

THE E-type

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Making history

Club Representative **Alex Holis** looks back at the Jaguar Club of Greece's latest tour, which had royalty as its theme

On a sunny Sunday in Greece, it is nice to walk in the countryside or visit a historical location, enjoy an open-air meal in good company and possibly drive a beautiful Jaguar! We managed to do all of the above with a spicy ingredient that tabloids and people all around the world are curious about – history and gossip about a royal family. Maybe not everyone knows that Greece had a brief royal history, comprising only six ‘imported’ kings during 140 years of reign.

Today we are trying to compress into a few words the birth of this part of Greek history in order to satisfy your curiosity and introduce the fairytale location that we reached aboard 10 different Jaguars. The Greek War of Independence lasted from 1821 until 1829, and was a revolution waged by the Hellenic population to win independence from the Ottoman Empire. After a long and bloody struggle, with the aid of the Great Powers and the Philhellenism of European aristocrats such as Lord Byron, Greek independence was finally granted.

In 1827, Ioannis Kapodistrias was the first governor of the independent Greek Nation. As head of state of Greece, he proceeded



with crucial changes for the advancement of the state, as well as the enactment of the state legal system in order to restore law and order. He also reorganised the military forces under a united administration. His reforms and measures, along with his effort to boost the country, evoked feuds that led to his assassination in Nafplion on 9 October 1831.

In 1832, at the Convention of London, the

- Top: everyone parked up in Drosia at the end of the run
- Above: XK 120 and E-type add a touch of style to the everyday traffic

United Kingdom, France and Russia established that Greece would be governed by a monarchy. Prince Otto Friedrich Ludwig of Bavaria, of the Wittelsbach dynasty, was appointed first King of the newly created Kingdom of Greece. Otto's parents were the Crown Prince Ludwig I of Bavaria, and Therese, daughter of the Duke of Saxe-Hildburghausen.

On 25 January 1833, the 17-year-old Otto disembarked in Nafplion from the British frigate *Madagascar* with 3,500 Bavarian troops as his army and the three members of the Bavarian Regency who planned to rule until Otto came of age in 1835.

King Otto was married in Germany on 22 December 1836, to the Duchess Amalia of Oldenburg. Upon her arrival in Greece, the beautiful 17-year-old Queen was heartily welcomed. She started working on social issues and wisely realised that her style of dress should emulate that of the Greek people. She created a 'romantic folksy court dress' that became the Greek national costume, and encouraged Otto to adopt a Hellenistic style in his portraits.

Until the completion of the building project for the Athens Royal Palace, now the Greek Parliament in Syntagma Square, Otto and Amalia temporarily lived in the mansion that was the first permanent base of the Greek National Assembly, now known as the Old Parliament on Stadiou Street. Afterwards, the royal couple moved into the building that is now the Museum of the City of Athens at Paparigopoulou Street. The interior of the palace was not completed before their exile.

Throughout the reign of her husband, Queen Amalia gave prominence to the redevelopment



of the green spaces in the city and, particularly, the creation of the Royal (now National) Gardens of Athens. Before finishing the planting of the Royal Gardens, she decided to purchase a vast area of 250 hectares in the north of Athens in the rich valley of the Kifisos river.

The climate was perfect for grapevines and fruit trees. Queen Amalia also created a husbandry model on her property, including many domestic and farm animals. There are sources indicating that there were cows, chickens, beehives and 'Merino' sheep, as well as a pair of giraffes! Old horses of the royal family were used for the tillage and for other agrarian work so that they could serve the farm.

Meanwhile, she supervised the construction of a royal villa with tower depicting the gothic style of Schloss Hochenschwangau in Bavaria, where her husband Otto was born. The Queen's Tower is a unique monument of the new gothic architecture style in Greece. The portal of the building is monumental since it resembles a castle with its ramparts and smaller side towers.

The main room of the tower features elaborate decoration with the coats of arms of the two houses and held a prominent status concerning the organisation of banquets. The precious, delicate and beautifully

● Above right: Otto and Amalia made their first home in what is now the Old Parliament (right) on Stadiou Street, a major thoroughfare in Athens



- Right: the National Gardens of Athens.
- Below: 10 Jaguars ‘guard’ the impressive Queen’s Tower.



preserved marquetry of the wooden floor made it necessary for visitors to enter the hall without shoes or wearing the special ‘Queen’s slippers’.

Otto’s reign would prove troubled, but he managed to last for 30 years before he and his wife left the way they’d come – aboard a British warship. During the early years of his reign, the regents ruling in his name

made themselves very unpopular by trying to impose German ideas of government on the Greeks, while keeping most significant state offices away from them. Nevertheless, they laid the foundations of a Greek administration, army, justice and education system.

Otto was sincere in his desire to give Greece good governance, but he suffered from two great handicaps: his Roman Catholic faith in an Orthodox country, and the fact that his marriage remained childless due to the Queen being unable to have children.

After the royals were exiled, the government declared the estate as



- Top: everyone gathers in the tower's main room – note the footwear, or lack of it
- Above: E-types to the fore at the Queen's Tower, with a trio XKs and a solitary Mk2 beyond;


public property. Its management was assigned to the Ministry of Finance, which afterwards delivered it to the new Danish king, King George I of the Glücksburg dynasty. In 1863, Otto was given the estate once again, as proxy. Following his death, the estate was purchased by Baron Sinas and, after that, it was sold to the Pachis family. Next, it passed on the Serpieri family.

By an interwar law that forbade the existence of very large estates in private hands, the Serpieri family was forced to offer 90% of it to the Greek public to become an Environmental Awareness Park, and maintain an area of only 25 hectares, inside of which the Queen's Tower stands today. Nowadays, the tower and its land forms an agricultural commercial company. Inside the property, we encounter horses, chickens and beehives. The stables that are offered for rent make it possible for horses to be accommodated and get proper physical exercise in an ideal habitat.

The estate still produces excellent organic pistachio, olives and grapes. After having visited the winery, we had the pleasure of tasting all the varieties of white and red wine, produced locally, accompanied by cheese and a delicious vegetable pie. Refreshed by the chilled wines and amazed by the natural surroundings, all the gentlemen drivers switched on the 'horsepower' of their Jaguar engines and, together with the ladies, slowly followed the path among the horses' fields to the exit.

We drove to our final destination, the vintage classic taverna Eleftheriadis in Drosia,



a well-known family restaurant that since 1928 has offered its speciality – the ‘Peinirli’, a kind of Greek pizza in a shape of a 30cm-long boat filled with cheese and everything delicious and fattening you can imagine! We parked our cars nearby and prepared our taste buds under the shade of the fig and plane trees. Another successful gathering was over and we toasted to meet again at the next one, always proud to drive our beautiful Jaguars. 



● Clockwise, from top: wine-tasting was laid on; two different kinds of horsepower; Series I leads V12