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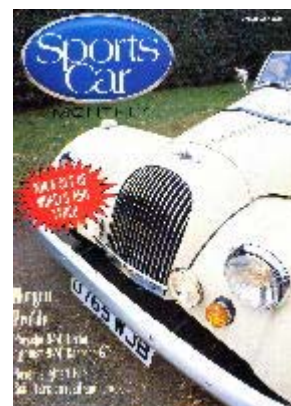
THE CAT'S WHISKERS by Ian Ward



Jaguar is a revered name in sporting circles, with a string of Le Mans victories behind it. Now Lynx are busy re-creating those Le Mans D-types; for Ian Ward, Mulsanne beckons..

Like so many specialist enterprises. Lynx Cars was born out of a hobby. In this case it was managing director Guy Black who wiled away his spare hours breathing new life into sporting machinery way past its prime. Then a designer for Weslake, Black began by re- building a Riley Lynx—hence the company's name — and then moved on to other worthwhile models.

It had not been his intention to specialise in Jaguars, but a C-type came his way for the face-lift treatment, followed by a tired example of the Coventry Company's other Le Mans winner, the D-type, and the die was cast. By this time, Lynx was in business and Guy Black quickly realised that the 75 D-types produced by Jaguar really weren't enough to satisfy an increasing demand.



The company was already manufacturing its own replacement panels, so it was a logical step rather than any mankind-moving leap from there to the creation of a new series of cars—and thus the Lynx D-type was born. It was the Racing Car Show of 1974 that saw the first re-creation on public view and over ensuing years 32 more of the curvy cats have left the factory, now situated in a neat, tidy industrial unit in St Leonards on Sea.



Restoration work has gathered momentum, too, during this period, with countless Jaguars being returned to new — or often better than new — condition. Just how many of 'the real thing' are left is somewhat unclear, because chassis numbers have sometimes become mixed up. For instance, an accident-damaged central tub may have been discarded in favour of a new one, but at a later date that tub may have been reclaimed and a car built up round it — hence two D-types with one chassis number!



The Jaguar factory has always been helpful with information and advice, but all the tooling has been made up from scratch to help Lynx's team of craftsmen in their tasks. Factory support stops at the name, however, it is officially frowned on for a Lynx to have a Jaguar badge — and they don't as they leave the works — but it is impossible to stop owners from making this swap.

A major part of the business they may be, but D-types are not all that concerns Lynx, although the work is mostly Jaguar orientated. Back in 1977, a customer asked for the top to be cut off his two-door XJ-C and although this proved to be feasible the advice of a structural engineer led the team to realise that the XJ-S would be a much more suitable candidate for this treatment. At that time, of course, there was not so much as the Cabriolet, let alone a full convertible, so Lynx engineered the XJ Spyder and drop-head which to most eyes is considerably more attractive than the somewhat heavily styled coupe.



This has become more sophisticated as time has passed, the latest development being simple electric locking for the electric hood (microprocessor sequencing of the whole window-winding-come-hood-folding operation is to follow). Nearly 70 Spyders have now been made, plus 35 Eventers, or XJ-S estates.

Once again, the Eventer has an elegance that the rear of the coupe lacks and this conversion realises the sort of interior space that such a big car should have. The rear seat can even move backwards to offer more space for four passengers.



A subtly body-kitted XJ-S Performer is coming soon, together with a modification kit for the 3.6-litre AJ6 engine, but the D-type order book is currently jammed, with enough work to see Lynx through the next year. At £43,000 plus VAT a time, this has to be good news for the company (a snip compared with a Jag at anything up to ten times that).

We headed down to St Leonards in the depths of winter to have a look at the operation and get our eager hands on the fabulous seductive D-type. Thick freezing fog stayed with us all the way from the wilds of Oxfordshire to but a couple of miles from the seaside, at

which point we burst into bright, crisp sunshine; Chris Keith-Lucas was most surprised to hear of our travel traumas but things were looking up for our promised drive.

On the principle of leave the best until last, we started with a tour of the factory, often a dull task but in this case a fascinating experience in itself. It is a joy to behold craftsmen fashioning the sculpted shapes of the D-type body out of plain aluminium sheet and to see how each hand-beaten panel merges naturally with its neighbours.





In each corner something interesting is going on — an E-type takes shape here, a Spyder awaits final approval there, a couple of E-types are being race-converted to one side. Then there's a new D-type on the way and what's this coming back to its former glory? No less that a rare XKSS, the road-going version of the D-type; what's more, it is quite a special machine, having once belonged to actor and car connoisseur Steve McQueen.

The D-type is based on the E-types's central tub and tubular subframes — very similar to those of the D. Thus the starting point is a dilapidated E which can offer itself as the basis of the new car—a strict proviso as far as the registration people are concerned (the Lynx classes as a rebodied E-type carries a chassis plate from the original donor car).

All the E-type parts are incorporated into the new D. Major differences from the racing original are wet-sump lubrication, requiring an imperceptibly raised bonnet line, and independent rear suspension, although a live axle could be had if real authenticity is construction work is left to amateurs.



Our tour of inspection over, and a lunchtime snack inside us, it is finally time to experience some D-type motoring. The car in these pictures was bought back from a customer by Lynx, hence its Jaguar label; it is quite an elderly example, as illustrated by its 15-inch wheels, but it is in pristine condition. There is a knack to achieving entry through the small doors, but once installed the simple seats are surprisingly comfortable and the bent-arms, big-wheel driving position seems quite a natural in a car like this.

We are indeed fortunate with the weather, for there is no hood — and nor would you want one to dull the exhilaration of a turn in such a classic racing re-creation. The full-harness seat belts are about the only concession to modern times.

A touch of the button (no key-start here) has the legendary XK bursting into song. This is no standard straight-six; a 4.2, its head has been reworked, with enlarged inlet valves, special cams have been installed and with three 45DCOE Webbers it develops around 300bhp — a genuine figure, unlike the exaggerated 'gross' claim for the production E-types. The best combination of engine/transmission is the 3.8 power plant with the 4.2 gearbox, giving the power, with more top-end freedom and a reasonable change.

A gentle but positive push slots the lever into first and steady release of the heavyweight competition clutch, together with a helping of power, has the D on the move. In fact on the move is an understatement; it leaps away from the line at blistering pace, leaving two black streaks in its wake, and it is quite a task to keep up with the gear changes. Even in top (fourth), acceleration is quite shattering and with the wind roaring past speeds seem even greater than their genuinely heady levels. And that delicious noise...



Although it is 'silenced', the exhaust emits an ear-splitting bark, which leaves the more perceptive beholders in do doubt as to the number of cylinders under the bonnet. At 5000rpm, the XK sounds as though it is doing twice that, yet there is no hint of labouring. Even the vestigial screen performs well in deflecting airflow over the head.



The steering is positive, if weighty, and handling surprisingly crisp for a car of this design vintage, while coupled with quite passable ride comfort. Over-enthusiastic application of the throttle will have the back hanging wide in a flash, but such 'moments' are quite controllable.

The brakes are heavy, but they are highly effective and they go to complete a fantastic dynamic package. Add to the thrill, the ego-boosting nature of such a crowd-puller and this has to be one of life's great pleasures.

Fine-weather car the D-type may be, but there would suddenly be a lot more fine weather if you owned one. We can't wait for another go.