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INCORPORATING THE LANCHESTER REGISTER & IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE SP250 OWNERS' CLUB

Eric Goes Toyota

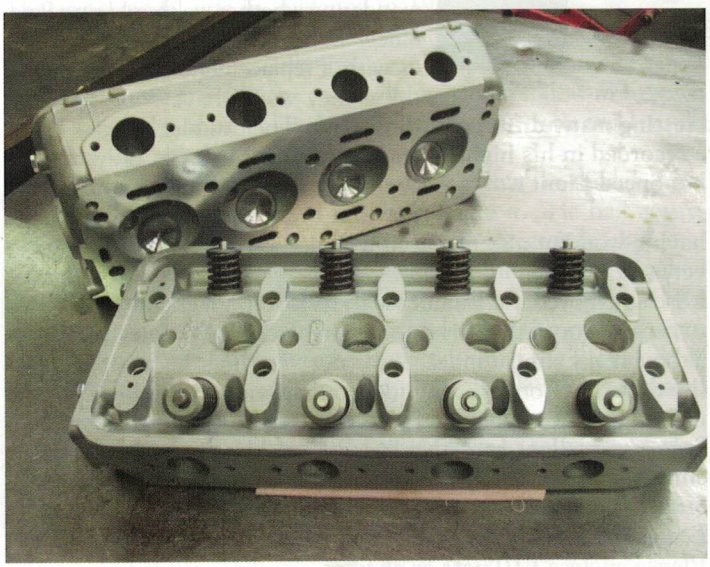
(AND GETS A NEW ENGINE)

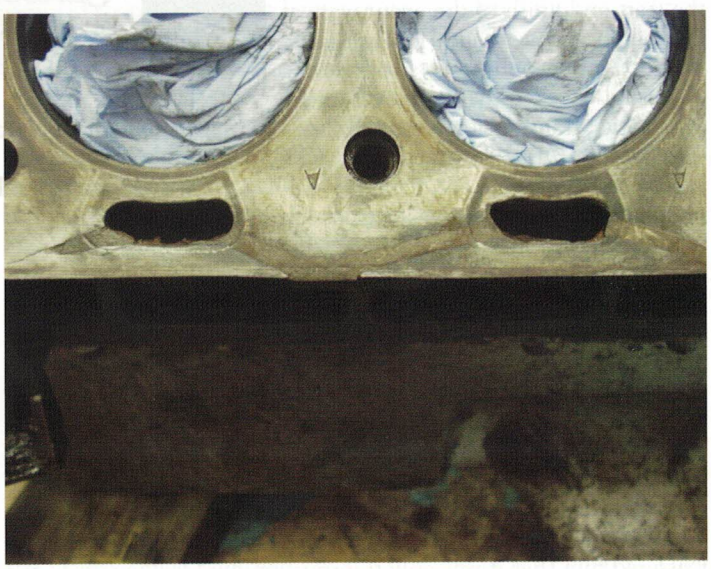
RICHARD LONG



I love my 1968 Daimler V8-250 saloon, aka Eric. Beautiful lines and engineering, along with graceful pose that manifests itself wholly when behind the wheel upon the open road. Well, that's not actually quite correct to be honest – sorry Eric !! An engine that smokes a little and leaks at various times, plus an agricultural 3-speed gearbox that uses all its available gears on reaching about 45mph to 50mph. It also shares an enthusiasm, with the engine, to leak oil – not oceans but enough to be an annoying issue that detracts from the majestic presence of this lovely car. Things had to change !!

The decision to address the smoking engine and the Borg Warner T35 auto box, had already been established very early on after purchasing the car. I was certainly aware of the problems that these cylinder heads suffer from and I also knew that the auto box would soon be having an eviction notice served in order that something more efficient could be installed. As such my focus was cylinder heads and transmission; needless to say this focus became somewhat wider as work progressed and the unexpected unfolded !! For a while I did consider replacing the BW unit with a 4-speed auto box, namely a ZF4 HP22 unit – in fact I had already purchased one of these units, such was my intention to use this instead. However the more I looked at doing this conversion myself, the more I decided that the amount of work required for the actual gain achieved was unbalanced and therefore I ditched





that idea and sold the ZF unit. I also considered using a Volvo auto transmission and this seemed quite straight forward with decent results, but all the time I kept thinking how nice it would be for Eric to have a modern 5-speed manual gearbox. Having always driven manual classic cars, it seemed only prudent that I should keep that trend going & additionally what a lovely set-up to have: an Edward Turner 2.5L V8 engine transferring its power to a modern manual gearbox, upon which the driving experience would be further enhanced and of course the engine was certainly going to benefit via this transmission conversion.

Thus, the decision was made – cylinder heads to be rebuilt and the car converted from auto to manual; pretty straight forward really, would you not agree ?? !!

DLOC members may recall reading my article in the November 2019 DM edition, highlighting "J&E Engineering Services" who carried out the comprehensive rebuild on my cylinder heads including the use of K-Line inserts in the valve guides. These inserts really are the only way to go if you are seriously considering having oil tight valve guides. The article explained at length all of the work and modifications carried out - the finished pair of heads were an absolute joy to behold; as was the cost. The level of skill and engineering craftsmanship, carried out by Jonathan Atkin {business owner} is way beyond anything else out there at the moment – believe you me, I know. As such I am not going to cover the cylinder head work carried out in these forthcoming articles, as it has already been published as mentioned.

