

Side GLANCES

By Peter Egan, EDITOR-AT-LARGE

THE EXPLODED VIEW

JUST BEFORE SHUTTING OFF MY READING light the other night, I looked at the page number of the book I was reading, Melville's magnificent *Moby Dick*. Page 659, chapter 105. Only 164 pages left. What a great book. How had I gotten to the ripe old age of 53 without ever reading it before?

CliffsNotes, that's how. Exam coming, not enough time to read it all. The typical college deal. Yet I had time to learn the chords to "Wild Thing." All three of them. Ah, well.

I put down the book and examined my hands, flexing them and wincing a bit. Two fresh Band-Aids leaking mercurochrome, four visible healing cuts and two blood blisters. You'd think I'd been boxing with a robot. But no. Earlier that evening, I had successfully transplanted a freshly rebuilt 4.2-liter Jaguar XK twin-cam engine from a wooden engine dolly upward from the bottom and into the engine bay of my 1967 E-Type coupe.

What a process. Between the wooden engine dolly, made from thick, oil-stained timbers, and the overhead cherry-picker with its massive chains, the whole operation looked like a medieval siege device being readied to fling an engine block at a Norman castle. Except the XK engine was too heavy to fling anywhere. It was a massive, beautiful lump that seemed to comprise at least a full third of the Jaguar, as if the chassis and wheels and that svelte body were nothing but a delivery system for the engine, much like helmeted soldiers with a battering ram, headed for the castle door.

Sorry about all this ancient martial imagery, but there is something undeniably heraldic and glorious about the best British cars that calls this sort of thing to mind. They are all genetically related to Robin Hood's bow or Richard Lion Heart's shield. The Brits can't

help it. It's how they make things.

And the engine was in the car, at last, sitting on its motor mounts, ready for its carburetors and exhaust manifolds. Back in its home after a two-year absence. In defiance of all sound physical theory, I half expected a vacuum to form where the engine had been sitting over in the corner, sucking all my posters and photographs off the wall of the workshop. The garage looked almost empty without it, as though a whole car were missing from a two-car garage.

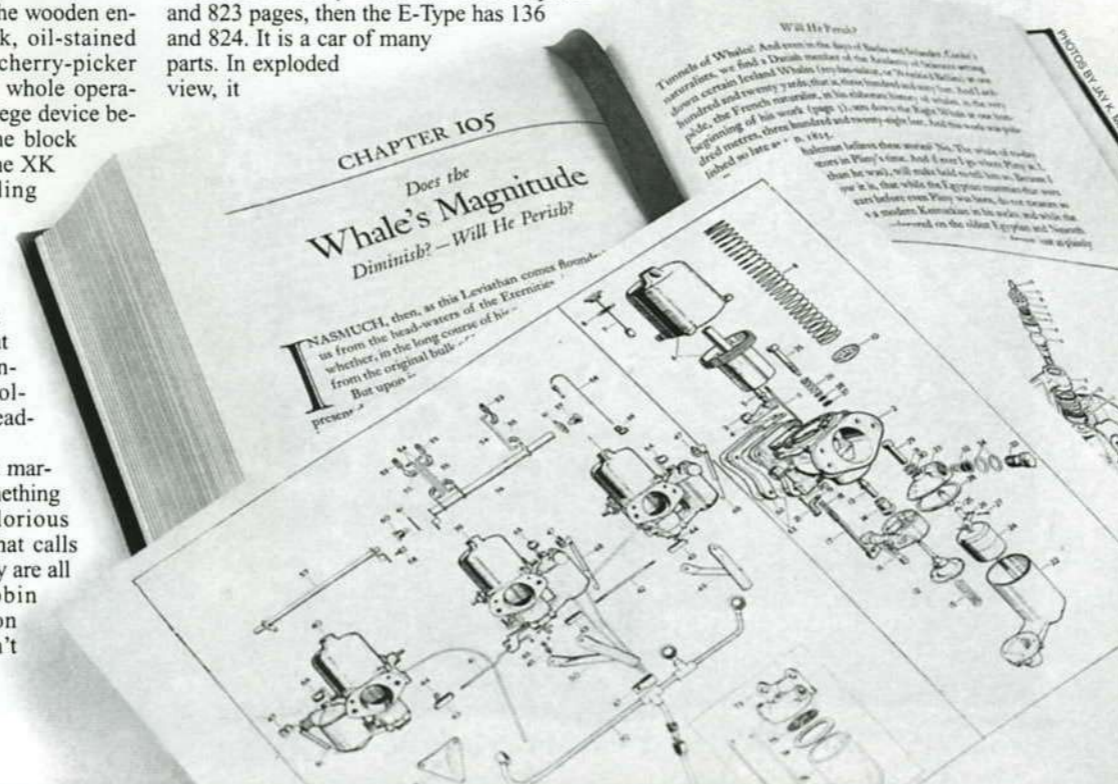
In any case, I was well on my way to accomplishing the two things I'd vowed to do this past fall: Finish reading *Moby Dick* and get the Jaguar running. Two classics needing completion, each amazingly complex and freighted with meaning just beneath a smooth surface of considerable beauty.

