

# CLASSIC DRIVER

## Business profile - Derek Hood, JD Classics



**Rettendon roof tiles are classics of the building trade which came from the small village of that name, five miles South of Chelmsford in Essex. When the clay from which these distinctive yellow tiles were made ran out after the Second World War, an industrial estate was established on the site. For the past 15 years, this has been the home of Jaguar specialists, JD Classics, owned and run by Derek Hood.**

The company name is derived by the first names of Jonathan Body and Derek himself. The two met in a newsagent's shop in 1985. Both were readers of Classic Cars magazine, both were Jaguar fanatics, so naturally they fell into conversation and became friends. Dissatisfied with the local classic car trade, they pooled their resources and co-operated on looking after their cars. Jonathan was an architect, Derek a dentist, but within two years they had decided to give up those careers and go into partnership as classic Jaguar specialists.

Starting with one unit on the Rettendon Industrial Estate in 1987, they began to buy E-types, Mk2s and the odd XK model from private buyers. The cars were renovated and placed in the small showroom. The business ran well for the first two years but then they lost a lot of money when the market collapsed during the funny money boom. "Lucky", says Derek, "it was our money and not borrowed from the bank. It was painful, but we survived."

They restructured the JD Classic operation to suit the changed times, switching in 1991 to full-scale restoration rather than a sales-based business. Steady expansion since then has meant that JD Classics now occupies ten of the Rettendon units and employs a substantial workforce. Jonathan Body married and emigrated to the Far East in 1998, leaving Derek Hood to run the business alone.

Born in Chelmsford in 1960, Derek was educated locally before taking his degree in dentistry at Dundee University. "For some reason, as a child I was always fascinated by cars and teeth", says Derek. "I can remember being taken by my father to the local Jaguar dealer in my pram."



These memories obviously left their mark, for Derek took to his new career with a surprisingly natural ease. The theory may be that it's risky to make a business out of your hobby but there were no such problems for Derek. Once they were in the restoration business, the partners found there was plenty of work, much of it involving rectification of the many Jaguars that had been badly restored by others during the boom years of the 1980s. They soon became involved, too, in the market for carefully modernised classics, especially Mk2s and E-types. In addition to performance improvements, they built in subtle changes to transmissions, brakes and suspension systems which made the classic Jaguars more acceptable to younger owner/drivers who did not appreciate primitive dampers, fading brakes and gears that made a horrible crunching noise when first was engaged.

Derek remains an enthusiast. He has never lost sight of the original idea of having a workshop where his own cars could be cared for perfectly, exactly as he always wanted. His own collection is impressive, including a Broadspeed XJ12 Coupe, a TWR Group A XJ-S and the XJR-15 raced when new by Ian Flux.

Recently Derek has become increasingly keen on Historic Group C cars, acquiring XJR-9, XJR-11 and XJR-12. Perhaps the most outstanding of these, when judged by former race results, is XJR-11 which Jan Lammers and Andy Wallace took to second place at Silverstone and Dijon when it was new.

The restoration of classic Jaguars of all kinds, whether road or race cars, continues to grow at JD Classics. Recently, Derek's expertise in engines has developed an unexpected new sideline, rebuilding World War Two Merlin engines for Spitfire fighters. Later this year, he will be moving JD Classics into new, purpose-built premises nearer his home in nearby Maldon.

For more details of JD Classics visit their website [www.jdclassics.co.uk](http://www.jdclassics.co.uk)

*Interview by: Tony Dron*

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