From the Passenger Seat

A personal reflection during COVID 19

by Angela King

My husband John and I first came into contact with the JDCHR at the annual Camellia Festival run by the Committee of the National Trust’s “Tomago House” in July 2006.

On our arrival there John immediately spied a pack of Jaguars lined up just beyond the house and................ “Zoom” he was off!

John had admired the Jaguar Marque of cars since the 1950’s, though purchasing one was beyond his means back in those years. However, in March 1977, he was told by a guy in South Tamworth about a MK 2 3.8 for sale in Coonabarabran N.S.W. It belonged to the local G.P., Dr Alan Kerr. John rang him, and our family made the trip to Coonabarabran on the Easter Weekend to view it and, if suitable, pick it up. The deal was done! John drove the MK2 back to Tamworth, followed by myself and the four children in our Holden station wagon.

John spent many winter evenings, (while watching the 1977 series of cricket tests between Australia and India), using pieces of broken glass to scrape the cracked lacquer off the walnut timber veneer. On completion of that process he restored the timber to its brilliant, original condition.

He also spent many hours on the engine, gearbox and suspension over the next 3 years. However, in 1980 we bought a 500 acre farm at Dungowan and the family, along with the MK2, moved out to “Old Oakvale”. In the following years John had little spare time, or money, to continue the Jaguar’s restoration. Then, one afternoon in 1995 Alan Guan, (former JDCHR member), came out from Tamworth, having heard from a mate that John had an old Jaguar in the farm workshop. He and his “cohort” of old car buffs inspected the Jag, and an offer from Alan to John ensued. John made the decision, due to drought related financial stress at that time, to sell the Jaguar with restoration on the way, but not completed. It went to a good owner.

At that time John asked Alan if he would give him first offer if, in the future, he ever decided to sell it. They kept in touch as Alan drove the MK2 and had it restored over the following years.

We sold the farm and retired to Lake Macquarie in 2004 to be closer to family.

Then, in 2007, (having seen the Jaguar Drivers’ Club Hunter Region display at Tomago House the previous year), and still being passionate about the Jaguar Marque, though no longer owning the MK 2, John joined the “Jaguar Drivers Club Hunter Region”.

In that same year, 2007, an inheritance came to me from my mother. And - almost miraculously - in January 2008, Alan Guan contacted John to tell him he was selling the Jag because of a shoulder problem. John had been extremely kind to my mother when we spent two days a week at Bayview, Sydney, with John helping me with Mum for the last three years of her life. What better thing would Mum want me to now do with some of that money than to buy back the MK 2? So, the MK2 moved to Rathmines.

Thus began my “View from the Passenger Seat”. I went in the MK 2 with John to many Club events over the ensuing years, enjoying the ride, (though sometimes not the speed and curves of those winding mid-week runs), the views, the variety of places to which we travelled and the fellowship of the Club members I met at the various events, although, it seemed to me back then to be very much “a man’s world”.

John always wanted my company in the passenger seat. I have never actually driven our Jaguar and, in truth, have no desire to do so. Whilst I had driven farm trucks and tractors the Jaguar looked like too much hard work to me at my age, and besides I wouldn’t want to be responsible for a scratch or dent on it! I was happy in the passenger seat! John made a decision early on not to take the Jaguar on long runs, so our attendance has been at mid-week runs, outings and events in close surrounds - venturing only as far as such places as Singleton, Nelson Bay, Nabiac and the Hawkesbury River.

Whilst John had an interest in, and a passion for Jaguars; my interest and passion was in Vintage Fashion of the C20th. I had a small collection of vintage clothing and accessories which, as well as wearing, I put to a use doing parades of “Happiness and Memories” in local Aged Care Facilities with the help of my daughter, four friends from our church and John, my “Jack-of-all-trades” and a occasional model! Sometimes the MK2 also made an appearance - on display outside, of course!

Now back into the passenger seat! The MK 2 was a 1966 model, sold in 1967. This was of interest to me, as it was “of my youth” and I remembered the fashions. John and I also had met and married in 1967. Though Jaguars were not the wedding car of choice in our circle at that time - too pricey!

An idea began to germinate in my mind. I had plenty of 1960’s hats and gloves in my collection and some dresses and accessories. So, why not combine my passion for fashion with John’s passion for Jaguars?

I could dress to the era of our MK2! This would make some Jag Club events a bit more interesting for me in “the passenger seat”, and it also might add interest for some others attending. Personally I had very much enjoyed seeing, at events we attended, women from other car clubs dressed to complement their vehicles. Thus inspired, I began dressing to suit our Jaguar’s classic 1960’s vintage at some of the main events we attended with JDCHR.

Australian National Jaguar Rally Nelson Bay

After seeing one of my “vintage dress-up” efforts my fellow Club member Ruth Calcutt, encouraged by her husband Alan, was inspired to dress vintage to complement their vehicle. She had the outfit and just needed a hat - my collection came in handy!

In 2018 I felt a bit despondent and decided not to dress in vintage, but Ruth encouraged me to keep going! She was keen and Alan had already chosen her outfit from their wardrobe! She just needed to borrow a red vintage 1980’s hat! So, our 2018 “All British Day” saw us on an extremely cold, windy morning, (bless those early rising members doing the 7am parking roster), dressed in vintage, but covered by overcoats, to be discarded around 11am! Comments of appreciation, and ensuing conversations, passed to Ruth and myself were happily received and encouraging to us both.

Ruth and Alan dressed to complement their Daimler.

At the end of the day, when John and I were packing up, a very pleasant gentleman from Sydney, who was up “puppy-sitting” for his son that weekend, approached us.

He had a long conversation with John about the MK2 and its history. He then asked to take a photo of us both with the car, saying it was great to see the 1960’s dress fashion with the car. He wanted to send the photo to his wife back in Sydney, who was also a Jaguar admirer, so she could see the duo. Being younger than us, he was about the vintage of our car!

We went to the very first JDHCR “All British Day” at the Newcastle Foreshore in 2009. In previous years a Jaguar display had been held at “Tomago House”, where we first discovered the JDHCR. The move has proven to be a great success.

2011 Australia Day at Customs House. Our youngest daughter, Elizabeth with her family and the MK2. Elizabeth was 9 months old when we bought the Jaguar in 1977! This was the first time our JDCHR took our cars to the forecourt of Newcastle’s Customs House for display on Australia Day 🇦🇺. Her husband, Alex, is now “keeping the battery charged” with John in the passenger seat!

At the invitation of the 2015 Newcastle Show Society Committee the JDCHR displayed their cars during the day. In the evening members chauffeured the Showgirl entrants around the main arena. I watched on with a friend from the grandstand. Thank you Dorothy Arms for the photos.

I enjoyed the Saturday Morning Coffee outings when they were introduced. A time to chat and get to know other members a little better.

Our social secretaries took us on lots of adventures on our Mid-week runs from 2008 up until COVID 19 clipped all our wings temporarily!

My views from the MK2 passenger seat have been many and varied, woven into the warp and weft of John’s passion for the Jaguar marque and on occasions, my passion for vintage fashion! I know dressing in vintage is not everybody’s “cup of tea”, but it has made our involvement in JDCHR activities a bit more interesting and enjoyable for me.

I still enjoy being in the passenger seat, though our attendance at Club Activities from now on will be limited by John’s Motor Neurone Disease which prevents him from being able to drive the MK2.

I’m hopeful that one day soon he will write an article on “the view from the driver’s seat” including some technical details.