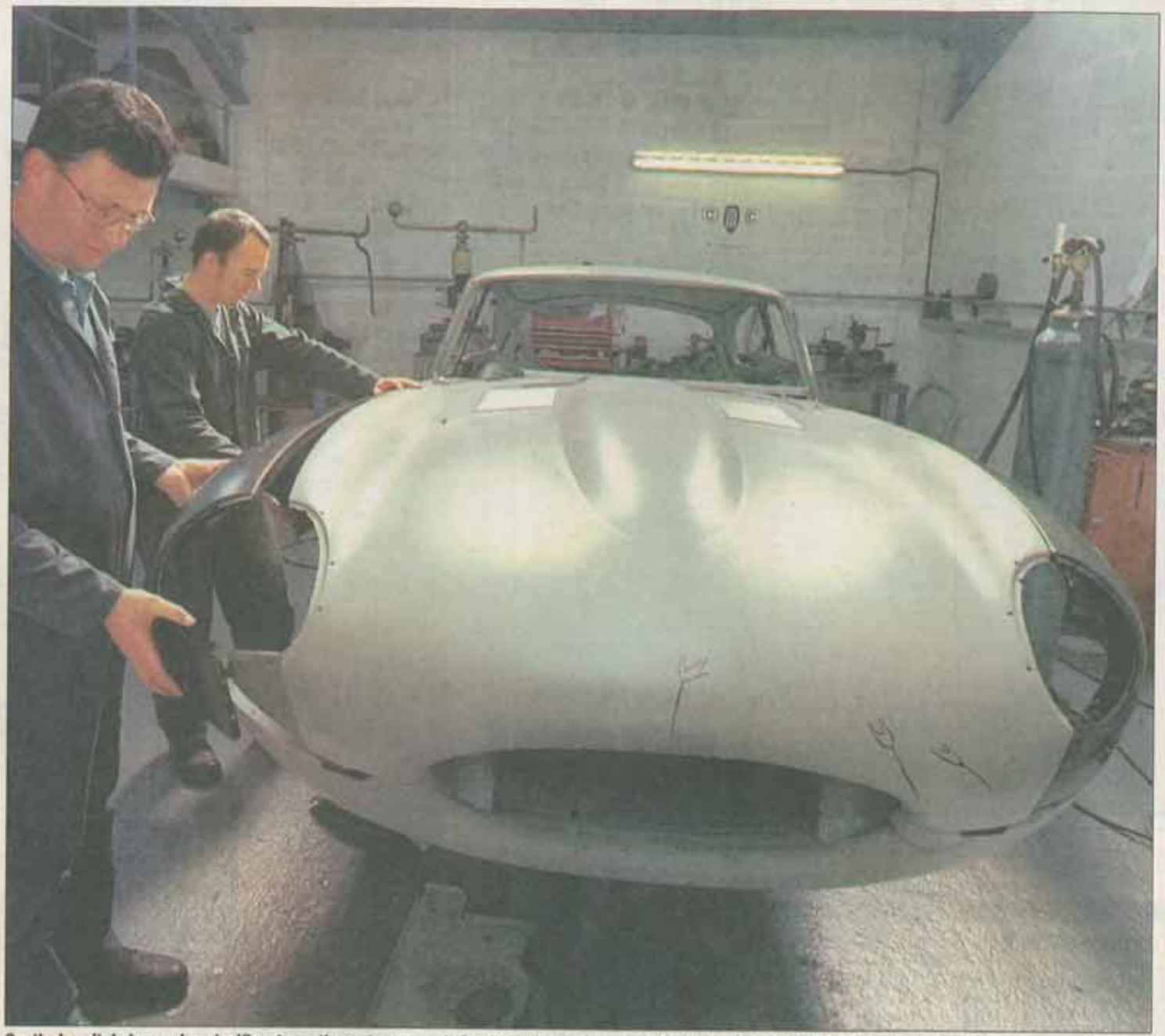
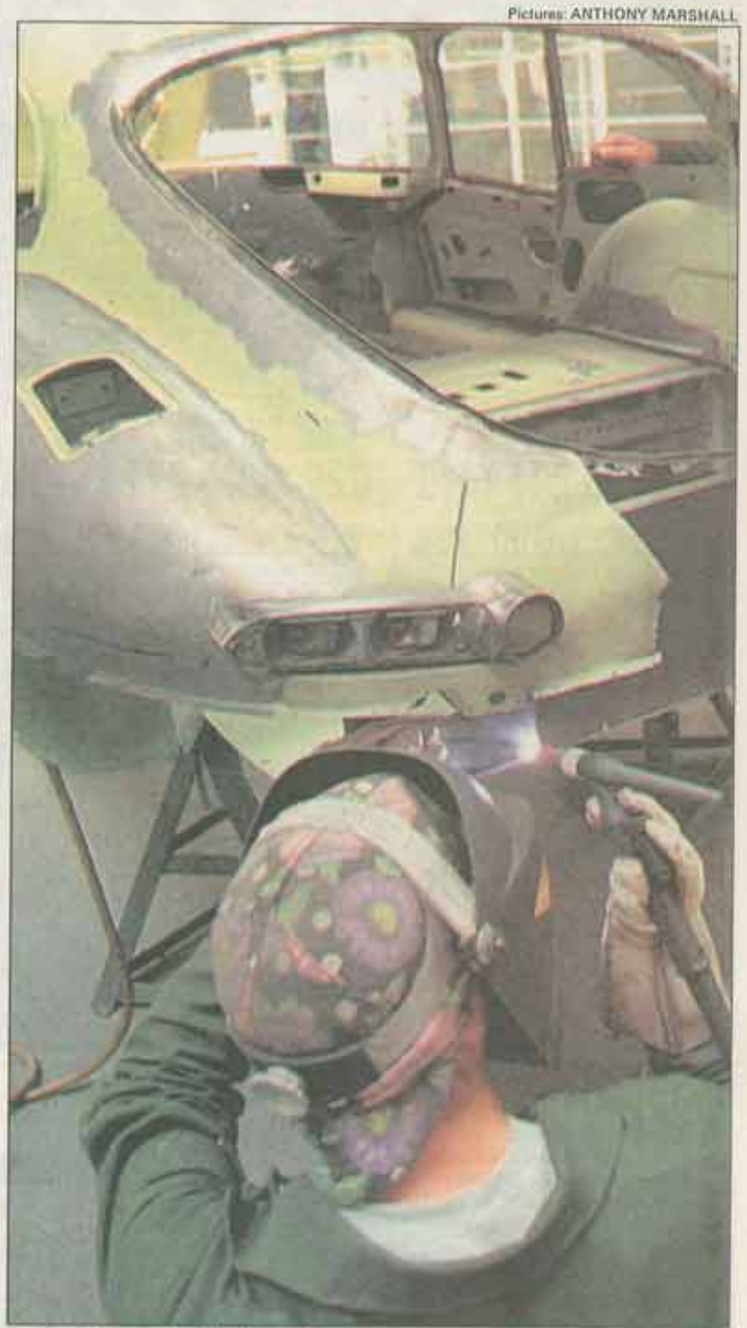
Automobilia

