

Essex Thameside News



Nº 222, October 2025

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Chairman's message

Steve Rider

chairman@jecessexthameside.co.uk

Hello Essex Thameside Members,

As the end of the year approaches we still have two or three shows and visits planned to take place before the season finally comes to an end. Principal among these is our attendance at the Chatham Historic Dockyard on 5th October and, of course, the club jaunt to France to take advantage of the culinary delights available in and around La Rochelle. Both events kindly arranged by Lester Magness.

The committee is also starting to think about plans for 2026. Recommendations or suggestions are always welcome from our membership and we will be seeking your views over the coming weeks. Apart from shows and visits, we are considering increasing the number of breakfast meets, Sunday lunches or other meals that we can offer to our membership, particularly during winter months when shows are limited and the weather conditions are likely to be more inclement.

On a similar note, there are likely to be one or two changes to your committee in the new year and we would welcome any member who will consider serving for a period. For information or to discuss it further, please do contact any current committee member.

With regards to this Newsletter I am again grateful to our principal scribe, Neil Shanley, for his efforts. He has written a very detailed report on the Spitfire factory, museum and chapel at Biggin Hill. It never ceases to

amaze me as to the variety and depth of knowledge of subjects, within our club, displayed by our members.

I would like to remind you of the forthcoming Classic Car Show at the NEC in Birmingham on the 7th to 9th November. Club members can benefit from being able to obtain tickets in advance at a discount by using the reference CCCFNOV5155 when booking. Several members of the committee are planning to visit the show over that long weekend; we would welcome the opportunity to meet any members travelling to the event in order to swap notes and perhaps discuss some of the more unusual or noteworthy elements at the show.

As another reminder of the rapidly approaching festive season is that those people signed up to attend our Christmas bash at Pontlands Park on 6th December now need to make their balancing payment of £44.50 per person (added to £25pp deposit already paid, for a total cost of £69.50pp).

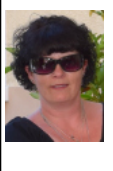
Our next club night is on Tuesday 28th October. With both Halloween and bonfire night rapidly approaching, we shall celebrate the time of year with a Halloween-themed club night. Once again, we invite you to join us for a 'spud night' where we will supply cooked jacket potatoes with butter. We suggest that you bring your own choice of filling although, as before, we will have a limited choice of toppings available just in case.

We therefore encourage any member so inclined to enter into the spirit and help ensure a light-hearted evening; any member doing so will be suitably rewarded and I hope to see you at our Chelmsford base on 28th October!

Happy motoring

Steve

Committee Members

	Richard Gibby Treasurer, Webmaster and Editor rwgibby@gmail.com		Ian Croxson Secretary ian@thecroxsons.com		Lester Magness Vice Chairman and Social Secretary lestermagness1@gmail.com
	Beverly Warren Membership Secretary membership@jecessexthameside.co.uk		Neil Shanley Committee member and Co-editor neilshanley@btinternet.com		Vaughn High Committee Member vaughn.high@sky.com

Events Diary

Club nights start at 7.00pm on the last Tuesday of every month (except Tuesday 16th December 2025)

Shows, Events and Visits

5th October Visit to Chatham Dockyard [*Contact Lester*]

6th December Annual Christmas Bash, at Pontlands Park Hotel [*Contact Neil Shanley*]

Others - for information only

8th–10th November Lancaster Classic Motor Show at the NEC, Birmingham

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'One Way' by Neil Shanley



Group visit to Chatham Historic Dockyard



Sunday 5th October 2025

£21.00 per person, including tea/coffee and a bacon roll

To register interest, please contact Lester Magness on 07739 263330 or lestermagness1@gmail.com





The Spitfire Factory at Biggin Hill

A Cotswolds tour, the Sandringham event and a visit to the Spitfire factory at Biggin Hill are three successful ideas from Vaughn and Julie High that the Club has undertaken this year – welcome to the committee, Vaughn!

