar distributor) and is the very first Jaguar ever to finish Le Mans. It also competed in the 1950 Mille Miglia and the Alpine Rally. After I bought it, it went straight to [CKL Developments Ltd.](#) for a brush up. Since then I've done 6 or 7 Mille Miglia in it as well as the Le Mans Classic 2 or 3 times.



That is such a famous car for the brand, and arguably the start of the Jaguar legend at Le Mans. That finish on a first attempt was what gave them the confidence to come back to compete for the win the next year in the XK120 C, which was basically the same engine and running gear in a lighter and more aerodynamic form. The C stood for competition but is now better known as the C-Type.

I got even more hooked on the brand and so started looking for a C-Type. XKC 015 - the Masten Gregory car - came on the market and that was very intriguing.



Masten Gregory was the epitome of the glamorous 1950s racing driver with his movie star looks. He started racing SCCA in the states before coming to Europe and winning Le Mans with Ferrari in 1965. I believe that C-Type was his first competitive car?

Yes, in 1953 he won the Sports Car Club of America race at Golden Gate in San Francisco. It was one of the first C-Types delivered to the US and Road & Track magazine had asked to test it. Masten said "Yes... as long as it is still in one piece after the weekend." That was the Golden Gate race. Road & Track tested it the following week and that was the first C-Type test. The car was for sale and again I had it first inspected and then restored by CKL. I've used that car for the Monaco Historic Grand Prix, the MM, the Tour Auto, as well as showing it at Villa d'Este.



You have a beautiful set up here with the cars displayed right at your house. How is it living with these famous pieces of history?

This is my smoking lounge. If I have some spare time I do some reading, smoke a cigar. We built the house about 12 years ago and I had the possibility to make the garage just right and exactly as I wanted it. It has wooden floors and everything to make a nice place to spend time with a glass of whiskey.



Finally, do you consider yourself a Classic Driver?

I am very particular with my cars, so if there is something not quite correct then I have to make it correct. I like my cars to be ready for the next event, the next adventure. Above all, they are tools for having great experiences and making great memories. I just did the Tour Auto with my daughter and that was a lot of fun. That is perfect for me.

Photos by Rémi Dargegen

Gallery

