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SOMETHING OLD IN SOMETHING NEW by Ian Kuah



THE C-TYPE WAS THE RACING VERSION OF Jaguar's XK120. It's also one of the purest and most beautiful cars ever designed. A paragon of the 'form follows function' school, it was sleek and elegant where the later and faster D-Type was rounded and more portly.

However much more publicity was given to the D-Type, which won the world's toughest endurance race in '55, '56 and '57. Demand for Lynx replicas of these has always been very high, with over 50 cars built. However, the tide seems to be turning, and now that

interest is growing in the C-Type again, Lynx have re-launched their version - of which only four had been commissioned since 1976.

Originality is a sore point with some car enthusiasts. But the fact is that most old cars simply do not mingle too well with modern traffic conditions. They overheat, fluff their carburetors and even break down. That is, at best frustrating. At worst, it can be downright dangerous.

The alternative is to build an old car with as many modern bits as you need to make it sensible on today's roads, while preserving the overall character that came as standard in the original. If you think about it logically, you would then have a car which the factory could eventually have made anyway had it stayed in production long enough.

FAST FORWARD

With the benefit of hindsight and experience, there are now much better ways of doing things than existed 40 years ago, and the case for describing Lynx cars as 'evolution' versions of the originals is one that can be very convincingly argued. This car is dimensionally identical to the factory classic in wheelbase and body, with a tubular steel chassis and hand-wheeled aluminium body. But it's in the details where improvements have been sought.

The engine is a case in point. The original C-Type power unit was the venerable XK twin-cam straight-six in the modest 3.4 litre capacity. For better torque and easier driving today, Lynx normally recommend the later 3.8 litre version. In fact, some of the later C-Types were fitted with this bigger engine anyway. "We can do either capacity and even a 4.2 litre if the customer wishes," John Mayston-Taylor, owner of Lynx explained, "but we think the 3.8 is the best compromise between power, torque and smoothness. In any case, the 3.8 in this particular car has 285bhp which should be more than enough for anyone."

Jaguar never achieved such power figures in the '50s, and indeed, even the later E-Types never came close, except the special competition versions. The reason is once again the march of technology. Contemporary cylinder-head and manifold gas-flow knowledge, piston and ring design advances, lightening and balancing of other internal components like the connecting rods and so on have given a classic engine rebuilt today a huge performance edge. Further gains come from the latest generation of Weber 45DCOE carburetors which are streets ahead of the originals and much easier to tune and maintain.

The clutch is a more modern hydraulic unit; the original was not too clever and was troublesome in service. Of the original parts, you can count the radiator, dynamo, inlet and exhaust manifolds, voltage regulator, Smiths instruments and even the horn.

The disc brakes are slightly thicker than the originals which they need to be to cope with the enhanced performance. They're clamped by larger calipers, and the combination improves both the crispness and fade resistance of the brakes. A conventional servo is used in place of the original, gearbox-driven, hydraulic type found on the 1953 disc-braked cars.



"The D-Type was designed for top speed down the Mulsanne Straight at Le Mans which is a flat piece of road," John explained. "Our D-Type and XK-SS owners wish to drive their cars on public roads as well as on the track, so we elected to use the E-Type rear with other adjustments and it has ended up substantially better in ride and handling than the original.

"However, we didn't have to do this for the C-Type as it was more a case of a road car converted to race trim. So the ride is better to start with and little has to be done to make it perfectly acceptable for road use today. In fact, the suspension is largely original, and we only improve things where we need to"

The Lynx car uses wire wheels half an inch wider than the originals, 5.5 x 16-inch. These have 60 rather than 54 spokes for better stability. They're shod with 6.00 x 16 Dunlop racing tyres.

In the spartan cockpit, which amplifies the grunt of the highly tuned motor, an acre of bare aluminium is your closest friend. In front of you are the big and easy to read Smiths instruments —a 160mph speedometer that reads clockwise and a matching rev counter that goes anti-clockwise. The latter is an original, the former a reproduction. One feature you'll not find on a classic C-Type is wing mirrors, but they're very helpful in modern traffic, even if it is easy to see over your shoulder. This car has a single aero-screen, but you can have a pair if you want; you can also have a passenger door.





Over the years, Lynx, arguably the world's finest repairers and replicators of classic Jaguar sports cars, have bought up all the C-Type and D-Type spares they could find, and now have the most comprehensive stock of original parts for these cars in the world. Apart from being used to repair original cars, these parts are incorporated into new Lynx creations to give as much authenticity as possible to cars which are more than just replicas. The parts supply is not endless however, and so these valuable components are kept for special projects like this C-Type, where details matter. Other makers of C-Type replicas do not have access to such parts and have to use something else. It's as simple as that.

"For those who worry about one of our cars being passed off as an original by some unscrupulous seller, we have our own build number on the rear bulkhead," says John, "as well as on the chassis and in a couple of discreet places buried deep within the cars' structure. This way we can easily authenticate a car if there's any dispute over its pedigree. We don't make fake Jaguars. This is a Lynx C-Type, nothing more, nothing less, and the Lynx name speaks for itself. We try to recreate the feel of a 1950s sports car but with a few improvements in the areas of performance and safety."