History

For those not familiar with its history, Biggin Hill airport was formerly a Royal Air Force station, best known for its role in WWII's Battle of Britain, when it served as one of the principal fighter bases protecting London and the South East from attacks by German Luftwaffe bombers. It was originally opened in 1916, during WWI, to conduct wireless experiments. The Royal Flying Corps transferred there in 1917 and established it as part of the London Air Defence Area responsible for defending London against attacks by Zeppelins and Gotha bombers. After the First World War, the runway was extended and experimental works continued, including

participation in the development of radar. Over the course of the Second World War, Spitfires and Hurricanes from Biggin Hill shot down 1,400 enemy aircraft at a cost of the lives of 453 crew based there.

After hostilities ceased, Biggin Hill was briefly used by the RAF Transport Command, becoming a base for regular and reserve fighter squadrons, and from 1956 civilian light aviation relocated from London Croydon airport to Biggin Hill. It ceased to be an operational RAF Station in 1958.

Today, the RAF's 75-year presence, together with those who lost their lives, is commemorated in St George's RAF Chapel of Remembrance. The adjoining Memorial Museum was opened in 2019 and tells the story of Biggin Hill Station through the personal experiences of both those who served there and the community that supported them. Biggin Hill is now a dedicated business airport with a collection of thriving light-plane clubs and charter companies.

The Factory

A visit to the Spitfire Factory was the prime reason for our visit which included a detailed, very educational tour. For example, did you know that you can still buy a new Spitfire – minus the cannons? I didn't. Nor did I know that there is a factory making them. It will build one from scratch, although it will not have original registration numbers and squadron details. Yours for around £1M. If you happen to have an original main data plate showing the aircraft's construction number and other original information, you can order a plane to be constructed around it. Often people have the odd cockpit dial or some other item surviving from an original plane to be incorporated into the new build. The finished article can use all its historic numbering and history; for all intents and purposes it is seen as a genuine, period airplane. Try doing that with a classic car! If you prefer the "real thing", or as near as you can get to it, dating from WWII, it will cost you upwards of £10M. For those fortunate enough to own one, the 50-hour service which the factory does will set you back around £250K (before a full engine rebuild every 500 hours of flying time).

We were given a tour of the manufacturing facilities where wings and fuselages were being built from fresh aluminium sheeting and a lot of rivets. A time-consuming task and, in some cases, not to be taken on by large workers, particularly towards the tail of the aircraft where access is extremely tight. For a Spitfire or some of the other WWII aircraft, you do need a "Merlin" engine and there were several on display, some beyond rebuilding due to crash landings and enemy action.

Spitfire Facts and Figures

For those interested in such things, here are a few gems:

- Average flight time ranged from around one to three hours depending on power settings, added fuel tanks, and model type.

- There were a total of 24 "marks" or major variants of the Spitfire with numerous sub-variants within each "mark".
- The Rolls Royce Merlin engines which powered the planes were also manufactured by the Ford Motor Company in its Manchester (UK) Plant and the Packard Motor Car Company in Detroit.
- Ford redrew the engine plans to make the product suitable for mass production and made 30,428 between June '41 and March '46 whilst Packard's total was 55,523 units. Together these amounted to around 57% of the total Merlin engines built.

- In later planes, the Merlin engine was upgraded to the Griffon 65.

