

Two Jaguars by Chris Harris-Evans

In England in the 50s and 60s everyone wanted a Jaguar. Advertised for *GRACE, SPACE & PACE* they really delivered, with sumptuous leather, acres of wood and the fabulous 6 cylinder twin cam engine and all for a very reasonable price. They were the aspiration of the “nouveau riche” comparable to the Rolls Royce and Bentley for the truly wealthy.

My first Jaguar was a 2.4 MKI, it was the entry level model with the leather and wood and twin cam six, but at reduced capacity with correspondingly less power. Mine was even more handicapped with a worn engine that turned out to have a burnt valve, that I discovered when I removed the cylinder head. After replacing the damaged valve and lapping all the others I discovered that there was no adjustment for valve clearance other than fitting the correct size shims. This required assembling the two cams, measuring all the valve clearances, then removing the cams again and purchasing the correct sized spacer before reassembly and rechecking the clearance which hopefully would now be correct.

With the engine fixed I used the Jaguar to commute down to Southampton every other weekend to visit my fiancée, Jean, who was doing a post graduate course while I was enjoying the benefits of my first salary.

The two Jaguars were not consecutive, but separated by the two Citroens, so that I bought the second after our wedding. I had family living in Africa and I always wanted see how they lived so I got a job at the Victoria Falls Electricity Board in Livingstone, Zambia. I knew that I would need a good car so I bought a 1960 3.4 MKII Jaguar, filled it with our wedding presents and shipped it in the hold of a freighter, with Jean and I travelling as passengers, from Liverpool to Cape Town. I will never forget the embarrassment, after we boarded the boat, when the purser asked us “where are your parents?” We obviously looked too young at our mature 22 years old!

There were about fifteen passengers on the boat and we dined with the Captain and Officers every day. We stopped at Tenerife in the Canary Islands, Lobito Bay in Angola and Walvis Bay in South West Africa before arriving in Cape Town where we were stuck for two days while the Jaguar cleared customs. Eventually we set out for Zambia spending about a week travelling at a leisurely pace through South Africa and Rhodesia before we crossed the Zambezi and into Zambia. We drove through Livingstone before we even realized we were there. It was so small, like a Western town with trucks instead of hitching posts, and we would be living at the power station seven miles outside of town. The family we had come to visit were 500 miles north in the Copper Belt so we were definitely in the “boonies”.

Zambia had three types of road, first, dirt, which tends to develop into corrugations that have to be graded every so often. Then there is strip or single tar which is great until someone approaches in the other direction and you have to move over into the dirt. Finally there are good two lane roads, typically in and around the towns, but continuous between Lusaka, the Capital, and the Copper Belt. The Jaguar was fabulous; the dirt road was fine as long as you kept the speed over 60 to smooth out the corrugations. A similar speed was about the safe maximum for moving off the tar into the dirt, when encountering opposing traffic on the strip road. The two lane had a nominal 60mph limit but the Jag would happily cruise at 100mph with the light traffic but you had to keep your eyes open for dogs and other wildlife.

We lived in a prefab overlooking the third and fourth gorges below the Victoria Falls. There was always the spray from the falls and initially we were without air-conditioning until I fitted a couple of window units.

I enjoyed the two years working at the hydro power station, maintaining the plant, building power lines and taking endless pictures of the river and the Falls, whereas Jean, although she got a job teaching at the local school, was bored and wanted to return to civilization. So after two years, I sold the Jaguar, for more than I had originally paid for it, and we returned home to England. I had to promise Jean that I would never take her to a hot country, full of snakes and other wild life again, which I broke a dozen years later when we came to the US.