



Fast Lane - November 1987

LYNX WITH THE PAST by Doug Nye

It's a common problem. Famous cars from the past now fetch so much money that you'd never dare drive them even if you could afford to buy. For the price of a Porsche 928 though, you can have a D type Jaguar and realise that's as good as the original and appreciates nearly as fast. Doug Nye drove the real thing, and he



A pal of mine is given to inscribing epigrams and mottos on the wall of his living room, in addition to the useful telephone numbers to which we normal chaps confine our graffiti. High on his list is "Ah Nostalgia - The Real Thing"...

If true, this perhaps is the key to the growing demand for so-called collectors' cars. But obviously at the top end of the market there's a finite supply of the genuine article and to match booming demand over the past few years, prices have gone simply crazy.

Four years ago I bought a genuine D-Type Jaguar - ex-double Le Mans-winning Ecurie Ecosse team - for a collector friend. It cost £112,000. He wittered at the price, but I assured him he'd be all right. Rather to my surprise I could hardly have been right. Soon afterwards, Graham Robson produced a pocket history of the D-Type Jaguar and quoted "the going rate" as being "between £70,000 and £100,000 . . .". By then he was already some £20-30,000 out of court. Last year a proper D sold for £350,000 plus, and today good-history Ds are bobbing about in the half-million Sterling bracket . . . my collector friend's included.

This fantastic inflation - approaching £100,000 per year - has had three effects. Dealers and investors have been made even richer - it gravitates against the cars being used at all seriously because they have become too valuable either to insure or to risk - and finally it has largely taken them beyond the reach of many genuine enthusiasts who could really appreciate and enjoy them as the high-performance road-racing cars they are.

Against this background, the faithful replica can have much in its favour, particularly if it is built by a company that respects and the preservation of the high technical standards which the cars' original design embodied.

Lynx Engineering of St Leonards-on-Sea in Sussex are just such an engineering-based - as opposed to motor trading-based - company in the business of replicating the classic Jaguar. Stump up today with your order, state your required specification and company principals Elgan Howell, Guy Black and Chris Keith-Lucas encourage customers to follow their car through its build-process; oh yes, with stage payments along the way.

In effect, the productionised Ds from 1955 appeared in three forms, each with live-axle rear suspension, a stressed-skin centre monocoque and a bolted-on, multi-tubular front subframe supporting the legendary, 6-cylinder dohc XK engine and front suspension. Stylist Malcolm Sayer's original 'short-nose' styling was stubby and brief as the name implies, the nose ending only just ahead of the headlamp glasses. 'Short-nose Ds' also had a separate headrest-fin which terminated on the rear deck just short of the tail-tip boot hatch. The '55 works cars for Le Mans then introduced the alternative 'long-nose' form, with the radiator aperture thrust forward some 7.5 inches and an integral rear fin extending right to the tail and onto the boot hatch. Finally a road-equipped XK-SS version was then produced, production of which terminated in the catastrophic Brown's Lane factory fire of February 12, 1957.

Lynx customers can specify a replica in any of these forms, two-seat or single-seat, full-width windscreen or wrap-round single-seater with rigid tonneau over the passenger's side: engine spec too - the customer can name the tune, and within reason, Lynx will play it.

Today they make something like 90 per cent of the car in-house, including monocoque to the original drawings, body panels, painting and trimming. Essentially the cars are marketed as 'rebodied E-Types', using a rotted E's identity-bearing front sub-frame, suspension and other components 'reconditioned'. Essentially, Lynx's very high-quality ability to recondition and restore as new does seem to be a good thing. It's not like the well-used genuine Ds but this isn't the place to argue that point.

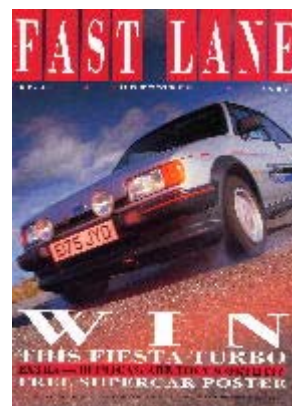


Having once placed your order, in nine months to a year's time your very own Lynx D-Type will be finished and running and already its resale value will be higher than your purchase price if recent trends continue...

