

Jaguar S-type 4.2 V8 R

by: EVO team
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I think I may be turning into my father, which is slightly unsettling, though not as unsettling as turning into my mother. I started thinking about this when I was looking through some old photos and there was dad with the Mk2 Jag he owned for much of the '70s and '80s. It suddenly struck me that my long-term S-type R bore an uncanny resemblance, especially spooky since I'd specced the car myself. Perhaps my subconscious had been trying to recreate a car that had been a big part of my growing up. Anyway, I decided to try to track down the Mk2.

Fortunately I didn't have to do too much detective work. Dad sold it to an old colleague of mine, and, 15 years later, he still has it. And so it was that I met up with John Blundell and 5 VPH and we had a great lunchtime, reminiscing and talking about Jaguars. In fact 5 VPH is no stranger to magazines. John used to be art editor at *Classic & Sportscar*, and the Mk2 has made a number of appearances. Most notably, it starred in a feature with great train robber Bruce Reynolds. Interestingly, Reynolds said robbers rarely used Mk2s. They were too conspicuous. Most of them favoured Ford Zephyrs.

5 VPH still looks terrific. It's a 1961 car, a 3.4 manual with overdrive. Best of all, John has never been afraid to really drive the thing. It's been all over the UK and the continent too.

We swap Jags for the drive to the pub. After the S, the Mk2 feels initially ponderous. Most striking is the huge, thin-rimmed steering wheel and the steering itself, heavy at low speeds and extremely low-g geared. The four-speed manual 'box crunches if you try to hurry it. But the straight-six feels strong and sounds fantastic, with a real bark to it where the S's V8 is subdued except for the supercharger whine. The Mk2 has more soul than the S will ever have. But it's just an old crock, right?

I buckle-up in the passenger seat as we head onto a three-mile stretch of dual-carriageway, Andy M following in the S. Which gives him the perfect view when John flattens the throttle in third and the Mk2 hammers forward, straight-six snarling. I glance at the speedo: 60, 70... into fourth... 80, 90... John Keeps it nailed. 100, 110... That's probably enough. There's a roundabout ahead, the Mk2's brakes aren't what they were (and they never were that great). But by gum, this thing still flies. Andy is equally stunned and says the Jag looked superb, flashing past modern Mercedes and BMWs.

John is polite about the S-type. 'You just touch the accelerator and it goes. And the steering's so light and responsive. And with the auto box it practically drives itself...'

He doesn't mention the brakes. These continue to be a cause of anguish round here, the one big dynamic flaw in the S-type's make-up. At low speeds they're snatchy; hauling down from high speed, the pedal feel is spongily inconsistent. I mentioned all this when BG54 DZZ went to Guy Salmon Jaguar of Northampton for its 10,000-mile service and also asked them to check that neither front disc was warped. They could find no faults and, after a road test, reported that this was 'how you'd expect an S-type R to feel'.

It's a pity, because it dents what is otherwise an extremely accomplished chassis. And I'm growing to like the S-type a lot, though I can't as yet say that I love it. Meeting up with 5 VPH again after all these years reminded me what made the Mk2 great: it had a soul, and it was a true original, arguably the definitive sports-saloon. Jaguar needs to rediscover its knack for creating innovative, inspirational, era-defining cars. Somehow I can't imagine my 11-year-old son getting misty-eyed about the S-type R in 20 years' time. Unless, that is, they bring out a Spongebob Squarepants special edition...

Running Costs

Date acquired	December 2004
Total mileage	13,082
Costs this month	£280.82 (service)
Mileage this month	1711
MPG this month	21.4mpg