

# BIRD OF PRAY

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It may not be first on your list for million-dollar supercars, but drive it, and the Eagle Speedster becomes an almost religious experience...

**L**ow-slung isn't really the word. I'm sitting in a car where the door tops barely crest my knees when I'm standing, and it's a good job there's no roof, because the windscreen header rail ends somewhere at eye level, even if I'm slumped with extreme prejudice into the seats. In front of me is a gorgeous, triple-spoked wheel positioned almost vertically, the slim wooden rim tactile and comforting. Six inches in front of that are two large, round dials, glowing softly in the darkness – a counterpoint to the neon blaze of Miami's urban cityscape. The nose is less a bonnet and more a prow: eager, immense and beautiful in a rich dark blue. As the lights change, I dip the clutch, engage first, rev the straight-six slightly more than necessary and allow the 4.7-litre engine its head in the first three gears. Response is instant. The nose rises slightly, the rear tyres squirm with happy compliance and the vintage Jaguar E-type launches like the proverbial scalded cat.

And yet, a lot of what follows doesn't make sense. No old E-type that I've ever driven rides the vagaries of a modern road like this – compliant and controlled, even through





For all those under the age of 21: this is what an engine should look like



Horrid modern stereo could be easily tucked away. Otherwise sublime



potholes and strange American cambers, of which there are many. No classic steers with such accuracy and fluency, without the pause-and-effect cadence of age. Old cars don't tend to want to brake so straight, true and hard. No period gearbox finds its way so accurately, without the need to double the clutch on downchanges. And yet this car doesn't feel new. It's not a resto-mod, with modernity hovering obviously under the surface. The gearbox is long, and still requires you to be positive. I can hear – and feel – carbs. There's still the character of the old, but with a not-so-gentle push towards what can only be described as optimisation. It's like the best E-type you've ever driven. Except a little better. Which – as it turns out – it is.

This is the Jaguar E-type Speedster by Eagle. A company that *TopGear* likes very much. And it is perhaps the finest interpretation of the character of old with the usability of new that I have ever come across. Getting to drive it was serendipity of the highest order – a friend of a friend knew that Eagle man Paul Brace was delivering a car to a wealthy collector at the same time I happened to be in Miami. A couple of calls, and Paul informed me that the owner – a man of some serious taste and even more crucial trust – would be happy for me to drive his car. A car he hadn't even driven yet. Did I mention trust? In this specification, this car is entirely bespoke. It will be one of six, none of which will be the same, and would cost north of one million dollars. Paul turned out to be rather more than just a delivery driver, too. He is actually responsible for the concept, design and production of the Speedster series. On which point, I've decided he's actually some sort of sublime genius. Albeit one who spends far too much time obsessing over perfect detail to possibly have a life outside of this car.

And so to a bit of explanation. The Eagle obviously hits all the right notes in terms of being an E-type. And yet, if you parked both together, the Eagle is an odd, kind of a rolling concept of the E, the car that people might remember the E-type to look like through the rosy-tint of memory. Lower, smoother, slicker. Jaguar originally produced the Roadster, Coupe and 2+2, and the Speedster's something else again – obviously an E, equally as obviously a very special iteration.

It is, however, actually an original Series I Jaguar E-type. Although with the amount of work Eagle – and Paul – has put into it, there remains an argument for the entire Speedster to be considered bespoke. Briefly – and I do mean briefly – the major changes amount to dedicated all-aluminium bodywork that does without any weather protection, a chopped and raked 'screen with hidden A-pillars, wider arches to cover the inflated track and wider wheels, de-seamed and generally cleaned-up shell, and the pair of centrally mounted exhaust pipes frenched tidily – albeit subtly – into the bottom of the bootfloor.

The bodywork itself runs into the interior with an extended rear deck that wraps slightly around the seats, a thoroughly reworked 'waterfall' centre console whose sheet metal oozes around the door tops, a handbrake hidden in the centre console and deeper sills and a lower seating position that add to the decidedly burly appearance. Even the badges are flush-fitted. It's all about the detail that must cost Paul his social life. In fact, the only thing I couldn't bear is the awful modern stereo in the middle of the dash – an item I'd be happy to stash somewhere out of sight if this were my car.

The motor itself is enlarged from 4.5 litres to 4.7, an all-aluminium inline six with twin cams and big valves. It produces 310bhp at just under 5,000rpm, and 340lb ft at 3,600, driven through the rear wheels via a five-speed aluminium manual gearbox of Eagle's design. There's even an aluminium Power Lock differential to keep the rear wheels synched. So the drivetrain, like the bodywork, production and materials, is authentic, yet improved. The suspension consists of independent wishbones with very obviously modern adjustable damping (I doubt any period dampers could provide this kind of ride and control with the Eagle's decidedly roller-skate stance), and the brakes are 315mm vented discs at the front (280mm at the rear) gripped by four-piston calipers with servo assistance. Like I said, this thing stops as well as it goes.

