

HOW THE BOMBER SCORED A DIRECT HIT...

STORY BY JOHN ELMGREEN | PHOTOS SUPPLIED BY "BOMBER" MOXHAM



Bomber's XK and E-Type

How did young Thomas John Moxham, son of a grazier of Nyngan, NSW, get his nickname Bomber? There must be a great story there! But, surprisingly, Bomber does not even know himself! It must have been one of those Aussie schoolyard things, where every kid had to have a nickname, and the details of how this particular one came about are now lost in the mists of time ... But what we can say is that, as a young man of 20 years of age, Bomber fixed on a target of getting himself a new XK120 – and scored a direct hit!

It was in the earliest months of 1950 that Bomber, the boy from the bush, was in Sydney, and happened upon Wynyard railway station where he saw a gleaming white new XK120 on the tilted display stand of the War Veterans Art Union. It was valued at £1,550. The Art Union, and its regular displays of top prizes at the railway station, were something of a Sydney institution at the time, and a Jaguar saloon was also on offer there. The top prize was a furnished house and a Sunbeam Talbot. This XK120 was the alloy bodied chassis 660002, the first XK120 sent for retail sale anywhere in the world. Its presence in Australia was a tribute to the charm and persuasive powers of Jack Bryson and his excellent relationship with Bill Lyons of Jaguar, enhanced by Bryson's visit to Coventry in 1949. Bomber, then working on the family farm as a £5 a week station hand, decided he just had to have one. So, at great expense for a fellow on £5 a week, he bought tickets in the Art Union (a

book of tickets cost £1), but of course did not win when it was drawn on 4 April 1950.

Fortunately for Bomber, the family property, *Mullengudgerly Station*, was a merino sheep stud which had been established by his father and two uncles outside Nyngan back in 1923, and the wool price in 1950 was going through the roof. Some have said that this was at least in part the result of the Korean War, which created a heavy demand for all sorts of commodities. Record prices through that year would lead to the coining of the phrase early the next year of wool selling for "a pound a pound". In an atmosphere of rural affluence, Bomber felt game enough to talk to his father about this new Jaguar, careful not to overstate its stunning visual, not to say performance, appeal. "OK", said his father, with no demur from other interested family members, the family business would buy the car for Bomber.

The order was placed through the local Jaguar agents Dalgety & Co in Nyngan where the local wool classer and valuer, Peter Charles Wright (known as "PC"), was well known to the farm. It would cost £1,661. XK120 chassis 660139 was despatched from Coventry on 19 September 1950 to Brylows in Sydney. On 10 January 1951, Bomber and PC duly presented themselves at Brylaw's service garage at 213 Bourke Street, Darlinghurst and picked up the Cream car which had been registered RY888. They drove it straight back to

the Nyngan district, a trip of some 8½ hours, without incident. They were respectful of the running in period, and, although this was in mid-summer, there was no sign of overheating.

When Bomber's father first saw the XK120 arrive at the property, he nearly fainted – this was not at all what he had been expecting! But it was too late – the deal had been done, and Bomber had scored a direct hit!

The car was bought in the name of T.R. Moxham which was the name of Bomber's grandfather, in whose name the family farming activities had been carried on for decades since the grandfather's death in 1916. Thomas Robert Moxham had been a very prominent businessman and citizen in Parramatta, as well as having pastoral interests. He was born in Parramatta in 1858, was elected as a local councillor in 1887, and became Mayor in 1897. In 1901 he was elected to the NSW parliament. Early in the new century, he also acquired one of the first cars to be road registered in NSW – a Renault that carried the number plate "7". Bomber was disappointed to see the car later leave the family. T.R. Moxham later became Whip for the Liberal Party, and was still the local member when he died relatively young in January 1916. There was a very large funeral, said to have been attended by "thousands", and his standing in the community was generously recognised. He left what was for the time a very large estate valued at some £50,450 to his

widow Mary and his five children, one of whom was Bomber's father Thomas. Another was Robert, who was to lose his life on active service in France in 1918. Thomas also enlisted and in 1918 departed from Sydney by ship after his initial training – only for the ship to turn back and head for home when the war ended before it had reached its destination.

Bomber, born in 1930 at the start of the depression, had grown up on the property and was initially educated by correspondence. But in about 1941 he was sent to The Kings School in Parramatta as a boarder to continue his education. He knew what farm work would require and, while he was in his later years of high school, had the initiative to undertake a course in mechanics – by mail. He does not claim to have been a great student at school, but got excellent marks in the extra-curricular course he pursued in mechanics. He left TKS in 1948 and returned to *Mullengudgery*. There was a drought on, and he took on a wide variety of jobs around the farm as a station hand.

As Bomber and PC were on the Mitchell Highway nearly at *Mullengudgery* on the delivery trip back from Sydney, they had honked the horn of the Jaguar as they passed the property of their nearest neighbour, Bill 'Butch' Buckley. In no time at all, Buckley was over at *Mullengudgery* in his 1947 Ford ute, giv-

ing the Jaguar more than the once over. He was obviously impressed. Without saying a word to Bomber, the next day he drove to Sydney and placed his own order for an XK120. On 20 February 1951 he took delivery of a Red car 660131, just 2 chassis numbers later than Bomber's car. It had arrived in Sydney on the *Stanroyal* with four other XK120s and came with an 8:1 compression engine when most XK120s sold new in Australia ran with 7:1 compression.

In due course these two XKs were not the only ones to be in and around the district: there were also:

The Silver car (660153) of Bruce 'Waxy' Mayger of *Belaringer*, Nevertire, sold new by Brylaws to local Gunnedah dealer Mansour Brothers on 9 November 1950 and evidently the car sold new to Mayger. This car is today with Carl Lindner's family in the Barossa Valley.