DRIVING FORCE

Because the C-type stemmed from a road car design, it feels civilised on the road and the engine tune complements this, making it is very docile and tractable at low speeds. The light alloy body and torquey long stroke engine makes for a car that's easy to drive in touring mode.

The power band is 2,000 to 6,000 rpm through the four- speed synchromesh gearbox (the original had a Moss box with no synchro on first gear. But you do not need to explore that power band or use the gearbox frequently unless you want to go very quickly. Driven in anger, this replica C-Type is almost, but not quite, modern supercar quick, with times of 0-60 mph in 6.0 sec, 0-100 mph in 14.1 sec, and over 140 mph flat out which is pretty respectable, even today! Tractability is certainly the car's strong suit and it easily passed the William Lyons' test of being able to pull away smoothly from 10mph in top gear.

While the Lynx C-Type's suspension is largely to original pattern, most people find it amazing to learn that suspension geometry was a black art, scarcely acknowledged in the C-Type's heyday.

The front and rear suspension of the Lynx is to the original factory specification. "We repair original C-Types here," John explained, "so we have the drawings, patterns and other tooling. The suspension is fully adjustable for castor, camber and toe-in which means it can be set up very precisely."

Modern knowledge of setting-up suspension has turned an already sweet performer into a ballerina.

If Jaguar had been able to set up their C-Types to this level, their already convincing wins at Le Mans in 1951 and again in 1953 would have been a total rout. But in those days there was little time for such niceties as the one small in-house works race team did everything, Testing was mainly by Norman Dewis at MIRA. Today, at a comparable level, separate teams look after engine, chassis, aerodynamics and electronics and expensive track test time is de rigueur. Indeed, in those days, the driver was expected to get on and drive without commenting too much on technicalities!

The C-Type is light but its aerodynamics and chassis give it good directional stability. It's neutral, balanced and very adjustable in corners. Another plus is that the taut and controlled ride is matched by a surprising amount of comfort for road use. In fact, the ride/handling compromise is so good that nothing has to be adjusted for the track. Most cars are designed purely for the road, but on a track, their handling quickly falls apart.

BALLERINA

The steering is light and precise, and with two and a quarter turns lock-to-lock, it's also very direct. You do need to be slightly on the move to lighten the steering load when parking, something that most people have forgotten because of power-steering.

Another thing about cars from this period is that NVH had not been invented and you get the full, adulterated raw sensation of driving. This means that you do not have to be doing flies-in-your-teeth speeds for your drive to be satisfying. In a modern Porsche or Ferrari which has been 'sanitised' by drive-by noise regulations and the demands of people who want to use them everyday, you have to be driving three figure speeds before the car begins to entertain. No so with the C-Type. Even at 40 or 50mph, the car is talking to you through its steering and chassis. It is alive!

It also has different personalities. At moderate speeds, the rack and pinion steering wriggles slightly in your hands, describing the road surface beneath. In fact, the whole chassis is communicative. This is real 'seat-of-the-pants' motoring. Go faster and the decibels rise, the bumps begin to smooth out and the car becomes an even more fluid mover.

Given its head on a race track, it is pure magic. The old-style cross-ply race tyres allow progressive slides at speeds which any modern shopping hatch will beat. But, the level of feedback, the sheer ability of the chassis to delicately tell you how many degrees of oversteer you can achieve with a given amount of throttle and counter- steering, is alien to drivers of modern cars.

Such have been the advances in suspension design with countless isolating rubber bushes, that the fine adjustments you can make and feel being made in the C-Type have become coarser and more reliant upon sheer g-force in modern sports cars. Drifting and sliding to order, this car is an education in classic front-engined, rear drive handling. Another bonus is that the steering doesn't load up as you work the car in a corner, unlike many later (but not the latest) mid-engined marvels whose unassisted steering loads up so much you that have to grip the wheel hard to hang on. High steering loads are bad because they lessen your ability to be smooth with the wheel and make it hard to dial in precise doses of opposite lock when it all goes green.





The C-Type is also ergonomically sound. The steering wheel and gearlever fall easily to hand. The cockpit has a period feel but is not edge of the seat like the D-Type, which feels like a WW2 fighter by comparison. Overall, the C-Type is the more practical of the two if your ambition is to drive on road and track, with more of the former than the latter.

The more seat time I have in modern sportscars, the more I tend to become blasé about the driving experience they provide. Cars like the latest Porsche 911 and the Ferrari F355 are amazingly good all rounders and when you drive them hard, and you'll find levels of performance, handling and grip that blow away the top racing cars of 30 years ago. But what is missing is a high level of involvement. If I wanted to cross a continent in speed and comfort, I would much rather do so in a BMW 540i or Mercedes E430. But for pure unadulterated fun on the weekend, give me a Lynx C-Type anyday.