The bad news is that prices for the Lynx Ds now start at £48,000 - plus VAT but including the basic E-Type. The good news is that this figure represents at the worst, say 15-20 per cent of what you would have to pay for one of the 50-odd genuine articles built by Jaguar between 1954 and '57. Ok, so you

have to be reasonably well-heeled to afford such a toy for fun, but you need not by any means be in the millionaire industrialist collector or investor bracket to enjoy the essence of genuine D-Type motoring as offered by Lynx.

Essentially those involved in founding Lynx's D-Type business, and probably most of their customers, all grew up during the period when the Ds ruled Le Mans. Jaguar effectively tailor-made the cars to win the 24-Hours classic, and they did so in 1955-57 after being shaded only narrowly into a fighting second place upon their debut there in 1954.





I'm certainly not alone in having been swept up by the D's charisma right from the very first time I saw one. Much of its charm is typical of its era. You see, as a small boy in Guildford I didn't have to be taken to Goodwood or Silverstone or Le Mans for that first brief glimpse. I was actually larking about with school- chums in the woods of Stoke Park, alongside the Guildford Bypass, when the murmur of passing - uniformly dull and largely black-painted - everyday traffic suddenly threw up a new, sharper sound.

It was a rising, hard-edged braying note. Clearly something 'special' was accelerating uphill towards us on the Bypass, slashing past the Morris Oxfords and Austin Devons. Here they came!

Two cars - grimy green, at least one of them as I recall with a narrow yellow nose band. They slammed past, breasted the rise and slowed, exhausts crackling, brake lights flashing, brief snaps of smoke as the drivers changed- down for the top roundabout by the AA office block. Braarrp-paaah, braarrp-paaah. they sang, then the stoplights biinked out, those shapely big-finned tails squatted low and the cars snapped left and accelerated away, out of sight. It was some time before the noise was lost to us. and then the breeze carried my first deep whiff of burned competition oil . . . and I was hooked.



About the same time, a teenager named Chris Frost lived in Petersfield and made a point of riding his motor-cycle through Farnham whenever he could, just to have a drool through the showroom window of the Hawthorn family's Tourist Trophy Garage there. They had a Brooklands Riley on display which Chris thought was simply magnificent. One day he was drooling at it when a tall, blond chap suddenly opened the showroom door and barked "Don't just stand there dribbling down my window, if you want to look at it, come in and do it properly!" He spent time showing the youngster the finer points, sat him in it, even popped a crash helmet on his head.

"What do you think of it?" "Fantastic! It's the first racing car I've ever sat in ..." "Huh, come into the workshop and I'll show you a proper racing car..."

And he did, and it was a D-Type Jaguar and the tall, blond chap was Mike Hawthorn, and Chris Frost was converted for life.

I went on to spend my life writing about such cars, and occasionally driving them. Chris went on through the Brigade of Guards' equivalent of the SAS to become a successful businessman in his own right and to own the next best thing to a genuine megabuck D- a Lynx.



He bought it second-hand, had a wet-sump 4.2-litre XK engine built-up for it and has used it extensively ever since maintaining it in near-concours condition alongside a similarly gleaming collection of pre-war vintage and PVT cars. He generously loaned it to us for a week's hard motoring which did not, unfortunately, come to the happiest of endings, but gave us every opportunity for a proper evaluation of Lynx's work.

I was interested to see how it would compare with 'MWS 302'. 'my' old ex-Ecosse car. Main differences are in the wet-sump production 4.2 a opposed to original dry-sump racing 3.4 or 3.8-litre engine, and the adoption of 15in against original-spec 16in wheels. Otherwise the car looks the same, smells the same, and it goes and feels . . . better.

Its Malcolm Sayer-styled bodyshape might be dated and 'draggy' by modern standards but for sheer aesthetic balance and good looks it has few peers. From some angles those rolled-in centre monocoque sides make it look gawky, its ground clearance excessively high, but you merely move to look from another angle and it's just beautiful - there's no other word . . .