The Black car (660195) sold on 19 February 1951 to John Fisher of *Colane*, Nyngan. It was later restored to concours standard by well-known JDCA member Bob Clare and is now owned in Sydney.

The Silver car (660819) sold on 17 September 1951 to Mrs Alice I.H. Berryman of *Warramunga*, Miandetta (outside Nyngan). She kept it until about 1952-53 before trading it in, with a dealer in Tottenham, NSW. Last heard of in Europe.

The Pastel Blue car (660840) sold new in Sydney and then in March 1953 sold second-hand to Dennis ('the menace' – of course) Hunt of *Wyoming*, Nevertire, NSW. He did not have the XK120 for very long and in 1953 raced at Gnoo Blas in Orange an MG T series car with a 6 cylinder Holden engine fitted. This instigated some teasing when it was beaten for top speed by a Morris Minor driven by Shirley Hodder.

Bill Buckley quickly acquired the NSW registration plates "XK120", but the circumstances in which this happened somewhat irked Bomber. Bomber was in Sydney when he saw a Vauxhall with those plates. He had PC from Dalgety make some enquiries to find the name and address of the owner. Bill Buckley was shortly thereafter going to Sydney, perhaps for his annual one month summer holiday at Manly beach, and Bomber gave him the details, asking him to follow up the owner about the plates, which of course Bomber wanted. Exactly what happened next is not known, but the result was certainly that Buckley ended up with the plates ... He said to Bomber, "Well, you wouldn't ever have got them anyway!" Buckley later sold the XK120 but kept the plates on another car. The XK120 was last heard of in Sydney.

The local XK120s of Moxham, Buckley and Mayger in particular indulged in local informal competition, between towns



Bomber at Gnoo Blas 1953

and the like, and took delight in overtaking manoeuvres. Bomber became very conscious that Buckley's car was slightly faster than his, which he put down to the 8:1 compression ratio. Bomber also saw 123 mph on the speedo on one run to the very social event, Narromine Polo – but the tonneau cover, which can only have been over the passenger's side of the car, could not stand the battering from the high speed and shredded.

Bomber also decided to try his luck on the track, and in 1953 took part in three events at the Gnool Blas track in Orange. His participation was encouraged by the arranging through a friend of full insurance cover for the car for all of these events, lessening any inhibitions he may have felt in competing in the car belonging to the family business. Thankfully, and no doubt to the relief of the insurance agent, he did not come to grief.

The first event at this new track was on the Australia Day weekend in January 1953 and Bomber was there in the XK120. However, in practice, he suffered a loss of oil pressure, began to blow clouds of blue smoke and had to withdraw. The problem turned out to be a dislodged plug in the crankshaft, which Bomber was able to fix temporarily. It was then, or perhaps after the Easter races in April, that Bomber decided that 8:1 compression was the way to go and took the XK120 to North Sydney where Brysons attended to the fitting of new pistons in their workshop at 267 Miller Street. When it came time to refit the cylinder head, no new head gasket could be found, and so Jerry, the mechanic involved, retrieved the used head gasket that had recently been replaced on Dr John Boorman's XK120 and fitted that – with no problems.

The race program for the next event at the track at Easter 1953 gave notice that Dr Boorman was expected to show up with his "wire-wheeled XK120 ... imported from England at fantastic cost and has some of the well-known XKC bits in the motor. He should shame some of the racing cars." This was S660983, the first Special Equipment XK120 OTS into Australia. Despite the fanfare for Dr Boorman, it was a matter of some pride for Bomber that on 6 April 1953 his car was timed during the meeting over the flying quarter mile at 115.3 mph, ahead of Dr Boorman at 113.2 mph. The doctor could not have been well pleased.

Bomber also ran at Gnool Blas at the Cherry Blossom Festival long weekend meeting early in October 1953. The report in Denis Gregory's Gnool Blas book said: "T.J. Moxham in a Jaguar XK120 gave the field six minutes start in the 10-lap Airzone Handicap but couldn't quite catch up despite a spir-



From left to right is Bill "Butch" Buckley, Bill "Give Up" Phillips and Tom "Bomber" Moxham.

ited drive." He was a very creditable third – giving away six minutes start? – and earned himself a cheque which he framed rather than presented – only to lose it in a house fire in the 1970s.

That same year, Bomber also took part in a 1948 Ford in the Redex Trial, an event that included Jack 'Galignite' Murray.

Bomber retained the XK120 until 1962 when he entrusted its sale to Dalgety in Nyngan and it passed to a young Air Force officer in Richmond just outside Sydney. Sadly, the car has not been heard of since, and must be assumed to have perished in the early 1960s, the only one of the Nyngan district XK mob to be unaccounted for.

Over the years, Bomber bought out the interests of the other family members in *Mullengudgery*, and still runs sheep on some 34,000 acres there and another 9,000 acres of an irrigation farm nearby. He has a son and a daughter, and three grandsons.

The passion for the old Jaguar did not die, and in 1990 Bomber acquired another XK120, chassis 660180, at an auction at Darling Harbour in Sydney. It had been sold new in Melbourne. Again, he drove it back to *Mullengudgery*. He still has this car although it is little used these days. He also has an E Type which carries the original plates from the XK120, RY888.



Author's note: It was such a pleasure to meet Tom 'Bomber' Moxham at Tony Pallas's workshop in Brookvale early in June 2020 and to chat further with him thereafter: it is a rare experience to be able to meet a first owner of any XK120 and Bomber's memory and enthusiasm were terrific, showing no signs of his 89 years. The histories of all the XK120s mentioned here are set out at more length in 'The Jaguar XK120 in the Southern Hemisphere', still available at www.jtpublications.com.au