

How the Purple Gherkin got its Name

Mike Powley is in the middle of his life (his words!) and even although he has had several sporting cars of the British persuasion; a couple of MGs and Morgans, he still feels that the "Lucas - made in Britian black-mechanical-magic curse" is still yet to be exorcised totally. What did he do? - well short of getting something really obscure and old like a Lagonda or some other such thing - he went for a contemporary classic.

My choice....a 1976 Series Two XJ6 Coupe!

Now given the "M" word cited at the beginning of the article, some strategies are necessary if one is to achieve the goal.

I started looking at XKE Coupes, especially 2+2s and did this with my better half every chance I got. This just created a brouhaha in the family as another small British thing was not what my Rosemarie had in mind. I mean for her it was "Mike, get a life!...get a real car for a change."

Given this extreme opposition to such a silly notion as an XKE it was relatively simple to pull the fast switch and view a much more practical unit - a real four seat automobile that could fit four real people; this ploy actually seemed to work and begrudgingly I was allowed to bring the XJC home.

This was not without some trepidation on my part as I was aware of this unit's potential for disaster. Comments such as can be found in Don Ward's article "The World's Fastest Vinyl Roof," quoting Jag authority and author/editor Paul Skilleter as rating its reliability as only slightly better than the wooden spoon duo of the Rover 2000 TC and Lotus Elan. This kind of literature was not allowed to fall into the rest of the family's hands!

About the unit - it was lavender-blue! (dilly-dilly) but having a chance to be the second owner had to override the aversion to this colour. A real sissy car - friends wondered just what kind of mid-life something or another Powley was really having! so in their taunts it soon became known as the Purple Gherkin.

Part of the strategy in buying such a unit was an interest to have a show car of sorts and not one where, like the XKEs, the classes are so crowded and competitive that Jags with 99.00 points or better are as common as tabby cats. This model only saw real production effort in 1976 and the total of both sixes and twelves was, via Paul Skilleter's '84 book, 8,378 units, or via Phillip Porter's '88 book, 8,403 units built, and in my observation comparatively even less going into shows. This latter fact was verified, for when I

joined the local Jag Club (Canadian XK Jag. Register) mine was the only one of this variant to belong at that time.

The car was a first time out 2nd place winner in the May of '88 Vancouver All Brits - it is at these kind of events that the colour works its magic charm in influencing the people's choice voting format, for, to date the sissy car has been in six such shows and never placed less than third.

However, the real event for the Jag owner is the JCNA concours circuit, and this was to be the real test as here even the common four door versions can be very close to perfect, and often are, but a 3rd place debut was achieved at the local event in the summer of '88. Once, due to the absence of other more formidable units in its class, it even got a first; personal best to date is 94.84 points. Changing the original but "shabby gentile" carpets would likely get us up a notch or two on this scale.

Be wise, though, that you the owner never get complacent or too sure of the car's ability to show itself, for at it's first BIG event in Portland, the body judge, without asking the owner, actually ruled the colour to be the dreaded "NON-AUTHENTIC" zero points award.

Had I known this bit of irony at the event insane laughter would be the only answer, but leaving with a third was OK and it was not until the results got mailed that this error was duly protested via a zany letter to the JCNA authorities, (including factory paint part # GAP-606) and indeed it was agreed, the Purple Gherkin was a factory baby in every respect. I mean who would really want to custom paint it thus?

A highlight for me and the "Gherkin" was in the '89 season when the car was awarded the JCNA Regional Concours Class Championships Class 11, FIRST IN CLASS...and (whisper! in a field of one)..this is achieved by diligently participating in at least 3 regional concours events and having all the fun that goes along with it.

Strictly a social cat our Purple Gherkin!
Mike Powley

