

CLASSIC DRIVER

Size doesn't matter to this Hong Kong-based Jaguar XJ-S owner

Lead

Hong Kong-based enthusiast Ernest Li has held a lifelong adoration for cars, both full-sized and in miniature. We spoke to him about his Jaguar XJ-S and customised model car hobby for the latest episode of The Classic Drivers.



Ernest, thanks for sharing your stunning [Jaguar XJ-S](#) with us. It's a real connoisseur's choice, so we can only imagine you've been a lifelong petrol head. Was your passion ignited by your friends or family?

My journey with cars began when I was about 3 or 4 years old, according to my mom. She bought me a Tomica garbage truck in white and blue, and from that day on, I fell in love with cars and have never looked back. As a kid, my only opportunities to engage with cars came from my dad and my collection of toy cars. I loved collecting them, and eventually, I started to recreate toy versions of the cars I dreamed of owning but couldn't afford in real life.

My passion leans heavily toward cars from the 1980s and 1990s, largely because I was born in the early 1990s, during the rise of car culture. I still vividly remember the first time I saw a brand-new red Toyota MR2 SW20. It was stunning—beautiful, astonishing, and utterly breathtaking.

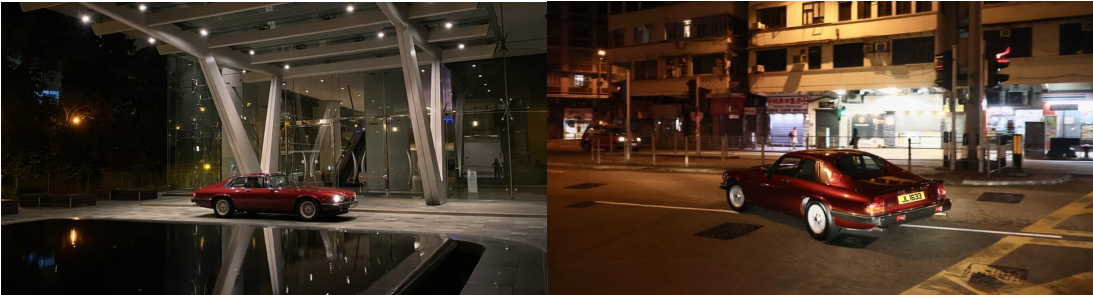


Amazing - so that was the model that started it all! As they say, one man's garbage truck is another man's treasure! On that note, what are some of your favourite creations? Do you know how many models you have customised to date?

When it comes to my favourite creations, I would say all of them hold special meaning. I particularly enjoy making the cars I saw in my childhood, especially those my family owned. I also love creating cars for enthusiasts, which I like to call "Cars with Meanings." Some of these real cars no longer exist, and by recreating them as toy cars, their owners can relive those memories. Each time I deliver these cars, the moment feels special. You can see the joy, tears, and heartfelt words from the owners, and I know these cars mean a lot to them.

Over the years, I've created more than 3,000 cars, some based on a single model but available in up to 100 different colours and versions. I have a strong preference for stock

cars in real life, which is why most of my toy cars reflect that style. I use 3D-printed stock rims, allowing the cars to look realistic while also rolling like toys. I focus on using simple tools to create these toy cars; you won't find me using fancy equipment. Sometimes, practicality is more important than appearance.



How did you come across your Jaguar and how long have you owned it? Could you tell us about the exact specification?

I remember when I was in primary school, seeing a dad drive a champagne gold XJ-S convertible every morning before school, with two kids in the back. That image has stayed with me, and I've dreamed of sitting in an XJ-S ever since. I later encountered an XJ-S 3.6 with my dad at the garage where he usually took his XJ8 for maintenance. The car belonged to an older gentleman who mentioned that it wasn't as powerful as his other V12 XJ-S, so he wanted to sell it. That's how the XJ-S came to my home and has remained here ever since. It's a 1988 model, featuring a 3.6 inline-6 engine with 221 horsepower and US-spec headlights.



For our readers who have never visited, how would you describe the car culture in Hong Kong?

I would say that Hong Kong is a unique place, shaped by its history as a British colony, which has contributed to its diverse car culture. With a blend of Eastern and Western vehicles from various eras, you can find many well-maintained JDM cars and European classics on the roads. People are beginning to respect and appreciate classic cars, especially those from the 80s and 90s. Car shows and gatherings have become popular, allowing collectors and fans to share their passion and celebrate the craftsmanship of these iconic models.



How does the Jag fair in the Hong Kong heat and humidity? It must be a pretty unusual sight on the roads!

I would say the humidity is the biggest challenge for the XJ-S in Hong Kong. Some parts of the car are starting to rust, which is common for Jaguars. I try to keep it as dry as possible, but I know that one day the entire body will need restoration and repainting. As for the heat, I typically avoid driving the XJ-S in hot weather—just like you wouldn't ask an older person to run under the blazing sun, right? That's why I have the Abarth 500C for those hotter days. Most of the time, I take the MTR since it's fast and convenient. Plus, I don't have to worry about finding a parking spot, which can be really difficult in Hong Kong.

It's quite unusual to see a Jaguar on the roads in Hong Kong; I estimate there are fewer than 30 XJ-S models still out there. Jaguars aren't a mainstream choice here; most people tend to prefer brands like Mercedes, BMW, Toyota, and especially Tesla, particularly the Model 3.

What are some of the dream cars you'd like to own one day? Are they already included in your model car collection?

For dream cars, like most car enthusiasts, I have a few on my wishlist. I've always wanted a Volkswagen Scirocco R in Viper Green; that color really catches my eye, and it's a fun, powerful car. The Alfa Romeo 4C is also on my bucket list. Despite its lack of storage space, difficulty in getting in and out, and limited legroom, it looks absolutely gorgeous. I could stand there admiring it all day!

My true dream car is the Porsche 964. I adore it in Rubystone Red; that was the colour I fell in love with as a child, and I'll never forget how stunning a Porsche looks in such a striking colour!!I've created models of them all in toy cars, and I look at them every day, hoping that one day my dreams will come true.



Rubystone is a favourite among the Classic Driver team too! Manifestation is a powerful thing, but for now, what would your dream drive be in your Jaguar?

I don't have a specific dream drive in mind for the XJ-S right now, as the car has been part of many significant moments in my life, including my wedding. It was special because you rarely see a Jaguar used as a wedding car in Hong Kong; many people might not consider it a reliable choice. However, the XJ-S performed wonderfully that day, making it one of the best occasions for it to shine.

I truly cherish the time spent with the XJ-S, whether it's with my family, friends, or especially my dog. Life is short, and you never know when the last ride will be.



Lastly, what's your ultimate driving song?

"Rage Your Dream" by M.O.V.E. It's the song from Initial D, which I watched a lot as a kid.

Photos by Andrew Chang and Andrew Lau

Gallery

