

CLASSIC DRIVER

Here's why the Jaguar E-Type remains the ultimate racing icon

Lead

Whether they are grazing the grass verges at Goodwood or leaving tyre tracks at Le Mans, the Jaguar E-Type is one of the most decorated race cars in British automaking history. We use some incredible examples within the Classic Driver Market for reference...



Turn up to your local race circuit during the early 1960s, be it Oulton Park or Oakes Field, and you'd catch a glimpse of an elongated clamshell nose slowly emerge from the trailer, revealing a racing car that some deemed 'too pretty' to be on track trading paint. The Jaguar E-Type was, in fact, never built to be a race car, more of a weekend sports car, but it would go on to become one of Britain's most successful race cars, clocking up over 1,000 entrees worldwide with some of motorsport's greatest names at the helm. One question that's always been on our mind as we've seen these elegant machines dominate historic race events, is just what makes them so good? To find out, we have the help of a plethora of famous period-raced examples that are [available within the Classic Driver Market](#).

By now, we're probably all familiar with the origin story of the E-Type, and how Jaguar executive Bob Berry drove the eagerly awaited car flat-out from the UK to the entrance of the Geneva Motor Show after the car was held up by excited British press, arriving a mere 20 minutes before the car's official launch. Despite sounding like complete fiction, once news of this incredible story spread around, the desire to acquire such a car became even greater. It also showcased just how reliable the car was, a key component to the E-Type's racing success.



Racing the E-Type was firmly not on the minds of Jaguar's executives, though, as the brand already has major successes with the C-Type and D-Type and proceeding E-Type was to be no more than a standout road car, never intended to take to the track. Of course, it's bodylines helped the E-Type to be seen as an out-of-the-box racer, with its sweeping curves which are naturally aerodynamic, factory fitted disc brakes, still relatively unusual at the time, all aided in the cars ability to be driven quickly, and it wasn't long before some examples took to the racetrack.

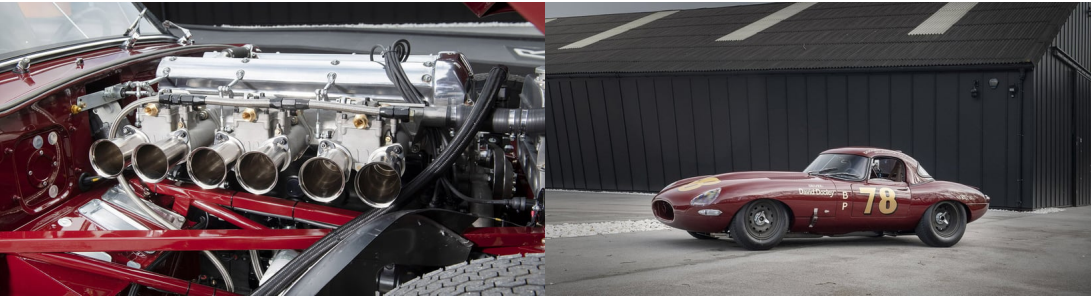


In its first race, the E-Type Jaguar was placed into the hands of a young and then relatively unknown Graham Hill, who secured a resounding win in his Indigo Blue E-type 'ECD 400' at Oulton Park. Incredibly, [another E-Type carrying the number plate 'YRP 999', seen for sale here by DK Engineering](#) would also be submitted into that now iconic race, but never actually raced. Hill and his canvas-roofed E-Type had seen off competition from the Aston Martin DB4 and many Ferrari 250s, raising the eyebrows of many racers, team bosses and manufacturers around the world.



What followed was truly a golden era for Jaguar and British motorsport, where the E-Type maintained its reliability and outright speed to claim multiple victories in Silverstone, Goodwood and many other circuits. Many examples began to appear on the rosters of American race series events, as well as its first appearance at Le Mans in 1962. American Briggs Cunningham, who had raced Jaguar's E2A prototype in the 1960 Le Mans 24 Hours, shared his E-Type with the legendary Roy Salvadori, eventually claiming fourth, ahead of a second E-Type driven by Peter Sargent and Peter Lumsden. Despite a domination from Ferrari that year, the Jaguar's reliability, speed and agility was clear for the world to admire. Speaking of Salvadori, ['WOO 11' featured by Fellowes Fine Cars Limited](#) was purchased and registered by him in 1962, and would go on to tackle countless events worldwide.

Before long, engineers began hatching a plan to build an ultra-light E-Type using aluminium components pressed on the same tools as the standard steel cars. These lightweight panels, combined with a freshly stripped out interior aided in shaving off precious kilograms and, in turn, seconds on track. Now using a 3.8-litre engine, a 5-speed gearbox and full aluminium bodies, a limited run of 12 race-spec cars that were built as a roadster but featured a hardtop, the new and improved E-Type was born.



In more recent times, historic racing has given E-Types another lease of life, becoming incredibly popular machines to dominate priceless grids filled with motoring jewels. While in period many racers saw their machines simple as just that, machines designed to bring home the trophies and prize money, nowadays even acquiring a classic race car can rack up eye-watering bills. That's another advantage the E-Type possesses over its rivals. Sure, they can't be picked up for next to nothing, but in comparison to the cars it battled alongside during the 1960s, the Jaguar certainly is the cheaper option. With events like Le Mans Classic, Silverstone Classic, almost any of Peter Auto's jam-packed calendar and perhaps most notably, the Goodwood Revival, racing an E-Type has become a rite of passage for many celebrities and racers. [Examples such as Chassis 875073 from Duncan Hamilton](#), a car that is perhaps one of the most famous E-Types in the marque's history, can regularly be seen trading paint against Ferraris, Shelseys and Aston Martins during the RAC TT.



For those seeking all the classic styling but are looking to write their own history, [Jaguar even produced an incredibly limited run of seven continuation cars. Brand-new cars built in the same way the originals had been](#), using the original engineering blueprints and designs as well as much of the original materials and methods. The cars were even given chassis numbers not utilised in the original production, making examples such as this one impossibly hard to find and allowing for its new owner to pick up the E-Type's motoring mantle in search of their own glory.

Whether you're more of a Ferrari fan, or prefer the romance of a classic Aston Martin, it's hard to ignore the pull a Jaguar E-Type has on the motoring world, let alone the world of motorsport. It's incredible reliability, lightness, handling and aerodynamics have all played equal parts in ensuring this once weekend cruiser went on to claim the sport's most triumphant victories. While Jaguar's future is looking more advanced than ever before, it's difficult to ignore the cars that made them who they are today.

Iconic E-types for sale

Gallery

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