



Jules Bodycraft's Dave Gautier

# Craft work

Thanks to the high quality of its work, Jules Bodycraft has become one of the UK's leading Jaguar restorers. We head to its Wolverhampton premises to find out more

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY PAUL WALTON

**J**ULES BODYCRAFT has restored hundreds of cars in its five-decade history but clearly stands out from the rest – a 1962 E-type roadster. Says Jules Bodycraft's Dave Gautier, "About three years ago, we were asked to restore the car for a local family who had owned it for 30 years. It was sold to an enthusiast from Malta who had commissioned a dealer in London to find him a car. The dealer looked at dozens all over Europe until he saw this one and declared, 'I'm going to recommend this is the one to have.'"

Dave kept in touch with the new owner who recently told him that the car had won a concours in Malta. Says Dave, "It was a

big one, too – an international event with cars from all over the world attending." The award was a well-deserved testament to this established company's abilities.

Dave's father, Rod, founded Jules Bodycraft at its current Brewwood Road premises in Coven, a few miles from Wolverhampton, back in 1969 as a small bodyshop specialising in general crash repairs. However, as a Jaguar enthusiast, Rod tried to work on them whenever he could. "Dad always had an interest in Jaguars," explains Dave, "and since local people knew this, he became busier and busier with them."

In the mid-Eighties, when prices of classic cars were on the rise, Rod bought several



A grey E-type being resprayed in the onsite paintbooth



Just some of the cars waiting to be restored in the company's lock-up

E-types in the States and shipped them back to the UK to restore them. Says Dave, "Since you got two dollars to the pound at the time, he bought quite a few cars; we must have restored around 15 to 20 in that time. Since then, we've really focused on Jaguar."

Dave took over the running of the company around 15 years ago when his father retired. "I was always around the cars when I was a kid," he says, "and Dad's interest just rubbed off on me. I started to work here when I was 16 and have been here ever since."

Today, the company boasts a staff of five (plus Dave's brother, who runs the general garage side of the business, which continues to service and MOT modern cars). Jules Bodycraft is now a leading restorer in classic Jaguars and a specialist in bodywork, either replacing complete panels or repairing them. Dave shows me a badly damaged wing of a dismantled E-type and tells me that the ruined section will be cut away and replaced with fresh steel from another wing.

On the day of my visit, an XK 120, all three series of E-type and a 420 saloon are in the workshop. The company will tackle work on any classic Jaguar apart from pre-war models. "We don't have the resources to restore the ash frames of pre-war models," explains Dave.

Along with body repairs and maintenance, Jules Bodycraft also offers full resprays in its onsite paintbooth. Dave understands the importance of paintwork, especially with cars as valuable as the E-type, and is justifiably proud of the quality of his company's resprays. "Paint is what people see first. What's underneath is obviously important, but the paint sells the car."

With full restorations, Jules Bodycraft carries out everything itself to be sure of the quality, with the exception of engine and transmission rebuilds, which are outsourced to local specialists. Cars are then reassembled onsite, including fitting any necessary interior trim.

The company can either restore cars



[Jobtitle?] Aiden \*\*\*\* swaps the steering of an imported E-type from left to right



An E-type Series 3 restored by the company 20 years ago is in for a service



Dave Gautier adjusts the steering of an E-type roadster 4.2 nearing the end of its restorations

sourced by customers (a lock-up to the rear of the workshop is full of E-types, owned by customers, waiting to be restored) or find suitable examples itself. Dave confesses he's amazed at how many unrestored E-types he can still find, some in the States.

In fact, two American-import E-types are currently in the workshop being converted

from left- to right-hand drive. In the last ten years, Jules Bodycraft has made some excellent contacts both in the east and on the west coast of America and, as a result, can offer customers a complete sourcing and importing service, from finding a suitable car, through collection and shipping, to delivery and handling all the necessary paperwork.

A recent shift, though, is being asked to work on later Jaguars. "We now do a lot of work on the XK8s, predominantly replacing wheelarches, sills and floors; all the bad areas. I'm about to repair the wheelarch of a 1996 XJ6 owned by one of our E-type customers. We'll do whatever we have to do," says Dave.

While it's unlikely such a car will win a concours event like the E-type in Malta, thanks to Dave's passion for Jaguars and his desire for getting them right, the repair – like everything else this company does – will be to the same high standard. 📧



A Jaguar 420 midway through its full restoration

## Jules Bodycraft

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