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LYNX WITH THE PAST by Jim Patten

The world-famous 'C' and 'D' restorer and manufacturer is 30 years old. Jim Patten takes a trip to St Leonards on Sea.

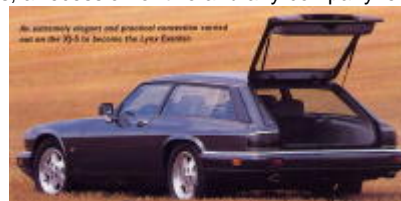
Think Upon this. The first Lynx 'D' type is now eight years older than the newest original 'D' type was when Lynx worked on it when they started restoring these cars. The maths work out: Jaguar built their last 'D' type in 1956, making it 17 years old when Lynx built their first in 1973. My, how time flies!

The 'E' type was just making it through its 'Series 1' phase and entering a tentative Series 2 period when Lynx first started as a company in 1968. Then, historic Jaguar racers (mainly 'C' & 'D' types) were simply out of date competition cars - it was just over 10 years since their last Le Mans win and their place in racing stables had long since been taken by Lotus, Lola or Ford GT40. Even the 'E' type and Mk 2 had had their day on the track. Those that had scraped a few thousand quid together to buy a 'D' type to race in the few Historic Sports Car Club races could either cobble the car together themselves or search in vain for a specialist. That is, until Lynx stepped in.

Small beginnings by partners Guy Black and Roger Ludgate but as experience grew so did the interest in 'C's and 'D's - and consequently their value escalated, making proper, authentic restorations financially possible. Soon, Lynx became known for their expertise in Jaguar sports racing cars and built up an impressive portfolio. But as 'C' mad 'D's became more valuable, so did a reluctance to use them for pure fun. A trickle of requests came through for Lynx to build a 'D' type to use, without the responsibility of thrashing a genuine car. Using Jaguar components throughout (including adapting an IRS for better driveability), the Lynx 'D' type was born.

To describe Lynx as a restoration company would be too narrow. Perhaps the term craft-based engineers would be more appropriate. With such comprehensive facilities and high calibre staff, using the very latest equipment and philosophies, the brief at Lynx is now very wide indeed. Historic cars aside, Lynx have been commissioned to develop BMX cycle frames, titanium engine cowlings for the airship industry as well as prototype work for today's car manufacturers. But it ain't been easy!

Stormy waters - Running any business can be fraught with problems. Throw in a couple of fuel crises, a recession or two and any company left standing has had to work at it. Flexibility helps and this in some way has been a life-line to Lynx, utilising the comprehensive knowledge and skills gained from restoring original cars and creating the Lynx 'D' type and XKSS (as well as a few 'C' types). Needs for the XJ-S owner were identified too and now with a background in prototype work, Lynx engineered one of the first 'independent' convertible bodywork conversions for the XJ-S with their Lynx Spyder of 1978. Even more successful has been their famous Eventer; the 'estate' version of the XJ-S arrived in 1982 and subsequently over 60 have been made. A performance XJ-S coupe joined the list with the Performer. Owners of other makes, notably Mercedes, Porsche and Saab approached Lynx to have the convertible conversion too.



But serious problems loomed as the 1990s advanced. The classic car industry nose-dived as it followed the country into recession. However enthusiastic any owner might be, when the back's against the wall, the car (or spending money on it) is one of the first things to be sidelined. In March 1992 Lynx went into receivership. There was work in progress. There were ideas. Even in the most severest economic climate, there were customers. But for the original Lynx, it was the end of the line.

Enter John Mayston-Taylor. John had been living in Canada where he had developed an extremely successful career, interspersed with some five years in Formula Ford in the UK after winning a scholarship; at one time he was team mate to ex-Jaguar Group C driver Andy Wallace in FF1600. In 1990 he was back in the UK, this time for keeps. The family timber business had been around since 1870 and had been ticking over very nicely. However, when it was time for John to take over, the decision was reluctantly taken that there was no future for them in timber. After consulting his parents, the business was sold and John looked elsewhere for a living. John's father had owned a string of Jaguars and kept nearly all of them. Lynx had been looking after some of the cars with restoration due on an XK120. Learning that Lynx could be bought, John demonstrated an interest. But now he had to move fast as the ship was sinking. It was complicated and it was involved but as history tells, John Mayston-Taylor re-established the company as Lynx Motors International Ltd.



A new era - Using his business experience, John set about restructuring the company. The sheer expanse of ground space was excessive, let alone the rest of the operation. Everything but the strengths were abandoned. Many of the long time staff were kept on as the basic aims of the company were sound and the past a healthy one, built on solid engineering principles. Jobs in progress were dealt with and new clients convinced of a long-term future. Race cars returned and new projects were planned. One most unusual restoration was that of the Ecurie Ecosse transporter for Dick Skipworth. This incredible device is often seen around the race circuits carrying the ex-

Ecurie Ecosse XK120 and Tojeiro-Jaguar as well as a Lynx 'D' (in Scottish flag metallic blue). An interesting aside is that Lynx have registered 'Lynx flag blue' as a colour and it appears on some paint company's paint chips. John soon developed a special relationship with his customers and tried to go that one step further. Many are wealthy, private individuals who seek fun ways to use their cars in private. In providing test days at the nearby Goodwood race circuit, they can drive their cars, be they historic or Lynx-built, with help on hand if needed. The future looks good. The market is recovering slowly and during our visit an XK 150 and 'E' type were being prepared for the Rallye du Maroc, and the sensational 'Lindner' 'E' type coupe, built for Dick Skipworth using an original wide angle cylinder head and sliding throttle fuel injection, was back for a service. A V12 'E' type taken out to 7.3 litres with suitable modifications, had just returned from a shakedown (with a built in hardtop and full carpeting and trim, the car looked fabulous). Another XK 150 had been built for a customer with many modifications incorporated for serious



road use but looking every inch the standard product. 'Old number 8', the famous ex-works racing SS100 was in their care (it's for sale, by the way) and a restoration of a Bristol engined Lister had just been finished, ready for the Louis Vuitton Concours d'Elegance.

'D' types, 'E' types, GT40 - all had their spaces reserved too and as a measure of their commitment to historic sports racers, Lynx are to sponsor the exclusive XK-engined sports racers event at XK50 on June 28 at Donington.

Perhaps their biggest shop-floor problem is parts sourced from outside. The standard of reproduction spares is variable at best. "How can I tell a customer that we have just spent three hours modifying a part that should fit first time?" says John despairingly. Mind you, the inventory of parts they've made or commissioned themselves, using originals as patterns, is pretty impressive - not only the major 'C' and 'D' items but the many small yet equally significant items too. Not cheap, but who said owning a 'D' type was anything except expensive?



The buzz around St Leonards on Sea is the possibility of an XK8 Eventer. There is already considerable interest from potential owners and if just a few more people are serious, the project (designs have already been registered) may go ahead soon.