

# The mother of all rebuilds: 9600 HP is

Picture: ANTHONY MARSHALL and DAVID PARMETER

After 21 years in a barn, the oldest E-Type in existence is about to be restored. During the next 11 months, its owner, **Philip Porter**, will report on progress...

**T**HE E-TYPE Jaguar that created the legend — the original E-Type — is about to emerge from a 16th-century barn in Worcestershire to be totally restored. Known universally by its distinctive 9600 HP registration, the oldest E-Type in existence has been sitting in darkness for 21 years, but it has had several exciting lives.

The E-Type is a machine that still thrills. But back in 1961 it truly was a phenomenon, with an impact that is almost impossible to comprehend now. Early examples were literally mobbed.

Motorists pulled in front of E-Type drivers to stop them for a chat and a closer look. The police did the same. One owner parked his car in the City and returned from his office to find such a crowd around it that he had to postpone his journey home and go for a drink instead.

Descended directly from the Le Mans winning D-types, the first prototype was built in 1956, the year after the awful accident at Le Mans that claimed more than 80 lives. It was thought that a limit would be imposed on engine size, and so a smaller, lighter car was designed, to double as a racer and a high-performance road car.

Masterminded by Bill Heynes, the E-Type was designed by Malcolm Sayer, a remarkable man who uniquely used complicated formulae to create shapes in the way that computers do today. Anticipating computer-aided design (CAD) by several decades, he claimed that the E-Type was the first production car to be designed mathematically. Sayer, the pre-eminent aerodynamicist of his day, hated to be a stylist, and yet he created one of the



Rebirth: Bob Berry, left, and Philip Porter with 9600 HP

most beautiful cars of all time. Today manufacturers build several hundred prototypes to develop a new car. To develop the E-Type, Jaguar had about five. And one was 9600 HP. Built in 1960, the car was mainly used for high-speed testing; one of the best places to do that was the new and still quiet M1 motorway. Jaguar was determined that the E-Type would be a 150mph car. The equally stunning XK120 of 1948 had proved to be the fastest production car in the

world and Jaguar was used to leaving the competition trailing. But there was a problem. The E-Type would not quite do 150mph. It would do 145, maybe 146, even at a push 147 or just 148, but not 150. The final 2mph made an enormous difference in terms of prestige, but proved elusive as chief tester Norman Dewis rushed around the Motor Industry Research Association (MIRA) test track and up and down the M1. Furthermore, on the March launch date

approaching fast, all the publicity material had been printed... Jaguar tried three different engines in the first three months of 1961. The car was lightened in subtle ways. They tried lowering the suspension at the front. They experimented with larger wheels and racing tyres. In the end, in desperation, they relied on what we might term a warm engine — and removed the front over-riders. Well, they were worth another 2mph!

In February and March, 9600 HP, which had been given the title of press car, was loaned to most of the leading magazines and newspapers for their journalists to road-test ahead of the launch in Geneva. One of those journalists was John Langley, then a young reporter on *The Daily Telegraph* and later to become *Motoring Correspondent*. He remembers his drive vividly and has written several articles about the unforgettable experience.

The first magazine to test 9600 HP was *The Autocar*, which took it abroad to obtain maximum speed figures. Such speeds were virtually unheard of at that time, and it took some courage, and many adventures, before the magic number — a two-way mean speed of 150-mph — was finally recorded. The car was then readied for the launch in Switzerland, at the Geneva Motor Show press day, but it was delayed by last-minute problems. Leaving the night

before, Jaguar PR man and amateur racer Bob Berry had to drive flat out from Coventry to Geneva, arriving with just 20 minutes to spare. With Sir William Lyons proudly standing by his latest and most sensational creation, 9600 HP was shown to the world's press in a Geneva park. 9600 HP was subsequently in virtually every publication and was available for any publicity stunt. When London's first automatic "car laundry"