Of the two, however, I'm not sure the car doesn't have the novel beat for complexity; it may be that Sir William Lyons and his team of engineers have out-Melville Melville. If *Moby Dick* has 135 chapters and 823 pages, then the E-Type has 136 and 824. It is a car of many parts. In exploded view, it

looks like the atomic structure of the universe, pulled apart into all its compounds and elements.

Take the throttle linkage, for example. No Sprite-like cable that runs from gas pedal to throttle arm for the Jaguar; it has a series of bell cranks, levers and rods that takes the forward motion of the gas pedal and routes it forward, upward, across the firewall, down the firewall and forward to the carburetors. Beautiful, smooth and elegant, but complex. An Austin-Healey Sprite has about six distinct, individual parts to its throttle linkage and the Jaguar has about 55, by quick count as I stand in front of the engine bay.

And then there are the brakes. No simple master cylinder and brake lines here. You have two separate masters joined remotely by a system of brake lines, vacuum boosters, vacuum lines, reservoir and check valves, along with a remote set of



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fluid reservoirs protected by a pair of heat shields that bolt to the frame with multi-piece brackets. Part of the vacuum system runs through a pipe behind the firewall, held in with retainer plates and rivets. The hoses use three different sizes of special hose clamps.

This brake system is so complex I can't actually remember exactly how it works for more than a few minutes, even after I've just read about it and looked at the schematic diagram. It's enough to make a steam locomotive designer weep. For all that, the brakes are none too powerful for stopping a supposed 150-mph sports car. But they are virtually failsafe, full of backup circuits and contingency features. You have to experience about six kinds of bad luck at once to totally lose your brakes on an E-Type.

If the Jaguar's various systems are complicated, so is most major repair work on the car. The clutch comes to mind. It has a very short service life, yet clutch replacement requires a full engine and transmission pull, after the usual removal of the huge and heavy bonnet (which requires the assistance of two men and a dog), radiator, cooling system, etc. Part of the suspension has to be disassembled, too, to get the tie plate for the torsion bars out of the way. A messy, time-consuming affair. And expensive, if you hire it done.

Back in the 1970s, when I worked as a full-time foreign car mechanic, you could buy used E-Types with slipping clutches quite inexpensively (\$1500 was typical), because no one wanted to spend the money for a new one. Some already had, and once was more than enough. A second clutch job was a drain on your lifetime reserves of enthusiasm, like finding out you had to go through college all over again because the dean had forgotten to record your grades.

But if complexity is the curse of the E-Type, it is also one of its finest virtues. It may even be the reason I own the car. It's the trait that makes an evening in the garage seem worthwhile.

Sure, the front suspension is made of many separate parts rather than a couple of simple stamped A-arms, but look at those forgings! Strong, yet delicate in appearance, right off the D-Type at Le Mans. Yes, the three SU carbs can be difficult to rebuild or synchronize, but was anyone ever

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greeted with any more beautiful sight when raising the bonnet of a car? And that gold twin-cam cylinder head with the polished cam covers and chromed acorn nuts looks like the first cousin to a Rolls-Royce Merlin in a Spitfire. The car bristles with paper-weight-quality hardware.

