



## Classic Cars - May 1998

FORGING LYNX by Martin Buckley

Lynx builds faithful reproductions of Jaguar D-types, Lightweight E-types and now the C-type. Martin Buckley drives the first of five to be built and explores the company's 30-year history.



If the Lynx C-type has a problem it is that it is a difficult car to classify. To dismiss it as a fake would be to denigrate it to the level of an overgrown plastic Airfix kit; to describe it as a replica somehow doesn't do justice to a car which in many ways is better than the real thing.

Still, who cares. After 20 minutes of driving the Lynx C-type, the first for 16 years, you are past caring about classifications. Hot, happy, sun-kissed and exhilarated, such definitions seem like pedantic details once you've driven this retro-rocket, which serves up all the thrills you could want in a sports car.

Lynx is no upstart outfit. It built its reputation on D-type replicas but actually started business in 1968 restoring and repairing pre- and post-war sports cars - including factory C- and D-types.

'The latter were almost 20 years old,' says Chairman and MD, John Mayston-Taylor, 'and in need of work. There was no restoration business as we now know it and the cars weren't worth much: in the early Seventies a factory D-type was probably bringing in £12,000 - £14,000. Considering you pay up to a million quid for one today that would have been a good investment.'

The Lynx D-type idea came from original company directors Guy Black and Roger Ludgate. They wanted to capture the feeling of the original but to incorporate upgrades and modifications as Jaguar would have done if it had continued building the cars into the Sixties.

'The D-type was designed for Le Mans,' says John, 'so it was meant to go very quickly on a smooth track in controlled conditions. On the road it's exhilarating but not that comfortable.'

An ex-Ecosse D-type successfully ran an independently suspended rear end in the early Sixties and its owners asked Lynx to fit it to their factory cars. So why not use it on the Lynx D-type?

Launched at the Racing Car Show in 1973, Lynx followed it up with the C-type in 1976. It's one of our lost products,' says John Mayston-Taylor. 'We only built four then dropped it in 1981. Everybody wanted the D-type.' All those original Lynx C-types survive, apparently, and there is a rumour that Bernie Ecclestone owns one.

Impressed with the work it had done re-commissioning his father's XKs, John helped bring Lynx back from the brink of extinction, taking the helm after the company went into liquidation in 1992. 'It had expanded too quickly in the 1980s, lost its way a bit with things like the twin-turbo XJS Performer and had been left stranded when the market bombed in the early Nineties.'

Now with a talented team of 19, things are looking bright again. There is a steady stream of prestigious historic racing cars adorning its slightly reduced workshops in St Leonards, East Sussex, and a steady flow of orders for the D-type, the low-drag 'E' and the Eventer.

'Our strength is in spotting niches in the market and reacting quickly. It doesn't take us 12 months to make a prototype,' says Mayston-Taylor. 'If cash is tight we come up with a new idea and just do it. The XJS Eventer is a classic example. We've built over 75 of them now.'

But what about the C-type? 'I always liked the C-type but the idea to do another batch actually came from a business associate of Dick Skipworth. We look after his Ecurie Ecosse C-type and his friend was so taken by it he wanted his own - but a new one, not a factory one.'



Lynx built just four C-types between 1976 and 1981

The car is modelled on the earlier C-type although it runs Webers (sand-cast SUs are optional) and has unvented disc brakes all round, clenched by twin-pot calipers. There are drum options for those who enjoy the period feel - and smell - of brake fade. The clutch is simpler and the car has adjustable dampers and a quick-ratio rack, with just 2 1/4 turns between locks.

The engine, a beautiful piece of architecture, is a 3.8-litre (the factory cars were 3.4) but comes with a C-type- specification big-valve cylinder head and exhaust manifolds. It deploys 285bhp (the factory car gave about 200bhp) through a close-ratio Moss gearbox with appropriate C-type modifications.

In most other respects the car is faithful to the twice Le Mans-winning original, of which Jaguar produced 54 between 1951 and 1954, all but 11 of them for private customers.



Beautiful C-type by Lynx is probably quicker than the original



Lynx built just four C-types between 1976 and 1981



There is a multi-tubular chassis — each one has a proper build number so nobody is tempted to pass them off as the real thing in years to come - and double-wishbone front suspension similar to, but not the same as, a Jaguar XK's.