A piece of history in

Almost a year after work began on the 1961 prototype E-type, the car's owner, **Philip Porter**, reports on how progress is being painstakingly made

Pictures: ANTHONY MARSHALL





Gently does it: being such a significant car, the restorers wanted to keep as much as possible of the original 9600 HP. Ideally, this would be a conservation exercise, rather than restoration by replacement

THE restoration of 9600 HP, the oldest E-type in existence and the car that launched the legend back in 1961, commenced last April and has since continued apace at Classic Motor Cars in Bridgnorth, Shropshire.

Superficially, the car appeared to be in pretty dreadful condition, but it is hardly surprising that a deep layer of grime had accumulated during 20 years in my barn. Being such a significant car, its condition was crucial because it was our desire to maintain as much of the original as possible. Ideally, this would be a conservation exercise, rather than restoration by replacement. The skill of the restorers was going to be paramount and the spotlight was on the chaps at CMC throughout.

The first jobs were to remove the vaguely-attached bonnet, strip out the interior and de-gunge the engine compartment. This revealed a number of previously unnoticed curiosities. Having been the development car in 1960-61, it is hardly surprising that 9600 HP should have some unique features. Clearly, it was hand-built before much of the production tooling existed.

Together with CMC, knowledgeable parts specialist SNG Barratt and senior Jaguar designers of the time, we have indulged in plenty of productive detective work and are gradually piecing together the early life of the car.

