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DEEP GREEN DREAM MACHINES by Mike McCarthy

Mike McCarthy tries two replica versions of the legendary Jaguar D-type.



I was a very impressionable 14-year-old when the D-type Jaguar made its spectacular appearance in 1954. That year Rolt and Hamilton took it to a magnificent second place at Le Mans, harrying the mighty 4.9-litre Ferrari of Gonzales and Trintignant all the way and finishing a bare 21 miles behind after 24 hours. Thereafter there was no mistake: D-types won in 1955, 1956 and 1957. To this day I am a D-type fanatic, and would die happy just to have owned one.



There were 63 D-types built, and many survive, so they are not rare—just very valuable and viciously expensive collectors' items. But their significance goes beyond the fact that quite a few were made, and that all were capable of winning races: the D-type was probably a more genuine prototype than any other car that has raced and won at Le Mans, for from it came the equally legendary E-type which was, in all the essentials apart from the rear suspension, based quite closely on the D-type.

Given that the D-type is one of the greatest classics of all time, that it bears a close family relationship to the E-type (for which parts are readily obtainable and relatively cheap), and that replicas are a fast-growing industry, somebody had to put two and two together and come up with a D-type replica: and now it's happened. Not one but two groups of people are going into reproduction of the D-type, and the wheel has come full circle, for they in turn are using E-type components. . . .

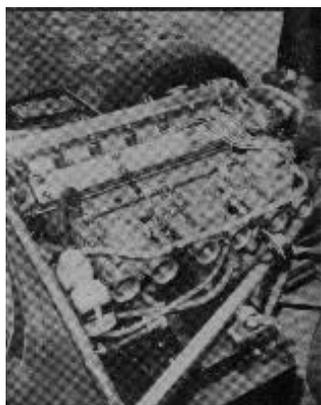
Lynx Engineering is run by Roger Ludgate and Guy Black, both about the same age as me (ie, unbelievably youthful) and both, like me, D-type fanatics. Roger is an architect, and Guy had worked for Weslake before setting up Lynx to restore historic sports and racing cars and build the D-type replica. He is one of the country's leading D-type (and C-type, for that matter) experts, and has what may be one of the best collections of genuine D-type spares — over £60,000 worth. He knows D-types like you and I know the proverbial backs of our hands.



And it shows in the Lynx. It is a remarkably good copy, and faithful in those details where spares and serviceability would not be a problem. On the other hand it is most emphatically not an exact copy: copyright has lapsed on the original design though, so there is no legal reason why it should not be.

Thus the chassis is like the D-type's in that it consists of a central stressed alloy monocoque with space frames bolted on front and rear, that at the front being a standard E-type component: but on the D-type the front space-frame comes back through the front bulkhead to pick up on the rear bulkhead.

Front and rear suspension are again pure E-type, with wishbones and torsion bars at the front and a lower wishbone plus additional transverse location by a fixed length driveshaft at the back: Four coil spring/damper units (two each side) take care of springing. It is in this respect that the Lynx differs most from the D-type, for the latter had a live axle and torsion bar springing.



The bodywork is hand crafted (and much better than the original, according to Guy) light alloy, the "standard" model being based on the "long-nose" 1957 D, with a full-width windscreen, two doors and a tail fin: XKSS, "short-nose" or single door with wrap-around windscreen and metal tonneau versions are offered. The standard power unit is a modified 4.2 E-type engine, equipped with three twin-choke Webers (what else?), but any state of tune you require can be supplied.

Roger and I were chatting about this and that when a green blur, accompanied by a fabulous howl, shot past the window— Guy had arrived. I climbed into the passenger seat while Guy drove around explaining things. I was too busy taking in the fact that it was quite happy trickling along at 1000 rpm, displayed no temperament whatsoever, that the ride was on the comfortable side of hard (important to my ageing bones) and that it just seemed to go around corners as if they weren't there. Came the time for me to have a go—and just then a part made by a well-known and large company went "clonk," so no drive. But fear not, folks: we have been promised the Lynx for a week, to take up to MIRA for performance testing, and for me to drive down the Kings Road, and on some nice deserted roads, with the wind trying to tear what little hair I have out by the roots, and an inane grin on my face, and oh! Joy. . . .

Anyway, the next day I found myself in one of those fascinating cobbled mews in Kensington, looking at the other D-type, called, believe it or not, the D-type Replica. Just that. To avoid confusion for the moment I am going to call it the Lamplough D-type, since it was at Robert Lamplough's house that it was garaged. The garage doors were opened, a few details were explained, and then the engine was started up: instant deafness as the engine bark echoed from the mews cottages. A quick trip round the block as passenger just to get acquainted, then off I set, all on my own. Brave souls, to let a complete outsider loose in their pride and joy. . . .





