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SOMETHING OLD IN SOMETHING NEW by Ian Kuah

THE RACING VERSION OF COVENTRY'S most celebrated automaker's svelte little Jaguar XK120 roadster, the C-Type remains 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.



The C-Type proved itself in combat by winning Le Mans in 1951 and '53, but history records that much more publicity was given to the D-Type, which won the world's toughest endurance race in 1955, '56 and '57. Because of this well-deserved notoriety, demand for Lynx D-Type replicas 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.



Lynx, in its original incarnation opened for business in 1968, restoring Riley Lynx cars, hence the name. The firm subsequently began refurbishing C-Type and D-Type Jaguars, but as it became more and more difficult to obtain factory spares, they started to fabricate their own from scratch.

Fabrication and restoration worked hand-in-hand for a while and eventually reached the point where whole cars could be created from scratch incorporating many of the original Jaguar spares bought and held in stock.

The recession of the early '90s brought companies like Lynx to the brink, however, and the company was taken over by its current Managing Director, John Mayston-Taylor, who revived the firm and brought it onto the world stage. Apart from being a good businessman, John is also an ex-racer and an all-round nice guy.

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. At best, it's frustrating. But 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 an 'evolution' car which the factory would eventually have made anyway had it stayed in production long enough.

With the benefit of hindsight and experience, there are much better ways of doing things than existed 40 years ago, and the case for describing Lynx cars as 'evolutionary' 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 is 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 smallest capacity, 3.4 litres. For better torque and easier driving in today's traffic conditions, Lynx normally recommend the later 3.8 litre version as the standard power unit. Authenticity is not in question here as some of the later C-Types used this bigger engine anyway. "We can do either capacity and even a 4.2 litre if the customer wishes," Mayston-Taylor, explained, "but we think the 3.8 is the best compromise between power, torque and smoothness. In any case, the 3.8 in this car has 285bhp which should be more than enough for anyone in such a light car."



Jaguar never achieved such power figures in the 1950s, and indeed, even the later E-Types never came close, except maybe in their marketing blurb. 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. Once the basic engine is built, 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.

One of the advantages of the total engine rebuild is the opportunity to fit harder valve seats so that the engine runs on unleaded petrol. And if the car is going to a market where the fuel octane rating is not as high as the UK, the compression ratio can be lowered slightly as well.

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 are clamped by larger calipers, and the combination improves both the crispness and fade resistance of the brakes.

"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 did not have to do this for the C-Type as it was a road car converted to race trim rather than the converse as was the case with the D-Type, which became the road going XK-SS. 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 also have 60 rather than 54 spokes for better stability with the power of the big engine. These are 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 turns counter-clockwise. The latter is an original, the former a reproduction. One feature you will not find on a classic C-Type is wing mirrors, but they are very helpful in modern traffic in addition to the easy over-your-shoulder view. This car has a single aero-screen, but you can have a pair if you want and 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 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.

"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 is 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."

BECAUSE THE C-TYPE WAS A ROAD CAR converted for race duties rather than the other way round, it is very docile and tractable at low speeds. Its light alloy body and torquey long stroke engine makes for a car that is 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 synchros. But you need not explore that power band or use the gearbox frequently unless you want to go very quickly. Driven in anger, the C-Type is almost but not quite modern supercar quick. Times of 0-60 mph in 6.0 sec, 0-100 mph in 14.1 sec, and 140 mph flat out was state-of-the-art in 1953; it's pretty respectable even today.



Tractability is certainly the C-Type's strong suit; 5,500 rpm through the gears will almost always be enough on the road. And at the other end of the scale, the car will easily pass 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 original, 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 and assembled from mostly original parts. "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.

Forty-five years of experience and the accumulated knowledge of just how much difference setting-up makes to a car's handling 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. In those days there was never the time to do these niceties as the one small works race team did everything, and testing meant a quick blast up the main road by the workshop. Today, at a comparable level, there are separate test teams who look after engine, chassis, aerodynamics and electronics and expensive track test time is de rigueur. In fact, in those days, it was seen as heroic to drive one's way around a handling problem!

The C-Type is light but its aerodynamics and chassis give it good directional stability without a lot of steering input. It is neutral, balanced and very adjustable in corners. Another plus is the taut and controlled ride 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 and on a track, their handling quickly falls apart. The C-Type is truly one of the few dual-purpose cars.

THE STEERING IS LIGHT AND PRECISE, and with two and a quarter turns lock-to-lock, it is also very direct. Like most cars with unassisted steering, make sure to creep forwards or backwards ever so slightly while steering to lighten the load when parking. This is something that most people have forgotten because of power-steering. Modern cars often end up with worn out steering bushes and joints because drivers habitually turn the wheel when the car is stationary.



Another thing about cars from this period is that NVH (an industry acronym for Noise, Vibration and Handling) had not been invented so, you get the full, adulterated raw sensation of driving. This means that you do not have to achieve 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 alive!



It also has different personalities. At moderate speeds, the rack and pinion steering wriggles slightly in your hands, describing the road surface. 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. 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 does not 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 gear lever 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 World War II 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 which you can use everyday if you want.

Drive them hard, and you will 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 anyway.

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