It's interesting driving this car on well set-up carburettors. Eagle does offer a fuel-injected arrangement, but Paul reckons a well

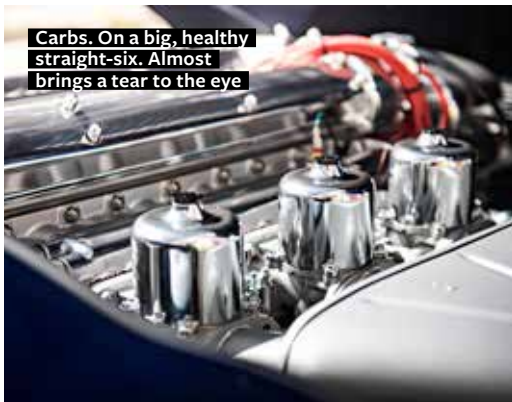


“IT'S LIKE THE BEST E-TYPE YOU'VE EVER DRIVEN. EXCEPT BETTER”



There is no roof. Mind you, live in Miami, and you don't need one

Flared arches, thorough modification. Except you wouldn't know it



Carbs. On a big, healthy straight-six. Almost brings a tear to the eye

Sorted for Es and whizz...



**ORIGINE E-TYPE**  
Depends on age, but £150k can secure you a decent E, with prices rising exponentially



**JAG LIGHTWEIGHT**  
A series of 6 authentic but new Lightweight Es built by Jaguar: "in excess of £1 million"



**EAGLE LOW-DRAG**  
Possibly the prettiest grand tourer available, the Eagle Low Drag is yours for just £695k



**EAGLE E-TYPE**  
Either roadster or coupe available with myriad upgrades for a snip at around £500k

set-up set of carbs make for a more authentic experience. And he's right; there's instant reaction to the throttle, a crash of induction and then delicious, mechanical roar. No metering, or waiting. Just air and fuel cycloned into a nutritious mix and sucked into a cylinder. It's also physically quick, not just immediately responsive: the gearing doesn't feel especially short, and it has over 300bhp, but more pertinently sumptuous torque and a weight of just over a tonne. Eagle claims 0-60mph in "under five seconds and 160mph-plus" and it feels easily capable of that. Although at the car's top speed, I would suggest ducking under the 'screen, unless you want bees tattooed permanently into your forehead.

The best part is that the Speedster melds all of the changes into a delicious, immersive experience. It's a treat to drive even moderately quickly - you really do feel like you have to 'drive' it rather than just point it in a direction and let the computer digitise a vector, you feel the surface of the road through the tyres and that lithe steering wheel, the textures, the sensations. The ride is benign, the body control exemplary and the noise makes you want to go and do terrible things at a racetrack, or find tunnels for no reason at all.

Yes, the chopped screen is low for me at 6ft tall, and, if you really fling it, there are few get-out-of-jail-free cards, but, get it right, and this is a car that doesn't feel like a car so much as a companion. It's also possibly the most attention-grabbing car in Miami. Drive an Aventador or a Ferrari around here, and you'll get a cursory glance - drive the Eagle, and you become instantly famous and universally adored. It doesn't present an aggressive tone, making you feel special, but not at anyone's expense or ego. It's essentially the world's most incredible automotive humblebrag. It also *smells* right. It's an oft-overlooked sensory input in modern cars, but roaring through the steamy Floridian night with the smell of hot oil and petrol diffusing through the bonnet louvres lifts the experience to something transcendental.

That's not overstating, by the way. You may not love older cars, and you may not like the idea of so much money being lavished on one car. But if you're reading this magazine, then that means that you'll get the idea of the Eagle. You'll understand. You'll know when something simply feels *right*. When the levels of technology are sympathetic to the design, the improvements significant but subtle. A car that you drive for the sheer hell of it, get up early for, possibly just sit and look at. When you get out of something wishing that you really could own it, keep it forever and hand it down to your kids. It's not quite a religious experience, but it comes damn close. **TG**

JAGUAR E-TYPE SPEEDSTER BY EAGLE

**Price:** \$1 million +  
**Engine:** 4.7-litre straight 6cyl, 310bhp @ 4800rpm, 340lb ft @ 3600rpm  
**Performance:** 0-62mph in 4.9secs, 160+mph max  
**Transmission:** 5spd manual, RWD  
**Economy:** N/A  
**Weight:** 1008kg