I originally wrote most of what follows largely about 'MWS' but it now applies just as well to Chris Frost's pride and joy. There's a nicely- formed wrap-over filler hatch on top of that headrest-cum-fin. Poke your index finger into the hole beneath it, depress the spring latch and flip the hatch open. Down inside is a massive filler neck and spring cap. Clang - thumb open the cap and squint down the open neck. There's a foam-baffled tank down there - no fuel gauge on the dash so you check the level by eye.

Reach over the perspex side screen, open the shallow little door with its tiny storage pocket. There's the high monocoque sill to step over. Step on that green leather seat - that's what the owner advised - wiggle feet beneath the large wood-rim steering wheel, lean backside against the thickly padded headrest and slither down deep. Reach right, latch the door. It's cramped, cosy and ooooh - where's my greasy mac?

The centre beam between driver's cockpit and passenger's bay is a monocoque structural member. It spears past shoulder-high. You sit that deep in the D, and just as - in a 'real' Ferrari GTO it's the view forward - the lazy rolling "W" of humped wings and the centre "power bulge" with its flanking louvres, which sets the enthusiast's juices stirring.

There's the right-side sill hard against one hip, the transmission tunnel high against the other. The vertical edge to the engine bay is hard and sharp against my left leg - there was a thick pad here on 'MWS'. There's little room for big feet around the pedals, and leg-room is confined. Get comfy otherwise, brace back from the large yellowed-wood steering wheel rim, bury your shoulders in the rounded seat back padding. Chipped matt black dash, minimum display of vital instruments, riveted BRG- painted monocoque interior - it all smacks of 1950s aeronautical engineering, like the cockpit of a Hawker Hunter or Gloster Meteor.



There's a centre lock for the disappointingly tiny key - surely a D should be brought to rumbustious life by something more grand, it's like a Morris Minor's! By the lock, the starter button.



Switch on, glowing lights, stroke the throttle to prime that rack of three twin-choke Weber 45s up ahead. Check neutral on the handy cranked-forward gearchange, thumb the starter . . .



Even from stone cold there's only the briefest starter motor grind, the D quivers, and GARRRUMMPHH! She's fired, the side exhaust spits rich black smoke, clears and settles into a surprisingly soft and civilised tick-over - the kind of creamy purr you might expect from so big a cat. Heat shimmer rises from the louvres ahead, rev it, blat black smoke, it's all alive, taut, nervous, so much more 'feel' than anything else roofed-in and modern. Forget your hopped-up Bee-Emms and Audis and decorated Japanese fornicatoria - true you'll not find quadrophonics and efficient noise-insulation (or even weather-protection) in this machine but any enthusiastic driver with muscle and heart and a soul will just know that unless somebody has got their sums incredibly wrong, this Lynx is going to offer so much motoring fulfilment there'll be no need for any ICE.

So have they got their sums right? In action, how does the replica D shape up?

Clutch pressure is considerable, as expected, find first, ease away - first impression is that this is just like an E-Type. It's as smooth, as easy and as taut in a smooth-riding kind of way. There's little of the low-speed live-axle jounce and rattle I recall from the original car.

Out onto faster but hardly smoother country roads and higher speeds and that independently-suspended rear end really proves its presence. Where the live-axled original cars would have felt smoother at higher speeds but would still have tended to leap from crag to crag, only the steering of Chris' Lynx vibrates and chatters to deflections of its stiff-sidewall, L-section, Dunlop racing tyres. It will white-line and it does deflect on these tyres but their sharper cornering bite and precision prevents the E-Type suspension - though well-damped - ever feeling flabby. On all surfaces the Lynx rode far better than I had ever expected and on fine-surfaced roads at higher speeds it was just a joy.

Its engine felt beautifully carburetted - always a tricky job with triple Webers - crisp and sharp throughout the range but the E-Type 4.2 engine does lack the hard instant edge I recall from the smaller dry-sump original.

Others with much greater experience of Ds than I told me long ago what a joy they are on the open road. This is in marked contrast to most of their contemporaries in the '50s which by modern standards are not much fun at all, too unmanageable, too intractable and too uncomfortable to make much sense for touring.