Even now, when you rebuild an E-Type, you can't believe Jaguar was able to build this car for less than \$6000 in 1960s' money. No parts-bin engineering here, either; nearly all its suspension, steering, brake and body parts are unique to the Jaguar range, and most are specific to the E-Type itself. The beautiful casting that suspends the brake and clutch pedals from the footwell, for instance, appears in no other car I know of. How did they do it?

I don't know.

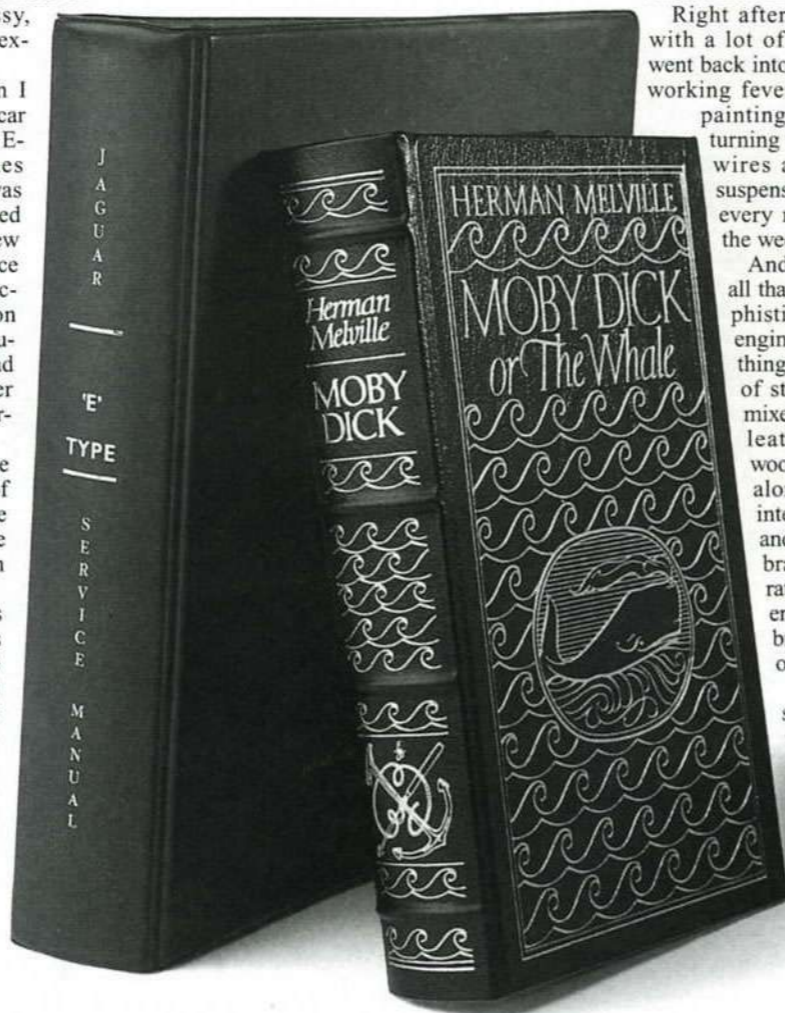
But, in a strange way, I've been grateful lately for those many parts. This past summer, I quit working on the car for a couple of months because the weather was too nice to stay in the garage. In my spare time I walked the dogs, rode motorcycles and bicycles, sailed, went fishing, read books, drove the old 356 on country roads.

Then, on perhaps the most beautiful morning of autumn, three airplanes crashed into three buildings.

Right after that, I found myself with a lot of undirected energy. I went back into the garage and started working feverishly. Bead-blasting, painting parts, lifting things, turning wrenches, hooking up wires and hoses, adjusting suspension. I've been working every night, sometimes until the wee hours.

And I've been thankful in all that time for the subtle sophistication of the Jaguar's engineering. There is something about its combination of style, grace and quality mixed with the whiff of old leather and the grain of wood on the steering wheel, along with the car's very intent to make life bigger and more colorful and vibrant than it has to be—rather than smaller, meaner and more pinched and brutal—that reminds me of Civilization.

So it's been good, spending all these hours working on the car. Besides, I had to do something, I think I'm too old for the Army to take me back. ☐



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