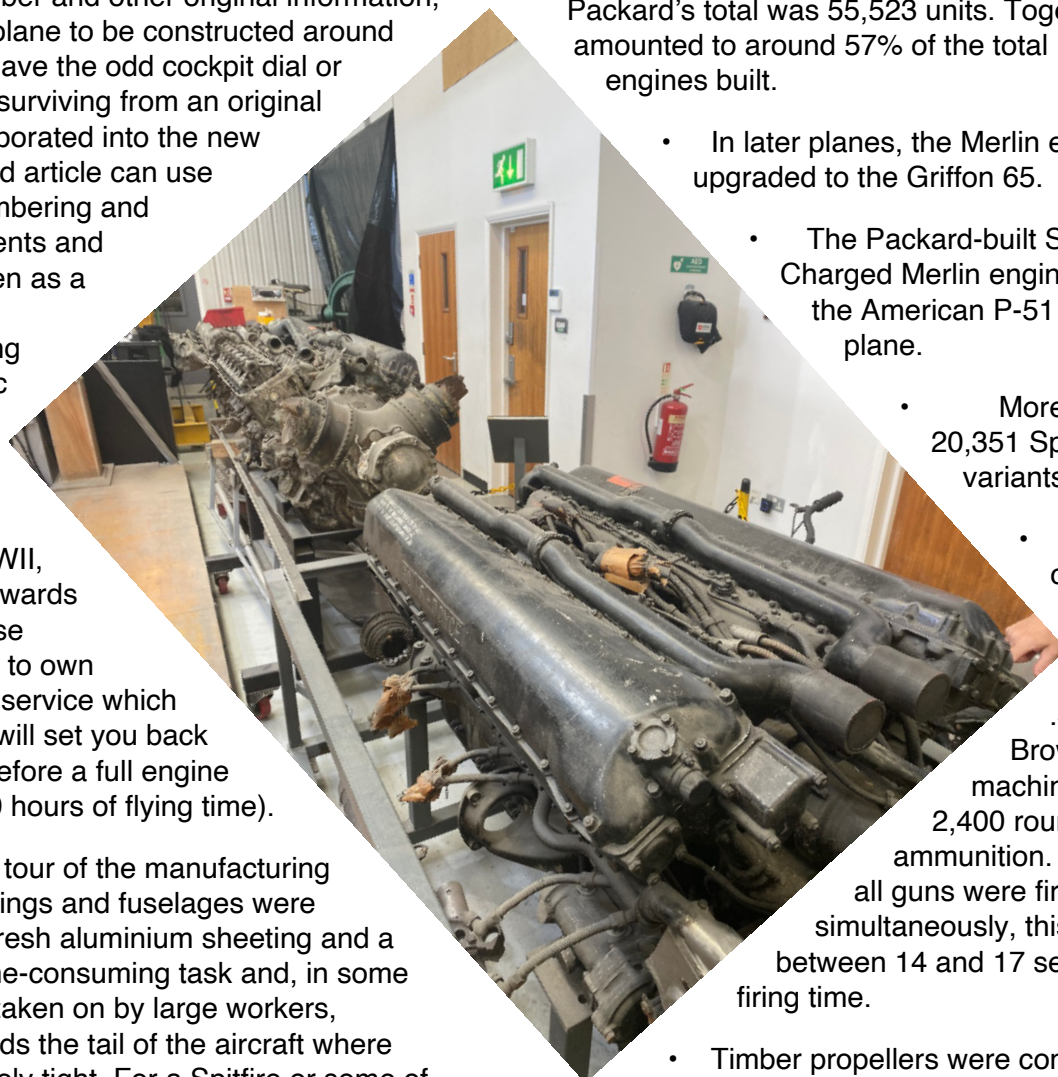
- The Packard-built Super Charged Merlin engine powered the American P-51 Mustang plane.

- More than 20,351 Spitfires of all variants were built.

- In most cases, the Spitfire carried eight .303 Browning machine guns with 2,400 rounds of ammunition. Assuming all guns were fired simultaneously, this gave between 14 and 17 seconds of firing time.

- Timber propellers were considered more desirable than steel since unlike the steel variety, they broke up on crash landing and therefore did not turn the plane over whilst they were still rotating.

- The average age of a Spitfire pilot during WWII was between 21 to 22 years old with 25 being considered mature
- Finally, a more sobering statistic. The average life expectancy of a Spitfire pilot in WWII was just four weeks.



The Exhibits

These ranged from whole planes – German, American and British – fuselages, engines and Steve McQueen's WWII Jeep, to an original unrestored 1937 Hillman Minx used at the airport during the 1940s. It was interesting to see two Messerschmitt BF109s, one of which had been fitted with a Rolls-Royce Merlin engine (distinguished by the bulges for cam shaft covers and the exhausts high in the nose, as opposed to the German-engined machines in which the 'bulges' are at the bottom of the nose section). Of the Spitfires present, most were airworthy, with 9GQ 627, a dual cab conversion to take a paying passenger on a flight of a lifetime, taking off as we watched. Ask member Steve Potter who has flown in this plane before.