Sure, the XK engine's exhaust manifolding and the Lynx's rather kitsch dummy dry-sump oil tank (which I did not admire), cause the passenger footwell to be cut uncomfortably short, but Jaguar designer Bill Heynes' monocoque construction was a tour de force in structural integrity and rigidity which none of the Ds' separate-chassis rivals ever matched.

You can feel this integrity as the car is solid, all of a piece, nothing chatters, flaps or vibrates as on separate-body sports cars. Booming around the Hampshire byways, ride impresses as the Lynx's finest quality, its servo-assisted disc brakes bite powerfully and four-square into the turns although they demand heavy pedal pressure from high speed, and the steering is a vibrant delight - so alive with none of the mushy insulation you will find, and probably admire, in many modern high-performance cars. Where in a BMW M5 for example one might admire the weighting of the power steering, here you apply different standards. I'd be prepared to argue whether they are lower - in view of the system's age - or just different, almost parallel. I think parallel is probably fairer - because the Lynx's steering is so light, direct and precise, to most brought up on moderns, that its terrific feel is just . . . well . . . different. I cannot criticise a system which is so full of information, especially on racing tyres which communicate the very texture of the road surface to your fingers.



Chris has experimented widely with tyre pressures to obtain what he regards as the optimum balance between handling and ride comfort. We found the rear tyres low by normal standards, but inner-edge tread wear betrayed the slightly negative cambered independent rear set-up, and higher pressures could have accentuated this up-edging, and also compromised ride. Tyre wear was very high, especially on the rear where it is exaggerated by a limited-slip diff. Otherwise I found the set-up, as Chris had it, delightfully effective on fast winding highways and byways.

The D is intrinsically a relatively nimble short-wheelbase car; now in tighter corners I could jab it into the turn initially, catch the tail as it ran round with the lightest hesitation on the steering wheel, power on and away. With the rather ratchety diff locking early, one could hang the tail out in hairpins, and keep it out under power. Only on some very dusty corners did the front end fade into incipient understeer, brief throttle lift, the Dunlops bit hard and with the mildest stab of opposite lock balance had been regained. It really was very nicely balanced.

I did feel that, just like the E-Type, the Lynx gives less confidence on roads slick with rain and drizzle. It is so quick, and encourages such enthusiastic motoring that you just know you could easily have an enormous moment. Perhaps this is itself an inherent safety factor, as Alan Jones' Dad told him "Safety's in the right foot, boy". Yet the monocoque structure is immensely strong and inherently safe as Chris Frost found when he slid his car off on oil spilled from a previous accident and rammed a tree, without major consequence other than several grands' worth of body repairs...

We were about to take figures when a mysterious and unusual mechanical failure intruded, so the figures appended are from a sister car. But due to their customised production no two of the 35 or so Lynx Ds built thus far - since 1975 - are identical, the customer calls the tune.



All I can say is that 'ours' would stream vividly and both very rapidly and very safely round country roads all day long with no need to use much more than 4,000rpm through the gears. Its 4.2 engine has so much mid-range punch any more was utterly unnecessary.

It would run arrow-straight hands-off at 4,600rpm in top gear - around 125mph I believe - without an apparent care in the world, with over 1,500rpm in hand, it still had bags of top-gear wallop in reserve for any potential "Get the hell out of it" situation.

You end up sun-burned, weather-beaten and wind-blown, drenched if it rains, battered semi-conscious if it hails, deaf from the atmospheric battering but not from that remarkably civilised exhaust note, and probably rather stuffed-up and nasal from so much pollen being forcibly rammed up your hooter! And if you are a driver worthy of the name you will have loved every single moment of it .

For any enthusiast at all attracted by the charisma of the Jaguar D you will also unavoidably end up morosely studying the mortgage and the grocery bill . . . and the thought that if you could firstly raise the ante and secondly bear to part with a Lynx after a short tenure, it even makes sense currently as a short or medium-term investment.

So we're sitting here figuring out ways to justify beating on Lynx's door for some of the finest fun in motoring . . . not only beautifully built, but beautiful to behold, and truly a delight to drive . . .