Originally built with great safety reasons but, to my relief, it was by and large going to be an exercise in localised repairs rather than wholesale replacement.

The shotblasting revealed a curious mixture of superb workmanship and a few bodges. Whereas production E-types have their body panels joined by overlapping, spot-welded edges, this old girl had her panels butt-welded (ie edge to edge).

Originally built with great

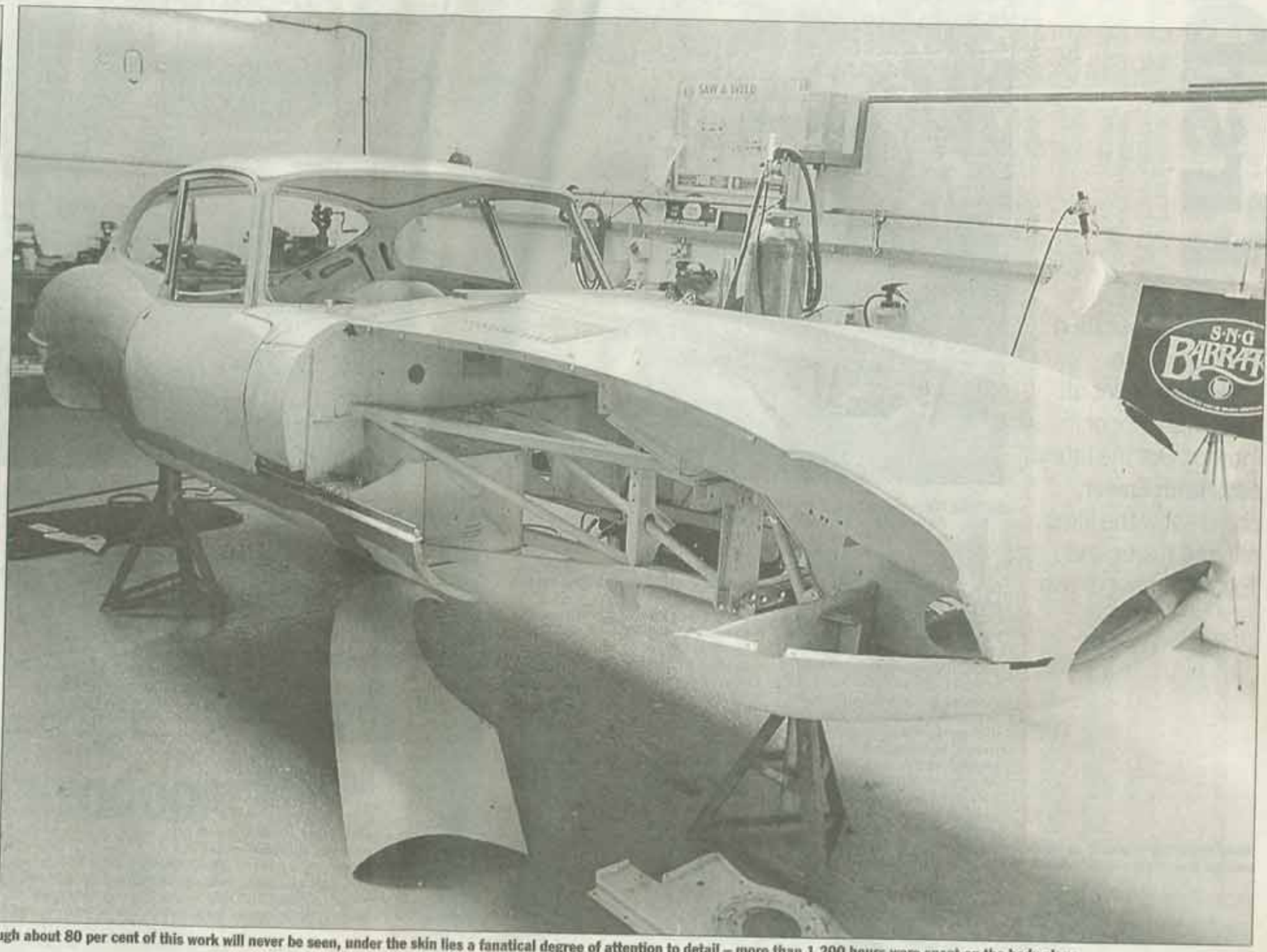
Tart — was exemplary. Every last detail has been saved, repaired or faithfully recreated.

