



Lorna, Stuart,
Gordon and Barry.

SPECIALIST VISIT

COVENTRY AUTO COMPONENTS

Tucked away on an industrial estate in Coventry is a small building with some remarkable secrets inside. We take a closer look.

WORDS AND PICS: IAN SEABROOK

Like many of today's Jaguar parts specialists, Coventry Auto Components began life as a hobby-business, run by Trevor Scott-Worthington. He began by helping dealers clear their stocks of old, unwanted parts, which could then be sold to enthusiasts trying to keep their cars on the road. Back in 1969, when this story begins, that meant the

pre-war SS cars, though the business soon grew to include the XK range. Trevor ran the business from home, buying SS cars in poor condition and selling on the parts, as well as items cleared from dealers. He worked with American Jaguar specialist Bill Tracey, so was soon sending parts all over the world. Soon, parts were having to be remanufactured, and

Trevor used companies all over the West Midlands. The business outgrew Trevor's home, and a barn became the new HQ. The business became rather a sideline while Trevor focussed on a career within the Rover Group. In 1988, he employed staff for the first time and 25 years ago, Stuart MacNeill joined the company as manager to help keep it on the right track.

After retiring at 65, Trevor sold the business to Martin Green and Stuart, but Stuart bought Martin out three years ago, and is now the business owner as well as the manager. The focus is still very much on the XK range, but Trevor remains close to the business. Indeed, his XK120 has been used to test many new parts, including brake upgrades and gearbox conversions that can be found in the company's Special Equipment catalogue.

SMALL, DEDICATED TEAM

Coventry Auto Components moved to its current location some 16 years ago, a small, unassuming industrial unit on the outskirts of Coventry. There is now a small, dedicated team, including Stuart, Lorna who is Accounts and Office Manager, Barry who looks after Sales and Gordon who packs up all of the orders. That's a bit of a simplistic view, as while I was there, everyone seemed to do a bit of everything – an essential part of keeping a small company going. That small-company vibe is also expressed clearly by the number of long-serving customers who seem to be ambling around the stores, looking for the parts they need themselves! They include legendary XK specialist John May of XK Developments. Around the building, there are plenty of parts diagrams and info sheets, and these are something Stuart puts together himself. "I try to follow the same style as the old Jaguar parts manuals," he says. "We have data sheets available on our website to help people fit parts and ensure they can order the correct bits." The company has just one catalogue, which »



Unassuming outside, but quite incredible inside.



The company produces datasheets and catalogues for the XK models.



Unwanted drum components kept on the shelf.



Gauges can be rebuilt to restore functionality.

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covers all XK models. Where does the talent for artwork come from, I ask? "My dad was a draughtsman," says Stuart. "It has enabled me to get a lot of pictures redone."

Stuart is keen to share this information, and it can all be found on the website. "It's taken me two years to put the information and diagrams together so far," says Stuart. "I'm still adding to it, making revisions and linking in new items. The website is far more than just part numbers and single-line descriptions." This is true. We've included a couple of diagrams in this feature, but for the

detailed information, you'll have to visit the website and see for yourself.

REMANUFACTURE

Naturally, parts remanufacture is a huge part of the operation these days, and Stuart prides himself on being able to find the best people to undertake the work. "It's getting more difficult to find people with the right skills as people retire, but nearly all of the parts are made in the West Midlands," he says. "Our remanufactured XK120 bumper blades are exceptional," he says. "They are pressed once,

trimmed on a five-axis machine, then pressed again. They are hand chromed and individually inspected."

Stuart is proud of the rubber seals too. "We get our seals made in Birmingham, and extra nitrogen is injected into the neoprene section. This gives greater compressibility and ensures a better fit, and means you don't have to readjust the doors just to get them to close properly."

Coventry Auto Components also has its own range of upgrade items, from disc brakes to five-speed gearboxes, though Stuart is also keen to keep a stock of any drum-brake equipment

removed from cars. "A lot of this stuff gets thrown away by people," he says, "but some of the smaller parts are very hard to get hold of."

While the relatively small building prevents the stocking of large numbers of major panels, Stuart says that most panels are still available. "We can even do complete rear bodies," says Stuart. "They're cheaper than some, and built to order in six to eight weeks." A separate catalogue for body panels is available via the website.

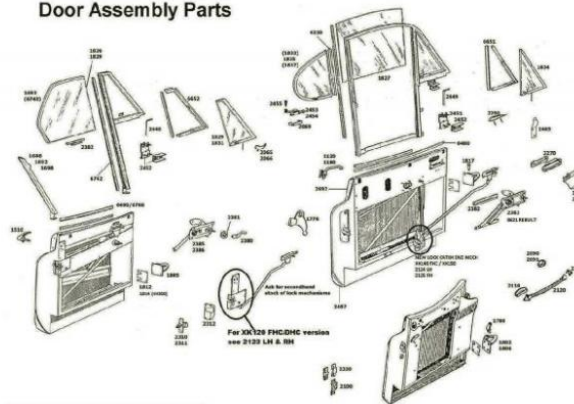
XK FOCUS

As I browse the shelves, I'm still amazed by just how much has been crammed into the building. From British-made coolant hoses to brake parts, badges and chrome trims, there is a great range of bits just waiting to be sent out. Stuart is particularly happy with the XK120 drophead rear windows. "Getting the shape exactly right is very difficult, but we managed it." Some of the 'wall art' includes window winder mechanisms, which makes it easier to visualise which parts someone is after, as well as allowing trusted customers the chance to examine them on a trip around the stores!

There are also dials and gauges aplenty, as the company has original period cores or remade case items which a Smiths rebuilder can restore, calibrate and warranty. The finished articles are stunning and look brand new. Other items have been improved with new materials and techniques, such as the cast anti-roll bar mountings for the XK150. These stronger units should be less prone to failure.

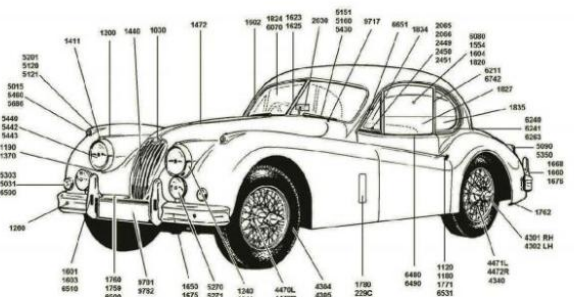
Stuart is keen to point out that Coventry Auto Components is very »

Door Assembly Parts



Two examples of artwork redone by Coventry Auto Components.

XK140 FIXED HEAD COUPE



Trade counter has some wonderful period parts on display.



The stores pack a lot into a small space.



Door seals are carefully designed for maximum squish.



Original Lucas horn.

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much focussed on XK models. "We feed into the bigger distributors worldwide," says Stuart. "We even supply parts to the Jaguar Classic Works making us a cornerstone for these models." There is new investment too. "We have just tooled up to remake XK120 and XK150 grilles to complete our range."

It all adds up to a company with a very friendly vibe going on, but also one with a keen eye on engineering – and local engineering at that for the most part. I certainly enjoyed finding out more about Coventry Auto Components. It just proves you never know what magic lurks behind an unassuming door. ■

CONTACT

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A closer look at some elderly parts.



Cutaway bellhousing for the five-speed gearbox.



British hose.



XK150 grille has been recreated.