The background history of these planes is fascinating and all seemed to be well-travelled, both during and after hostilities. Take Spitfire F Mk IX LZ842, built at Castle Bromwich in 1943. It served in Casablanca, Malta and Sicily before joining 327 Squadron in October 1944. Damaged after a forced landing, it was dismantled in Belgium. After the war it was one of 136 sent to South Africa in 1948 and subsequently sold for scrap in 1952. Amazingly, it survived as a hulk in the yard and later transferred to the South Africa Air Force Museum in 1978. It was then shipped to a UK buyer and later to an Australian collector. In 2003, it was acquired by Spitfire specialist Peter Monk, who restored it at the Biggin Hill factory, and took it on its first post-restoration flight in 2022. Now owned by Mark Bennett, it is one of the oldest surviving MK IX Spitfires.

The factory doesn't only deal with complete planes; we saw the remains of Spitfire LF IX ML119 of 1944 vintage, originally part of a batch of 2,190 built at Castle Bromwich by Vickers Armstrong. It moved down from Cosford to Martlesham Heath, then to North Weald and eventually to several Kent airfields, still with Number 1 Squadron. It went to the Czech Air Force after the war and was later one of 60 Spitfires sold to the Israeli Air Force in 1949. From there it went on to the Burmese Air Force in 1954 until finally becoming a "Gate Guard" in 1955. An American enthusiast later purchased it before it returned to the UK in 2000 and was stored in a barn. It is now awaiting restoration.

The factory does not seem short of planes to restore. Yet another Spitfire carcass awaiting its turn to be restored was RM694 of 1943. It is fitted with a Griffon 65 engine and a C type wing. It flew over 30 V1 "Doodlebug" intercept missions. After various transfers, it was used as yet another "Gate Guardian" at RAF Hornchurch for 15 years. It finally arrived at the factory in 2021 following numerous changes of ownership in both the UK and America. Its key selling point is that it has a remarkably complete fuselage with many original cockpit controls and systems still in place, making it one of the most original fuselages to yet be restored.

The Museum and Chapel

A visit to the Memorial Museum which adjoins the St George's RAF Chapel of Remembrance (built in 1951), was our penultimate activity. The Chapel preserves the legacy of the pilots who served and died flying from Biggin Hill. An interesting feature of





the Chapel is that its flooring is made from aircraft propeller blades. The Museum and Chapel celebrate the people involved with Biggin Hill. So, here you can read about some of the women who playing vital roles in the war effort. Jackie Moggridge was one such person who became the youngest Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA) pilot during WWII. She flew over 1,500 aircraft and after the war she became the first female airline Captain flying passengers across the world. A true inspiration. In 2017, the RAF was the first British Military to open every role to men and women. The Museum has much more to offer and is well worth a visit. The café even sells cappuccino with a Spitfire logo in the froth.

Finally, following a suggestion by Steve Potter, we assembled for lunch at the White Hart pub in Brasted – a regular port of call for the fighter pilots from Biggin Hill – to round off a great day out.

Neil Shanley



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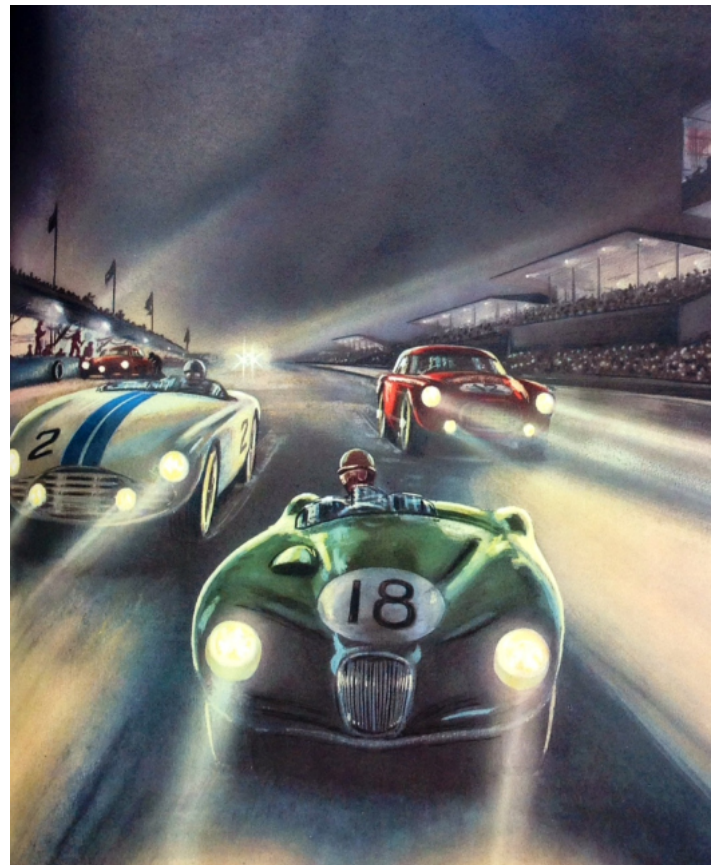
Biggin Hill and Jaguars

