



Driving a work of art

There is nothing quite like driving a classic car, and an E-Type Jaguar certainly is a head turner. Hop behind the wheel of the epitome of elegance with a classic car break at Headlam Hall.

You gently ease yourself over the running board, onto the comfortable grey leather seat which gives a light creak of welcome. The dashboard gives away the age of the car, with its complex panel of manual switches and dials. The car envelops you, ready to take you on an adventure. Miles of country roads wait and the biggest decision you have to make is whether to roll the Westasto roof back. This is the joy of the E-Type Jaguar.

"I try to tell them everything when they get in [to the car]. It's not like a modern car. You have to accept it. It doesn't have electric windows, there's no intermittent with your windscreen wipers, and that kind of thing. You have to respect its age", explains John Robinson, owner of both Headlam Hall and the classic car.



The British-made Jaguar E-Type was manufactured by Jaguar Cars Ltd between 1961 and 1974. Its combination of smooth looks, high performance, and competitive pricing firmly established the vehicle as an icon of 1960s motoring. So much so that the Jaguar E-Type recently ranked first in *The Daily Telegraph* list of the world's "100 most beautiful cars" of all time. It is not just *The Daily Telegraph* that recognises the flair of the E-Type - it consistently ranks in the top three in these types of polls. It is also one of the two road cars permanently displayed at the New York Museum of Modern Art.

More than 70,000 E-Types were sold in the car's 13-year production phase. 4,565 of these are still licensed in the UK. One such car, maintained in superb condition, is kept



The outdoor mosaic tiled hydrotherapy spa has water and air jets offering therapeutic water massage



at Headlam Hall. This beauty is indigo blue with a classic chrome trim and the large cross-slatted front grille and flared wheel arches which mark it as a Series 3, produced between 1971 and 1974.

The Series 3 E-Types were a departure from the previous models with one big change - a new 5.3-litre SOHC V12 engine replaced the old Straight-6. It might not be quite as powerful as an Italian V12, but it delivers exceptional smoothness and quietness that equates to a purr, rather than a rumble. The Series 3 was the first mass produced V12 in the post-war era. To accommodate the larger engine, the chassis got a longer wheelbase accompanied by wider tracks, wider tyres, and a restyle with more chrome. The extra weight and drag meant the power gain was minimal over the earlier cars, but taking one out for a spin now is not about speed. It's about style.

Viewing the countryside around Headlam Hall through the tiny windscreen over the achingly long bonnet while gripping the thin rimmed steering wheel is an experience only to be missed if you instead choose the Mercedes SL380 Roadster for your day out.

While the E-Type evokes *The Avengers* and *Austin Powers*, the Mercedes Roadster is a bit more what the *Dukes of Hazzard* might have driven if they were German, rather than American. Bobby Ewing from the television show *Dallas* owned one. The Mercedes SL380 Roadster is one of the definitive open top sports tourers of the last 40 years and, as expected from a Mercedes, a great example of German engineering excellence. Headlam Hall's 1981 signal red version has a V8 engine for effortless performance, and it's an easy-to-drive automatic.

Whichever car you take out on the road, your day is bound to be special. The cars come loaded with a gourmet picnic hamper and the environs of Headlam Hall provide plenty of opportunities for sight seeing. Barnard Castle town is only nine miles away, making a great first stop for speciality shopping, especially antiques. The castle itself is managed by English Heritage, and should you wind up here at lunch time, a walk along the river will offer up some suitably picturesque picnic spots. The classic cars will not be

out of place at The Bowes Museum on the edge of Barnard Castle. This amazing 19th century 'French Chateau' houses the greatest private collection of fine and decorative arts in the north of England. If you don't want to waste precious driving time inside the museum, at least pass by – the building is fabulous.

The Rose & Crown at Romalldkirk, 15 miles up the dale, is also owned by the Robinson family. The atmospheric former coaching inn makes the perfect stop for a scone for afternoon tea. Hamsterley Forest, 12 miles away, is another great picnic option or around 20 miles away High Force is England's highest waterfall. It is located on the beautiful Raby Estate to the north west of Headlam Hall, amongst the superb scenery of the Durham Dales. Other ideas for drives in the wider area include Durham City or the city of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, the North East Coast including Bamburgh Castle, the Farne Islands and Lindisfarne, and of course the undulating Yorkshire Dales. The ambitious may want to head to the Lake District. Alternatively, jump in the car and let whim and fancy guide your route.

Round your day off with a three course dinner at the award-winning restaurant back at Headlam Hall, where the menus change every few days due to seasonal availability and to offer variation for regular diners. No matter what the dishes are, fresh and locally sourced produce feature, including fruits, herbs and vegetables from the hotel's own gardens.

You probably won't have the time to stroll in the gardens, hit a round of golf, or make use of the spa facilities, including the outdoor mosaic tiled hydrotherapy spa heated to 37 degrees Celsius with a combination of water and air jets offering relaxing and therapeutic water massage. Luckily the Classic Car Break package includes two nights accommodation, so this can be saved for another day. There's always tomorrow. ■

For more information see:

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