The live rear axle is stoutly located by an A-frame and a Panhard rod with torsion bar springing - again as per original. Lynx resisted the temptation to give the C-type the independent rear suspension from the XJ saloon, as on the D-type, because it doesn't really need it.

It is clothed in a light and slippery alloy body of breathtaking beauty. Its voluptuous hand-wheeled wings hug heroically dimensioned 16-inch spoked wheels, its dainty doors cut into shallow sides, its pert tail smooth and almost featureless but for wristwatch-sized tail lights and a removable panel where the spare sits.

Apart from the fact that it looks brand new - most of the factory cars are evocatively battle-scarred - you couldn't tell it from the real thing.



Hop over the wide sill and lower yourself into the C-type's spare, functional cockpit and you are surrounded by space-frame tubes and expanses of flat bare aluminium which forms the floor and bulkheads. You sit low, close to the rear axle, with the eyeline well below the top of the fly-catching aero screens. The seats - a shapeless cushion and a rather upright backrest offer little lateral location but the four-point harness should take care of that. The view down the bonnet is inspirational, a smooth cleavage of hand-wrought alloy with slats to relieve under-bonnet heat just forward of the bulkhead.

The shiny newness of your surroundings is virtually the only thing that jars. Lynx has found the right kind of Hardura matting for the transmission tunnel; proper Fifties Smiths switchgear and gauges adorn a simple, no-frills cockpit. All I'd want - were this my £120,000 car - would be a three-spoke steering wheel. The wood-rimmed helm fitted looks distinctly out of place.

Turn the key and fuel pumps click, filling the Webers' float chambers with unleaded. Press the button and the engine fires instantly then idles smoothly. Dip the clutch, find first in the Mossbox and the gear engages cleanly. Throttle response is sharp and progressive in its long travel as the C pulls gently away. With commitment and precision - double de-clutching is easy - the gears slice through nicely, if not rapidly, on the stubby, gently curved lever. There is enormous low-down torque here, so gear play is optional anyway.



All correct period details carefully sourced



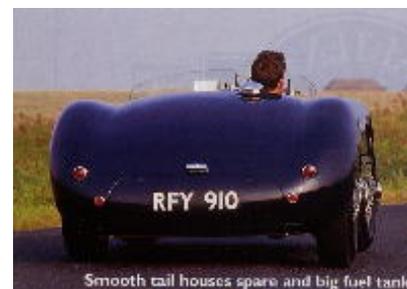
Spare plugs give flavour of the original

So prodigious is this torque, in fact, that the car will potter in top at 30mph then answer the throttle with a clean surge of power without a down-change. This balanced and blueprinted XK engine will spin cleanly to 5500rpm in an aristocratic crescendo of cam and chain thrash, its urge a searingly strong and sustained rush of supercar-like punch that forces you back hard in your seat, up to 100mph in top. Twin exhaust pipes, protruding from a cut-out below the passenger door, growl - then bark - and the aero screens do a fine job of directing the wind over your head. I was limited to 4000rpm on this still-fresh engine, but when run-in it should easily match the 145mph capability of the factory Cs. Lynx quotes 0-60mph in 6sec and 0-100 in 14.1sec.

In a straight line, everything is very stable as you hold the wheel in a loose thumb-and-forefinger grip and allow the wheel to wriggle and tug gently. The ride is firm but not jarring thanks to good damping, even if you sense the live rear axle working hard at times. What's more, the structure feels rigid and rattle-free, a quality that can only be good for handling.

Unboosted brakes serve up fine feel and progression as you slice off speed for a curve. Blip - pause - slice down into third and feed in some lock: the nose-heavy C-type will understeer on a trailing throttle, so get the power on early and drive through, steering on the throttle as the tall Avon radials drift. Lynx's C-type is easy to control.

However you classify it, this is a great car in its own right, not just for its muscular urge or its simple, sensual beauty but because it's an urbane and friendly car - raw and exciting yet generous and forgiving in its feel and manners.



Smooth tail houses spare and big fuel tank