Although about 80 per cent of this work will never be seen, under the skin lies a fanatical degree of attention to detail. Even though the shell was far from bad, more than 1,200 hours were spent on the body.

After minimal lead filling and trial fitting of items such as bumpers and lights, the shell went off to House of Kolor to be repainted. To maintain period authenticity, cellulose paint was used.

The car was then returned to CMC, where the rebuilt mechanical components have been refitted and the time-consuming task of general

the remaking



Details, details: every item has been saved, repaired or faithfully recreated. Although about 80 per cent of this work will never be seen, under the skin lies a fanatical degree of attention to detail – more than 1,200 hours were spent on the body alone

fitting-out is in process. No matter how experienced you are, this always takes longer than you anticipate.

The engine, meanwhile, has covered only about 50,000 miles and remains in excellent condition. None the less, it has been subjected to a total and meticulous rebuild which revealed that the carburettors date back to 1959.

I have been endeavouring to trace more of the car's life story prior to my buying it in 1977. As a result of my first article on the subject in *The Daily Telegraph*, a reader wrote to tell me that original owner John Paddy Carstairs sadly died 30 years ago, although his widow is still alive. A delightful lady, she has become a friend and I have learnt more about her multi-talented husband, who was a film director, artist, screen-writer and novelist.

Another reader wanted to know why the car was left-hand drive at the original Geneva launch but has since been converted to right-hand drive. It served as a press car early in its career and photographs in early-Sixties test reports show that it was already in RHD form. Interestingly, CMC found parts of the old left-hand drive throttle linkage still attached to the bulkhead.

Jaguar documentation from that period clearly details chassis numbers — including the fact that the car had three different engines in the first three months of 1961 as Jaguar battled to reach the magic 150mph top speed. Covered in more grime than virtually any other part of the car, the original chassis plate is still in place.

The car is now back on its wheels and the trimmers have started their work. It looks increasingly finished and March 14 is our deadline to recreate a mad overnight dash to Geneva — exactly 39 years after 9600 HP made it with minutes to spare to launch the E-type to 200 waiting pressmen. We then aim to recreate the 150mph runs, but not on public roads this time ...

Classic Motor Cars: 01746 765804

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Can you help?

"I AM keen to learn more about Malcolm Sayer, the legendary aerodynamicist and E-type designer. He worked initially for the Bristol Aeroplane Co and, in his spare time, designed bodies for the short-lived Gordano car project in the late Forties. Can any *Telegraph* reader help with further information on Sayer, the Gordano or any other aspect of 9600 HP's history?"

Philip Porter would appreciate information, at PO Box 2, Tenbury Wells, WR15 8XX. Fax 01584 781630. E-mail philip@porter-jaguar.demon.co.uk

plenty of productive detective work and are gradually piecing together the early life of the car.

Photographing everything in detail before stripping the car down couldn't be described as a heart stopping job, but the next task was: shotblasting the bodyshell. This was an intensely worrying time, for the E-type is largely of monocoque construction and shotblasting takes no prisoners. Corroded metal becomes a pile of dust on the floor and areas that have become unacceptably thin — or perforated — are shown up. The most economic way to restore an E-type body today is to throw away all but the front bulkhead and to build a new shell from there, but to have done that with 9600 HP would have been a catastrophe.

After an anxious few days, we breathed again. Though looking sad after years of neglect, the shell was not that bad. One or two major panels would need replacing for spot-welded edges, this old girl had her panels butt-welded (ie edge to edge).

Originally built with great care and skill in mid-1960, this prototype then had to work hard to become the sensational sports car that would be launched the following March. Time is always short during development and many details needed changing, evaluating, modifying again and checking. As a result, the extraordinarily small team of engineers was under great pressure and some jobs had to be rushed. Beneath the surface, panels were hacked about to suit the ongoing mods. There are even subtle differences in construction from one side to the other.

Without the right attitude and fervent enthusiasm for the car, these many eccentricities could have been overlooked and lost, but CMC's approach — led by the hands-on involvement of technical director Andrew

on the body.

consuming task of general

Mud, sweat and tears: before the rebuild, the car appeared to be in a pretty dreadful condition – hardly surprising since a deep layer of grime had accumulated during 20 years in a barn

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