

DREAM COME TRUE

A beautiful car drove slowly past. I had never seen anything like it — a long, low wide bonnet, a rakish stance and a gorgeously shaped huge rear window. From that moment on, it was the car of my dreams. 42 years later Jan Witkowski's dream is fulfilled.

I arrived in London in 1968, a naive new graduate, to start a Ph.D. at the National Institute for Medical Research in Hampstead. I stayed with my friend, Simon, in his flat just around the corner from Clapham South tube station. It was a long commute to and from Hampstead but had its advantages. It was easy to get off the tube at Leicester Squire and go exploring; Simon worked locally and often cooked the evening meal; and he had an MG TD. This car was a joy and we used to drive around in the summer trying desperately, and with little success, to pick up girls. (Forty years on, he still has the TD.)

I often went to *the Flask* for lunch, a pub much frequented by the theatrical and arty types living in Hampstead. In those days, when a pint still cheap enough for an impoverished student to buy, Flask

Walk was not a pedestrian precinct. One lunchtime I was standing outside drinking my pint when a beautiful car drove slowly past.

I had never seen anything like it — a long, low wide bonnet, a rakish stance and a gorgeously shaped huge rear window. I have to confess that I cannot remember the sound — I was mesmerized by the design — but from that moment on, it was the car of my dreams. And my dreams were going to be the only place where I could enjoy an Interceptor! I think that my starting salary was £900, so, assuming it was a Mk I in 1969, it would have taken four years of my before-tax salary to buy one! Nevertheless, I was smitten and my love — or was it lust? — was rekindled every time I saw one.

We moved from London to Houston in 1986, and

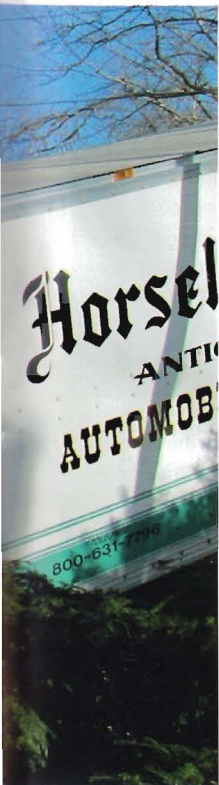
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then on to New York a couple of years later. While about 1000 Interceptors were shipped to the USA, it is a big place and I don't believe I saw any until about six months ago. I was driving past a local garage and there, parked in the road, was an Interceptor! I stopped the car and got out to look at

it up close, but it was a sad sight. The paint was peeling, the leather upholstery was cracked and torn, and it looked as though a flock of chickens had been roosting in it.

Now, I had been thinking of replacing my 1995 Subaru Legacy station wagon, a great car that is



brilliant in New York winters. But I believe in doing exhaustive research before buying anything, camera, snow blower, toaster, you name it; and so thinking about replacing the Subaru had already been going on for at least a year.

In November 2010, a couple of months after seeing the Interceptor, it occurred to me to check what cars were available on eBay. I looked for Subarus, Hondas, and Fords, and then the image of that neglected Jensen came unbidden into my mind. I entered the fateful phrase 'Jensen Interceptor' in the search box and there on the screen was a white 1974 Mk III. The description sounded good, and there were videos posted on YouTube, which showed the body, the engine and a clip of the car screaming off with rubber burning! I was hooked.

I still did some research, courtesy of the JOC. I contacted Bob Clevenger and Jim Calabro, both of whom wrote back to me, offering me very helpful comments and advice. (This is getting ahead of myself but members of the JOC have been unfailingly friendly and helpful. It is a lonely business being an Interceptor owner on Long Island, New York, but the JOC website and magazines have made me feel part of a vibrant community.)

All of this took place in the space of a few days, and with two days to go before the auction closed, I put in a bid at the starting price. Somehow, it made me feel less reckless. As I told my wife, I would probably be out bid and no harm would be done. But I wasn't outbid and on November 18, I became the owner of car 2210/9495. My family was, to put it mildly, astounded that I had acted so precipitously. My daughter still believes that her dad has been taken over by an alien!

There was one problem — the car was in North Carolina! I did toy with the idea of flying down there and taking a long road trip back to New York, but I decided that driving 650 miles in an unfamiliar, 34 year old car, in the winter, was probably tempting fate. Instead, I paid to have the car shipped, for about the same price as the one-way airfare and the cost of gas for the journey.

The car arrived on a Saturday morning and it was thrilling to hear my car burst into life! It aroused interest even before it was off the transporter. A couple of guys in a pick-up truck stopped in the middle of the road to talk about it — my heart swelled with pride! My first drive was the 60 yards of our driveway and I loved every inch of the experience!

The car had to be insured and undergo safety testing before it could be registered, but I couldn't resist immediately taking it around the block a couple of times. After a week, it was legal and I have been driving it regularly. It did have to go into the shop to have a host of small electrical problems fixed and it is booked to have the engine serviced and tuned. But it is joy to drive and I have to confess that I enjoy the attention the car receives.

Although the attention hasn't always been welcome. One evening we went to a party where I was regaling everyone with tales of my Jensen. So, as we were leaving, a crowd of partygoers came outside to see us off. And, of course, this was one of those occasions when it would not start, and increasingly desperate cranking of the engine only attracted a bigger crowd of onlookers! It was not helped by being 11:30 pm on what is a quiet residential street!

It is a long time — 40 years — since I saw that Jensen Interceptor in Flask Walk, Hampstead. It was well worth the wait.

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