

# Who and What am I?

## Members Profile - Eric West - Part 1 of 2

*By Eric West*

### **My name is Eric West, and I am a Jaguar Addict!**

I guess the place to start is to discuss where my infatuation with Jaguars began, and that goes back a very long time to when I was 7 years old and living in the village of West Runton in Norfolk, England.

As you might know, Norfolk was the home of many wartime bomber bases, and in the mid-1950s the USAAF still occupied a number of them, in particular, Sculthorpe, a large base right on the coastline about 10 miles east of where I lived. We saw many of the new American aircraft, such as the giant B36, B47 and even the early B52. Sonic booms were a regular occurrence and my father was Company Sergeant-Major of an Army Anti-Aircraft practice camp at Weybourne, which used to train gunners in the fine art of shooting down Yanks!

(Digressing a moment, the way in which they did this was quite ingenious. The aircraft flew several miles inland, whereas the guns pointed out to sea and fired at what was effectively a "mirror image" of the aircraft, so as the jet flew East to West, the guns would fire as if it was going West to East).

Anyway, also stationed on Sculthorpe was a squadron of Fairchild C119 "Flying Boxcars" and one of these was flown by our next-door neighbour a young, crew-cut, Captain, whose name I have long forgotten. He introduced me to both aeroplanes and, of more immediate interest, Jaguars!

(I once got to sit at the controls of his C119 and while, of course, I never flew it, it was the catalyst which led me to fly 83 different types of aircraft over nearly 50 years).

One fateful day he came home from work in the most beautiful car I had ever seen, a magnificent, bright red, XK120 Coupe. I was totally stunned by it and spent hours looking at it. (If it still exists, you will probably still find my DNA all over it). Sadly, despite my best pleading, I never got to ride in it. To make that worse, my sister was then a 4-year-old little blonde, blue-eyed China doll and the wife was very much taken with her, so she got several trips in it, none of which, I am sure, she fully appreciated!

Strangely, the thing I remember most about it is the "Growler" badge on the bonnet, which seemed iconic to me even back then.



Also in those times, the British Police were transitioning from Wolseley 4/44s and 6/90s, to the Mark 2 Jaguar and it was not hard to fall, and remain, in love with the looks and performance of the Mark 2. My mates all had Dinky, or Corgi models of both the Police Car and the civilian “getaway” car, it being the preferred mount of your friendly neighbourhood blagger! (The Corgi model was best as it had plastic windows, much more realistic).

Of course, Jaguars were well out of the reach of the man in the street, my parents bought their first car at about this time, a much-used 1939 Morris 8 series E. They paid 100 Pounds for it, my mother gave Dad hell over spending that much money on a car, a scenario which would repeat when, years later, I wanted to buy a Jaguar!

My enthusiasm for Jaguars even led to an encounter with royalty.

Dad’s best Army mate was then the Queens Firemaster at Sandringham and lived in the Sandringham Gate House.

He was also the British Army Chess Champion. My sister and I used to go to visit them as they had been our neighbours in Egypt when Dad was stationed at Tel el Kebir. We would play with his daughter out on the driveway.

On one such occasion a sleek sports convertible pulled into the driveway and a tall man got out. Being all of 8 years old, and cheeky, I said, “Hey Mister, I know what that is, it’s a Jaguar”, he replied, “No Sonny, it’s a Lagonda”, then went into the house. It appears he was there to arrange a game of chess.

Moments later, he reappeared, got into his car, said, “Goodbye Children” and drove off into the estate. Moments later my mother appeared, looking somewhat frazzled and said, “Were you polite to that Man”?

Having assured her that we were, she told us that he was the Queen’s husband, Prince Philip! I spoke to him again, briefly, many years later when I was a Traffic Officer, but it did not seem appropriate to remind him of the incident!

In 1958, after the infamous “Duncan Sandy’s White Paper’, which drastically reduced the size of the British Army, my father took voluntary redundancy and a position with the New Zealand Army at Waiouru.

I recall our family being met at the Waiouru Station at 10.00pm on a July night, (a night when brass monkeys were considerably endangered), by a rather fruity RNZEME Captain, in a 1932 Buick convertible, with the top down! I am sure the ride to his house, and then to our accommodation, stunted my growth!

The captain was not alone though, we later had another RNZEME Lieutenant, (our Scoutmaster), who purchased a 1928 Studebaker Hearse, to go camping in! We Scouts reckoned we were the only passengers ever to get out and thank the driver!

My interface with Jaguars was, for a few years, quite limited, I had an after-school job washing dishes at one of the restaurants fronting the Desert Road and we occasionally had Jaguar-driving customers call in, usually in Mk VIIIs and Mark IXs. I thought, and still think, that these were totally beautiful.

I did get my driver’s licence in Waiouru, taught by our neighbour, the local constable, in a 1947 Hillman.

It was about then that there was a magazine called "Understanding Science" which I subscribed to, and this frequently explained how various parts of a car worked, the E Type and the Mk 10 were coming into production and the magazine published lovely cutaway drawings of both these cars, which I really wish I still had!

My next real encounter of the Jaguar kind was when I moved to Rotorua after I left school and got a job washing cars at a local garage. Imagine my delight when I discovered that my duties included washing and polishing a dark blue Series 1, E Type Coupe! This belonged to a local Real Estate Agent, and I was forbidden, under pain of rough surgery on my delicate parts, from ever starting it or trying to move it out of the wash bay.

(I did have a rather embarrassing encounter with a 1934 Rolls Royce, which left me standing outside the office girls' window, in my underpants, but that is a tale for another time)!

There were only two E Types in Rotorua then, the other being a red drophead, which I also cleaned, and it was in this car that I had my first ride in a Jaguar, through the Kaingaroa Forest, at a speed which would see you walking for a long time today!

Then there was Miss Wilson!

Miss Wilson was an elderly spinster of the Parish, who drove a white Daimler 2.5 V8 Saloon. At the time, my mother was living in my parent's holiday home at Hamurana, while my father was waiting for Army housing to become available at Papakura.

Miss Wilson lived out near Hamurana and offered to give me a lift out to see mum. She was about 80 years old, and I guess she saw no real reason to continue living, and that is the way she drove! In my later career I conducted many driver tests and engaged in numerous high-speed pursuits. I have never been as terrified in a car as I was on that journey! Surprisingly, Miss Wilson died in her bed!

On a brighter note, I was introduced, on a blind date, to a young lady, the daughter of a local cocky, she was undeniably a most attractive girl. Her attraction was by no means diminished by the fact that Daddy used to let her borrow one of his cars, a 1964 3.8 S-type, which became the first Jaguar I ever drove. Sadly, her father's faith in her was misplaced, and she wrote it off on a backroad near Murupara, not long after we broke up. I would like to think it was because she was pining for me, but that's most unlikely!

I nearly moved into the realms of Jaguar ownership, (well almost a Jaguar) while I was in Rotorua, when I was offered a Swallow-bodied 1923 Austin 7, for the princely sum of a tenner! I was tempted as I had a girlfriend, but no car and I was just about in a sufficient financial league to afford it, but the magneto drive, (yes, it had a magneto), was a bit dodgy, so I turned it down. Again, it is something I wish I had today.

About then, my other great passion, flying, came to the fore, and I moved up to my parent's home to learn to fly at Ardmore, being reduced to riding a Vespa 90, while I saved all my pennies to throw them out of a Lycoming exhaust. Having done so I then went to Australia to get a flying job and spent many happy hours flying over the West Australian desert looking for Nickel.

*Eric*

*To be continued in July magazine as Part 2*