Biggin Hill is a famous airport and fighter station. On 2nd November 1939, one of its resident squadrons claimed the very first enemy aircraft 'kill' of the war when it shot down a Dornier Do.17. The station continued to play a major role in the Battle of Britain with squadrons of Spitfires being based there.

Our recent visit to Biggin Hill had, on the face of it nothing to do with Jaguar, being more concerned with the famous machines that were the star performers of the Royal Air Force during WWII. But you don't have to dig too deep to find links with our joint passion. Even more so, when you unearth ties to what is probably the world's most famous and prestigious car race, the Le Mans 24 hour.

Biggin Hill has regularly hosted International Air Fairs and of particular relevance to us was the Fair held on 14th to 15th June 1997. Star of the show that year was a flying formation of Jaguar GR1 aircraft from 41 Squadron which demonstrated a tactical low level sortie.

To add credence and importance to the proud Jaguar name, a display of Jaguar cars was also on show, and several racing drivers were in attendance to give further weight and gravitas to the name of Jaguar.



Stirling Moss was one who really needs no introduction but amongst the others were two drivers with recognised links to Jaguar.

The first, Tony Rolt, had always dreamed of racing cars, even before his schooldays at Eton. At the age of 17 in a Triumph Southern Cross, he achieved a very creditable 4th in class at the 1936 Spa-Francorchamps 24-hour race. A speeding infraction the following year temporarily curtailed his motoring activities before he came to the attention of Lofty England, who was to become manager of the Jaguar Cars sports car racing team.

After the war, in a 135 MS Delahaye normally well known for its reliability, he was forced to retire from the first post-war Le Mans race. In the same year Rolt first raced for Jaguar coming second at Silverstone in a 1-hour production car race. He later gained 4th place in the 1950 24-hour race and 6th in 1951, both with Duncan Hamilton as co-driver. In Ulster in 1951, he broke the lap record and brought the C-type he was driving up to a creditable 4th place at the finish.

From 1952–1955, Tony Rolt drove Jaguars regularly for the works team. In 1952 he narrowly failed to finish the Daily Express Silverstone race and was also forced to retire from Le Mans. 1953 was a season of lesser fortune; he was forced to retire from the Mille Miglia, the Goodwood 9-hour race and the Tourist Trophy.

Rolt competed in every 24 Heures du Mans race from 1949 to 1955. However, perhaps his greatest victory occurred in 1953, at Le Mans in a Jaguar 3.4 litre C-type, again with Duncan Hamilton. Tony Rolt and Duncan Hamilton were awarded the Campbell Memorial Trophy and the ERA Club Trophy in recognition of their triumph.

In 1954, he came second at Le Mans in a Jaguar D-type and achieved a good result in the Silverstone Sports Car Race, again in a D-type. However luck evaded him at Le Mans that year when the Jaguar's gears seized with the car in a well-established second place. He then chose to retire from racing shortly after the event.



Left and below: The Jaguar XK120 C-type, driven by Tony Rolt and Duncan Hamilton, winning the 21st Le Mans 24-hour race in 1953





Left: Tony Rolt in the cockpit talks to Duncan Hamilton at Silverstone in 1955

Peter Blond started racing Jaguars in 1953 and had many successes at club level in 1955 before turning to the professional circuits in 1956. In March of that year, at Goodwood, Blond came 3rd, driving a Jaguar XK120 in the 10 laps scratch race. At Snetterton in the Eastern Counties 100 Race, he came second in a Jaguar D- type. During 1957, Blond achieved some more good results, coming second in the Snetterton Sports Car Race, in his D-type and 6th at Goodwood

with co- driver Hamilton, again in the Jaguar D-type.