Having made numerous enquires about manual transmissions for Eric, I decided that my preferred course would be a Toyota W58 5-speed manual gearbox. These g/boxes covered a number of vehicles from the 80's through to the late 90's. Being Toyota they are 99.9% bullet proof and have an enviable reputation for delivering "the goods" and they will easily handle 300bhp+ which is way above the standard V8-250 saloon output. Therefore, this particular g/box is never going to be stressed and in fact you could say it will have an active but peaceful mechanical retirement !! The W58 gear ratios of 3.285:1, 1.894:1, 1.275:1, 1.00:1 & 0.783:1 {1st to 5th} are extremely pleasing. Coupled with the cars 4.27:1 final drive ratio, it really does provide excellent performance figures. In addition the W58 is an all alloy transmission making it much lighter the BW auto unit, even with the clutch assembly added.

To fulfil the manual requirement I needed an excellent working W58 and also a company to supply the conversion parts to make this part of the project viable.

After quite a few weeks of searching I located a 1991 W58 g/box, which had been removed from a Lotus Excel that was being broken – the Excel produced less than 200bhp during its production and the g/box was easily capable of handling that. As luck would have it, the unit was only an hours drive away and with some negotiation the g/box found a new home and a new car to service. I was also fortunate that the seller included the gear stick, as these are quite often sold separately which just adds to the cost and hassle of locating one. During my search for a W58, I had also been researching a couple of companies that produced a manual conversion kit specific to the V8 saloon. Of course no one in the UK produces such a conversion kit and in fact my enquiries led me to Australia and New Zealand. In the end I opted for Conversion Components in NZ, a company owned by Colin Dray. He supplies all the parts required and also manufactures / casts, from scratch, a purpose made bell housing; it is this item that really is the key factor on doing this particular conversion.

Obtaining the conversion parts proved just about adequate, I'd like to say seamless but that was not the case. Quite often my emails would not be returned regarding the order placed, funds transferred and technical information required. In the end I purchased a "phone package" for my mobile phone so that I could contact Colin on a regular basis and keep on top of the situation – this proved to be the best conduit for communicating with him and on reflection his customer service was poor. As estimated, the conversion kit landed within three to four weeks of placing the order and it arrived safe and sound. The planning element of the project was now taking shape and looking very positive as far as the transmission was concerned. It even came with an added bonus of securing the correct Toyota W58 g/box cross-member, via eBay, to be used during the conversion project.

I'm pleased to say that I was able to assist a fellow East Sussex DLOC member {Mike Wells} by offering him my old BW auto box {after fixing the oil leaks !!} as his unit had been condemned.

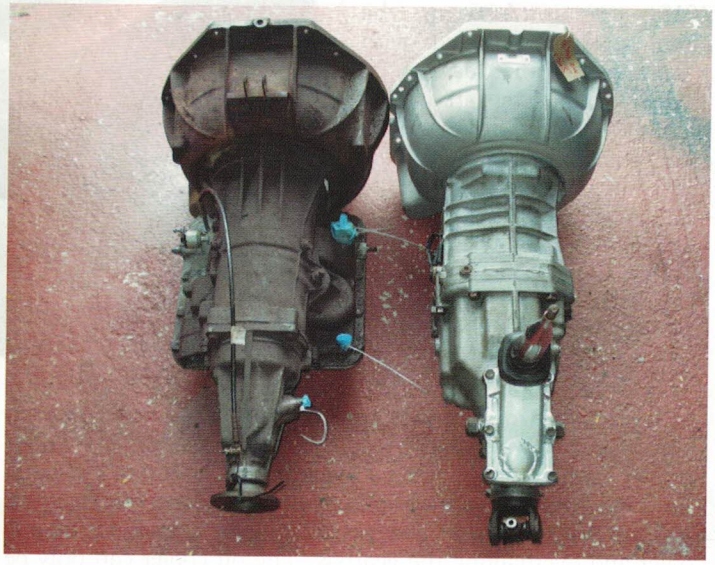
Attention turned to the engine and I could now concentrate on all matters pertaining to that. Oops, first major hiccup alert and they do not come much bigger than the following. On removing the cylinder heads, it was noted that the LH bank had a crack on the block face adjacent to the waterways; probably due to lack of anti-freeze at some stage. There was evidence that this crack had been the subject of a rough repair. I had no idea how old the crack was or when the repair was carried out; it mattered not because the location of the crack could not warrant a repair of any sort and nor would it have provided me with any confidence as to the blocks future longevity. In addition, there was no way of ascertaining if the symmetry of the bores had been affected and / or weakened. To confirm my suspicions, I gave Jonathan at "J&E" a call and sent some photos – his decision was immediate: the block is beyond economic repair and a replacement is required. Oh dear, I said !!! When faced with such an issue you have to be pragmatic and without a doubt it was goodbye engine and I now needed to secure an excellent replacement.

As you can imagine this situation presents its own problems. However, it also provides a number of exciting opportunities, namely - to have a bespoke engine fully rebuilt to exacting requirements and specifications along with important modifications; things were now starting to look up again.

With my budget about to be blown, I contacted Jonathan and said " I need you to build me a beautiful engine, please, which is a cut above anything else out there".

"Okay" he replied !! To be continued.....





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