

Selecting the right Jaguar E-type for you

Understanding the different “series”

Ivan Ruiz – October, 2004

If you are new to Jaguar e-type it may be a bit confusing listening to folks talk about “a series 1.5 OTS with dual Strombergs” and have no idea what they are talking about. The objective of this article is to try to explain the different models from 1961 until 1974 so that you can make a more informed decision.

1961 through 1964 – Series 1 3.8 liter

When Jaguar introduced the E-type in 1961 it was an instant sensation. Sleek, sexy, fast ... all in an affordable package. The first 500 cars are easily distinguished by the latching mechanism for the bonnet being located on the outside sides. On later cars that was moved inside. Also these early cars had many hand made features which were needed by the factory since all the mass production molds and techniques had not been completed ... remember, Jaguar had to rush product of the e-type to meet demand. One example you may see in ads for an early car are “welded louvers”, these are the bonnet louvers which on early cars were a separate part which was welded and not part of the bonnet stamping as in later cars.

The very early e-types, especially the outside latch cars, are in high demand because of their rarity and since they represent an e-type in its purest simplistic form.

Pluses:

Exterior design. You cannot beat the simplistic, non-adorned looks of the series 1 e-type

Interior design. This one may be subject to personal opinion, but I prefer the looks of the early aluminum dash and bucket seats. Granted the bucket seats were not too comfy (see minus below) but they sure look sporty.

From 1961 until 1964 the e-type was powered by the legendary XK engine with a displacement of 3.8 liters. I personally like the 3.8 liter engine over the 4.2 that followed in 1965, I find it revs better. American tend to favor the 4.2 engine since “more is better” ... but are not losing anything by going with a 3.8, and may in fact get a better engine.

In 1964, several cars were made with the 3.8 liter engine and the full synchro gearbox ... a very nice combination.

Minuses

A non-syncho gearbox was used until 1964. This gearbox is sometimes referred to as “Moss box” or “crash box”. Only 1st gear is not synchronized, the other 3 are. Yes, it

does take some time to get used to not putting the car in first gear if it is moving , and given everything equal I would pick the full synchro gearbox that came later. Still, if you find the “right car” and it happens to have the non-synchro box ... hey, it is not that bad.

Bucket seats have non-adjustable backs, okay for short trips but a visit to your chiropractor will be needed after a long journey

A cooling system which is sub par for many USA cities.

1965 through 1967 – Series 1 4.2 liter

In 1965 the e-type was refreshed mechanically and with some interior upgrades. The bucket seats gave way to seats that had adjustable seat backs. The aluminum interior trims were replaced during 1964 with black molded plastic and leather covering the center console. In the engine bay a 4.2 liter engine replaced the 3.8 and the brake booster was replaced with a more reliable unit. The full synchro gearbox was now standard. The exterior had no changes ... which is the reason these particular years are probably the most popular.

Pluses:

Exterior design. Still looks great with its simple bumpers and covered headlights

Gearbox: Okay ... the full synchro box is better

Seat comfort: A little better than before ... but do not expect miracles, you will still visit the chiropractor

Minus:

Only suitable for drivers less than 6 feet. This is true for ALL 6 cylinder e-types ... if you are 6ft or taller skip to the V12 series 3 section.

A cooling system which is sub par for many USA cities. The factory tried a different radiator but the results were mixed. I've owned several e-types that do not overheat regardless of the conditions and others that are very “particular” to driving conditions.

Late 1967 to 1968, series 1.5

The USA started imposing emission and safety requirements for car imported in model year 1968. Jaguar started making those modifications in late 1967 and throughout 1968. Hence these cars have many features of the series 1 and the series 2 that would follow. Although the factory never referred to them with this name ... these transition cars are commonly known as series 1.5

One of the first changes was the removal of the glass over the headlights; this necessitated the redesign of the headlight openings. Later the interior toggle switches were changed to rockers in an attempt to minimize injury from “pointy” switches during an accident. The three SU carburetors which had powered the e-type since 1961 were replaced with two “smogged” Stromberg carbs. This had the effect of losing a significant amount of horsepower, and thus performance.

Pluses:

Exterior: although the headlight covers are gone, the bumpers and taillights are still unchanged.

Minuses:

Performance ... the beast has lost its claws

Interior rocker switches. They are junk compared to the very reliable earlier toggle switches

1969 thru 1971, series 2

The series 2 cars saw the continuation of changes legislated by USA emissions and safety requirements. It is important to realize that many of these changes to the e-type were made simply to make them compliant for USA importation and not a desire on Jaguar to fix something that was broken. Quite the contrary sometimes happened ... things that work just fine on series 1 cars (such as the toggle switches) were now being replaced with less reliable, but compliant, components.

The biggest change in the series 2 cars were the bumpers, which had to be made bigger and lower to meet USA specs and the engine emission equipment which every year got more strict.

The series 2 cars are the slowest and probably less attractive of all e-types. On the positive side they are also the most affordable.

Plus:

Not a bad car to drive, if you don't mind not going too fast

Cooling system finally received a decent upgrade, these cars are less likely to overheat ... but don't count on it!

Minus:

Exterior design it loses the clean lines with the big tail lights and low bumpers, although still looks much better than a Camry.

Performance just adequate

1971 through 1974, series 3 V12

During 1971 was the only year where Jaguar manufactured both the 6 cylinder and the 12 cylinder e-types. The objective was to add some excitement back to the e-type by introducing a brand new "exotic" V12 engine. At the same time this would provide the car with the performance it lost with all the emission control requirements.

The most obvious difference in the series 3 is the body. While the 6 cylinder e-types were offered in three body styles ... open two seater (roadster), fixed head coupe and 2+2, the series 3 only came in 2+2 and roadster. The reason is simply that the size of the V12 engine, especially when coupled to the automatic transmission will only fit in the 2+2 body style. The V12 roadster is simple a "chopped" 2+2 . This is also the reason why the 6 cylinder e-types were only offered with an automatic on the 2+2 body style ... it simply would not fit the roadster or coupe.

The other big difference is when you open the bonnet. This is a massive engine!

Pluses:

Exterior design ... although a much bigger car, the lines seem to flow much better than the series 2. Not as nice as the series 1 but better than the series 2.

Interior comfort ... finally an e-type for a tall driver. The doors are massive compared to the earlier cars.

An AC that actually works

Automatic transmission option on the roadster. I am normally not a big fan of auto transmissions but on the series 3 cars it actually is a good combination. The Jaguar V12 is not the performance brute of a Ferrari or Lamborghini. It is a docile giant more suited for boulevard cruising. In this environment the auto tranny is very well at home.

Minuses

Very busy engine compartment, some components are a pain to reach

More things that can go wrong. The series 3 had more bells and whistles such as electronic ignition, power steering, air pump, AC ... which over time will need work.

Power steering takes way much of the road feel. Although I understand the need for power steering on a car with this much weight, Jaguar went overboard with a power steering arrangement better suited for a 4 door sedan.

Conclusion:

A 1962 series 1 3.8 is entirely a different car than a 1973 V12. Which series you select will very much depend on your budget and how you intend to use the car. How tall (and big) you are will also play an important factor. Also remember that vehicle condition plays a very important factor when selecting cars that are now 30 to 40 years old. Although you may desire a 1967 4.2 series 1, a wiser decision may be to buy a very nice 1969 series 2 over a ratty 1967.