

CLASSIC DRIVER

Peering into the nest of Eagle E-types

Lead

If you have ever owned a Jaguar E-type, or even thought of owning one, then you will almost certainly have heard of Eagle E-Types, the definitive specialist in East Sussex. Established in 1984, Eagle has focused on that one car ever since...

One car, thirty years

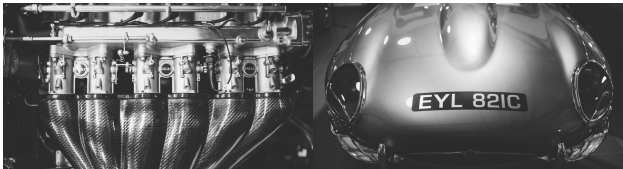


The man behind the business is Henry Pearman and there's an obvious question which has to be asked... Why, of all the cars in the world, has your business been devoted entirely to this one model for the past three decades?

"Why? Because I've loved E-types since I was about three years old. And it's not just me: it must be the most loved car across the world. Just to look at it, the E-type has a certain magic – and it delivers what it says on the tin. You think 'what a fabulous-looking car' and then you drive it, and it's even better."

Eagle specialises in everything E-type but there are three main sides to the business. Best-known is the no-holds-barred Eagle E-type (and its [Speedster](#) and [Low Drag GT](#) spin-offs): a complete, ground-up 'restoration', although the word doesn't do justice to the process by which a complete, original car is painstakingly reconstructed with components that are as good or better than new, mated to an original bodyshell fastidiously restored in-house. It takes almost 4,000 hours to complete the work, with each car rebuilt to a bespoke specification for an individual client. "Each one is different," explains Pearman, "like a Savile Row suit. We take into account whether it will be used mainly for touring, or for sportier pastimes, or whatever. For example, Eagle number 31 was an extremely bespoke 4.2-litre coupé built for a client in Monaco. It included a modern automatic gearbox, alongside our in-house air-con, speed-sensitive electric power steering, and a bespoke super high-quality full leather interior – similar to [the one we built for Martin Brundle](#), in fact. Meanwhile, Eagles 36 and 37 are in the process of being built now, ready for delivery later this year to California."

Subtle improvement



Pearman and his team are obsessive in their quest to improve the car without destroying its essential character. "If the E-type had stayed in production – as the 911 did – this is the direction Jaguar would probably have taken. The cars were so advanced for their time that they naturally respond to just dialling out a couple of problematic areas – silly electrical things and suchlike, which we can improve today without diluting the spirit of the original car. They all keep the correct XK engine, they don't have electric windows and we wouldn't look at developing an electric hood. We're very loyal to the original design and idea of the car. And we do everything in-house – we have our own bodyshop, restore our own bodyshells and apply our own paintwork, fit our own trim and carry out our own engine work. We even offer our own five-speed gearbox based on the all-synchro four-speed from the 4.2, but with the extra ratio for the increased motorway work demanded of the modern driver."

So what does one of these 'restored' models cost? "When the business moved to Sussex in 1993, we took the fairly radical decision to offer a fixed-price totally restored car. We'd found that so many restorations were compromised – starting out as a respray and then turning into something quite different, as more and more problems were revealed. So we decided not to do that any more. The price of an Eagle E-type depends on the year of the delivery date but to restore a really good car you're looking at something over £300,000 – a reflection of the 4,000 hours of labour, the multitude of new and restored parts, and our obsessive attention to detail."

Worth every penny?



If this is outside your preferred budget, you might be more interested in the second of Eagle's core offerings: the Endorsed E-type, which is the name Pearman gives to the very best original cars, in their original form. "We always have a selection of at least 25 cars in our showrooms, and they're the very best we can find. Even then, we take each car through a pretty rigorous restoration programme before we'll offer them for sale. We have an 8-page checklist and we go 'aggressively' through this list and rectify any faults." Even though it might look like a perfect concours-winning car when it comes in, the Eagle team is likely to spend 400-600 hours ironing out any potential faults. These 'Endorsed' cars start at a quite reasonable £135,000.

Finally, the business offers a menu of upgrades to the cars for sale in the showroom, which Pearman calls 'Eagle Engineered'. There is a proviso, however, as he explains: "Our set-up is such that we don't actually take in E-types for work, we solely work on E-types we've supplied to clients. If someone has an E-type they'd like upgrades applied to, that's not something we offer."

Something Eagle clearly *does* offer, however, is quality in spades. "At the moment, the market is recognising that quality is king," Pearman points out. Having witnessed the operation at work, we're inclined to agree. William Lyons undoubtedly would, too.

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Gallery

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