In 1959, Blond was unlucky while driving his Lister Jaguar when he retired from Le Mans 24 hour race with a blown engine whilst amongst the front runners. Blond retired from racing and went on to become one of the directors at Sothebys, the London auction house. Sadly he passed away on 19th January 2021 after contracting Covid.

Right: Peter Blond driving his Jaguar XK D-type, which he had bought from Bernie Ecclestone



XKD 518 charging to a 9th Place finish at the 1958 Goodwood Tourist Trophy. Courtesy of GP Library.

In an acknowledgement and perhaps recognition of these two men's achievements, the Post Office issued a commemorative first day cover, a limited number of which were personally signed by Tony Rolt and Peter Blond at the Biggin Hill Air Fair. Funds raised were utilised to help support the Royal Air Forces Association.

See copy of the first day cover below.

It is not often that personal hobbies or interests overlap but in this case an airport of historical importance, Jaguar cars, their drivers and Le Mans viewed together just seemed too good an opportunity for me to miss. So I hope this has been of interest.

Steve Rider



Further Information:

The JEC's Oxfordshire Region sponsored a talk by Tony Rolt's son Stuart
<https://youtu.be/3-bdf9MQMFo?feature=shared>

24 Hours of Le Mans
<https://youtu.be/PDGlejm32BY?feature=shared>



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A jaunt to Glemham

Classics at Glemham car show,
22nd July

Glemham, now in its 6th year, was the destination for twelve Essex Thameside Club Members and their cars who, on a bright and sunny early Sunday morning, made the pilgrimage to this former retreat of the Cobbold brewery family, very close to Woodbridge in Suffolk.

The landlady of the Lion Inn on the Main road outside Glemham did not appear to be so keen to welcome us when we congregated for assembly in their car park. Something about Lester's unpaid bar tab from last year.....?

This was our second club visit to the Modern, Classic Car and Supercar show that raises funds for the Suffolk charity St Elizabeth's Hospice. With over 650 cars in attendance in 2025, the event this year raised £21,500 as shown in the accompanying photograph.

Despite the sheer number of shows on our calendar, our club members seemed not to tire of the basic concept of rocking up in a field before 10.00am, trying to negotiate posts and parking in a pitch and mingling with other Jaguar owners. It still appears to

be a favoured recipe for a day out.

Within a few minutes of arrival the wonderful smell of bacon butties all round wafted into the air and tantalised the palate. There was plenty to do and see for all, with some excellent stalls and concessions, live music, clean loos and some really interesting vehicles being shown.

So what tickled my fancy at the show, apart from Steve and Carol Perryman's crispy bacon baps?

This yellow 1968 MGC Roadster with a cherry red interior did for one; cheese and tomato anyone?





A beautiful and immaculate, gold-coloured, super-charged XJ350 was another favourite of mine. The owner told me that, when new, it was bought by a consultant physician for over £90K but now it's probably worth no more than £12K.



As a day-to-day runabout, this 1983 Talbot Horizon GLS 1500cc in Café Noire Brown takes some beating. Only 150,000 of these were ever produced in Coventry. The car's most innovative selling point in its day was an LED rev counter, at the time the latest in technology. Some interesting facts from 1983 were shown on the billboard next to the car, including the price of a pint at a mere £0.67p. Quite a difference to having a slurp this weekend at London's Olympic Stadium where you will pay £7.30 for a similar measure of a non-descript, gassy lager.

Finally an Austin A30 from 1956 looked a picture. Its initial concept was by a member of the Raymond Loewy design studio, but the design was heavily revised by Austin's Head of Styling. I was assured by the owner that it does exceed the 70 mph limit but only by leaning forward and with a following wind. He



had actually fitted a bigger 1275 cc lump with a simple carb and exhaust upgrade, which may have had something to do with it. The late racing driver James Hunt had the van variant, a model he liked, saying that he 'could blow off all the Ferraris' with it. The van reportedly had birdseed in the cab and cigarette butts in the ashtrays, reflecting Hunt's personal use and lifestyle.



There you have it. A lovely day out in a relaxed atmosphere enjoyed by all of us that braved the 63 mile 'jaunt down the A12'. Even the rains held out. Will we do it again next year? Watch this space...

Ian Croxson

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