Unlike the Lynx, the Lamplough D-type is as close a copy as you can get - within reason. The monocoque and bodywork are made by Williams and Pritchard, who have had a fair bit of experience rebuilding crashed or rough genuine D-types. It, too, uses the E-type front subframe, but there is an additional tubular structure carrying on through to the rear bulkhead : the chassis of the Lamplough could be used for a genuine D-type. Front suspension is from an E-type (near enough to the original D) and a live rear axle is used at the rear, again following D-type practice, except that coil springs are used instead of torsion bars. The rear axle, incidentally, is built by Salisbury, has a limited slip diff, and a ratio (3.07:1) which is quite close to that of the original Le Mans axle (2.79:1). The 4.2-litre engine has been worked over by Forward Engineering, and has such delicacies as a C-type cam and three ubiquitous 45 DCOE Webers fitted to it: output is a claimed 280 SAE gross at 5500 rpm—not as much as a true D-type, but a lot more tractable. 3.4 or 3.8 litre engines can be specified.

So my dream was coming true: I was driving a D-type. Not genuine, perhaps, but near enough to give me an idea of what they were like, and yet not temperamental. Well, nearly, since in fact there was an odd clutch problem that made the clutch more of an on-off switch, and required quick changes, but I soon got used to that.

I nosed out into Kensington High Street and headed for the Westway - slap into one of the biggest traffic jams for miles. I kept it below 2500 rpm and 100 dB ('onest. Officer), just going " woomph, woomph " every so often. Luvly noises. Engine quite tractable, no oiling of plugs, temperature gauge climbing slightly but nothing alarming, keep that delicate nose clear of the car in front, get ogled at by all and sundry (especially by Dolly Bird on number something-or-other bus), remember that clutch, sun is shining, life is beautiful. . . .



On up through the northern suburbs and on to the motorway. The wind just catches the top of my bonce (good thing I don't wear a wig), speedo steady on 70— really? Then why am I overtaking everything? Hmm . . . (a later check shows speedo way out)....

The temptation to floor it is almost irresistible, but I resist. Engine surprisingly untemperamental, just giving a little burp of a backfire occasionally, on the overrun. Now I have time to take in a few of the details.

Such as a sad lack of toe room —I have to tuck my dainty size seven-and-a-halves under the pedal, and there's not much leg- room either, come to that. The gearlever is high up on the transmission tunnel, and needs a rather effeminate limp-wrist action, but the change is exemplary—neat, quick, precise. Steering, too, is superb: no lost motion, high geared, but very light, and not much heavier when parking. But above all there's the noise. That glorious bark through the near- enough unsilenced exhaust is music in anybody's ears, and its loud, very loud. It feels as if the exhaust pipe ends about 2 in from my lug-hole. The transmissions adds its grumbles, especially on the overrun, and the fuel pump is quite audible, but really, at any- thing over 30 mph, all you hear is the rush of

the wind and that fabulous engine growl. I begin to get an inkling of what it must have been like at Le Mans.

The D-type, like the original, is built for one reason, and one reason only: to go very quickly, and that it definitely does. Round winding country lanes, using a lot of the huge reservoir of power, drive it slightly brutally (quick changes, foot hard down, er, well, quite a way down) and it responds. Thoroughbred horses aren't my scene, but I can imagine a good horse and rider combination having the same sort of feeling. This is the ultimate in a driver's car. Tremendous adhesion from the fat tyres, quick but not instant steering that gives you gobs of information about the front wheels, nearly neutral handling under gentle power that becomes tail-out in almost direct proportion to the amount of throttle, total visibility, all add up to one of the most exciting sensations imaginable.

The makers of the Lamplough D-type have set out to keep the character of the original D-type. How far they've succeeded I cannot say, not having driven one, but they've made a superb car by any counts. All right, it is very noisy, the ride is har-ar-ar-ar-d, weather protection (speed apart) minimal, and it is probably the most unsocial car around, but who gives a damn? To the lucky potential owners sheer joy is going to be a D-type on a sunny day on deserted roads.



Poodle back again to London, down the M1. No fuss, no bother. Was I really away for over three hours ? It felt like minutes. My brief moment of glory is over, I can't hear a thing, my head hurts from the wind, but a dream has been realised.

If you have the same dream it's going to cost you a lot of money, These are beautifully made, hairy, magnificent toys, and will set you back between £10,000 and £12,000 each (God and inflation willing). Form an orderly queue from the left please, either at Lynx Engineering, Northbridge Street, Robertsbridge, Sussex; or at Sidney Marcus Ltd, Boston Place, London, NW1 (ask for Alistair Walker: he, Robert Lamplough and Len Pritchard, of Williams and Pritchard fame, were the instigators of the D-type Replica, to revert to its proper name) and put your name on the list. Heaven at last is attainable for cash.....